

Anybody Can Honk!

I don't know how many times I've read Ephesians 1; but only recently have I noticed that verses 3-14 make up one, 203-word sentence. It's as if Paul starts describing the richness of Christ's love and can't find a stopping place. He piles word upon word, trying to do justice to the extravagance of God's grace. But it's as if he knows mere human language can never describe the glory of Christ.

Then in verse 17 he launches into a prayer on behalf of his readers. And this is my prayer for you today:

(EPHESIANS 1:17-23 NRSV) *I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know* | *what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe...*

There's a difference between knowing about someone and knowing her personally. It's one thing to have facts in your head about God—to be able to quote chapter and verse; it's another thing altogether to know God. And the heart of Paul reverberates through this prayer that his readers might "know God better"—that the "eyes of your heart" might be enlightened.

In the Hebrew mind of the first century, the heart was the center of the will, the intellect and the emotions. In these verses, the word "know" means "to know intimately," or to know by direct sight or experience—to know in the same way we know music, or the colors in a sunset, or the taste of an orange.

A man fell in love with his beautiful neighbor; but was too shy to tell her. He had a gift for poetry, so he decided to woo her and win her with his trump card. Every day he mailed her a beautiful poem he'd written especially for her. For almost a year, he never missed a day mailing her a beautiful poem, extolling her beauty and her grace, praising her gentle and kind spirit. And after almost a year she married the letter carrier. He was the one who was present; so he is the one she got to know.

Paul prays from his heart that we might know God better—that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened so that we may know the hope, the riches and the power that is ours through Christ; that we may know: not long-distance; not second-hand through some mediary; but first-hand, face-to-face.

There was a bumper sticker in the seventies that said, "Honk if You Love Jesus!" In just a few weeks, there was another one—a response—that said, "Tithe if You Love Jesus; Anybody Can Honk!"

Anybody can honk. Anybody can come to church on Easter. Anybody can learn a list of memory verses. Anybody can live the letter of the Ten Commandments. The Pharisees made a show of doing that. But Jesus told them, "There's more to it
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than that. You dot your 'I's' and cross your 'T's'—you keep every letter of the law; but you miss the point."

Anybody can honk; but not anybody can see with "the eyes of your heart".

When your spouse or parent or child—or your best friend—calls you on the phone does he or she introduce himself or herself? Or, do you just recognize his or her voice—because you've spoken with each other frequently. There was a bumper sticker back in the '60's that said, "When you pray, does God recognize your voice?" Maybe more crucial: "Would you recognized God's voice, speaking to you?"

That's the purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines: prayer, meditation, fasting, study... You begin to see with more than your eyes; to hear with more than your ears; to understand with more than your brain.

When you see with "the eyes of your heart", it makes a visible difference in your life. You become what others cannot become; you are able to do what others cannot do. And it's at that point, for those who see with the "eyes of their hearts," that the visible difference goes even deeper.

Have you noticed how some people look like their pets? People who live together for long periods of time begin to look like each other—to exhibit similar habits; even to complete each other's sentences. The German philosopher, Nietzsche, spoke for many outside the church when he said, "You must look more redeemed if you want me to believe in your Redeemer."

When we know God better through daily spiritual disciplines, that happens. When we see with the eyes of our hearts, our worship is more than simply a sign of the coming Kingdom. In our worship—and especially in our praise—the Kingdom comes, because, as the Psalmist writes God "*inhabits the praise of God's people*" (Ps. 22:3). When we praise, the Kingdom becomes tangible and visible. To anyone who will listen we shout "Christ is risen! He is alive!" And they can see in our lives the coming Kingdom, a countercultural place where the prisoners are freed, the poor are nurtured, the wretched of the earth become royalty and all things are made new.

Christianity is more than saying right words and doing right things. It's "knowing God better." It's *knowing the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*"

Sounds like a Doxology, doesn't it? This exuberant shout at the close of Paul's prayer reminds us that Christians are called to a task more risky than simply obeying God's rules.

That's Paul's prayer for the Ephesian Christians—and my prayer for you.