

Wisdom as Enlightenment of Heart

Lesson for November 13, 2022

Unit III: God's Artwork

Scriptural Background: Revelation 2:1-7; Acts 19; Ephesians 1:15-23

Printed Text: Ephesians 1:15-23

Key verse: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in his Holy people, (Ephesians 1:18, NIV)

Word Study

Hook

In the summer of 1990, after several months of testing the waters of high tech, Michael Malanga recalls that he plunged in and officially joined the computer age. With the help of a friend, he purchased an IBM PC-compatible XT computer and an Epson LQ-510 printer. Compared to the lightning speed of the newer generations of 286, 386, 486 and 586 DX computers, his XT moved like a tortoise in January, but it did the job nevertheless.

He used his computer primarily for word processing, a high-tech term for typing. The software that he used for word processing was supposedly very powerful. I say "supposedly" because of the 541 pages in the manual that came with it, he read about 70 pages. Of the nearly two dozen programs contained in his software package he knew one: the word processor. And of the dozen or so applications contained within the word processing program he knew one: how to type. He had read just enough to get him going but not enough to fully understand all that the software and thus the computer could do. The only way he was going to discover the full power of his computer and its software was by becoming more familiar with what it could do.

If we apply the same analogy to the Ephesians, we can begin to understand the content of Paul's prayer for them in Ephesians 1:15-23. His prayer is motivated by their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints. He has heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus; they have the computer. He has also heard about their love for all the saints; they are using the software. Yet they just don't know how powerful both of them really are. There sits this powerful machine, loaded with all sorts of information and capabilities, but much of it goes unused simply because they have not fully familiarized themselves with all it can do. They have confessed a saving faith in Jesus Christ; that's good. They have also demonstrated a vibrant love for one another; that, too, is very good. But if they are to get a real handle on God's power, they must deepen their faith and broaden their love.

Key Terms

1. **Inheritance** (verse 18) – a heritage; property received (or to be received); something awarded by divine lot.
2. **Know** (verse 18) – be aware; behold; consider; perceive.
3. **Knowledge** (verse 17) – recognition; perception; “revelation”.
4. **Prayers** (verse 16) – petitions to God; requests
5. **Thanks** (verse 16) – gratitude; thanksgiving.
6. **Wisdom** (verse 17) – skill (divine or human); insight; intelligence.

Lesson Background

Last week, the beginning of Ephesians 1 was discussed. In verses 3-14, Paul has set forth the amazing and unlimited blessings believers have in Jesus Christ. Blessings that amount to our personal inheritance of all that belongs to Him.

In today’s lesson, the remainder of chapter 1 (verses 15-23), Paul prays in light of God’s ultimate plan and the work of the Triune God. He prays that the believers to whom he writes will come to fully understand and appreciate those blessings. In this prayer, he focuses on believers’ comprehension of their resources in their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In (verses 15-16), he praises them, and (in verses 17-23), he makes petitions to God for them.

Lesson in Depth

I. Enlightenment: What? (Ephesians 1:15-18a)

After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints: When Paul heard of the **faith** and **love** of the Ephesians, he could do nothing else but **give thanks** for them. This was because their **faith** and **love** were evidence of their participation in this great work of God. i. Faith and love do not *earn* us participation in this great work of God. They are *evidence* of our participation in God’s plan.

Love for all the saints: Significantly, Paul gave thanks not for their love for God, but for their **love for all the saints**. The real evidence of God’s work in us is not the love we claim to have for Him, but our love for His people that others can see (1 John 4:20, John 13:14 and John 13:34-35).

Making mention of you in my prayers: Paul not only gave thanks for God’s work among the Ephesians; he also prayed that it would continue with greater strength

In light of their marvelous inheritance in Jesus Christ, Paul now intercedes for the possessors of that treasure, (faith). These initially included not only the believers in Ephesus but probably those in all the churches of Asia Minor.

It had been about four years since Paul ministered there, and he was now in prison. From letters and reports from friends who visited him in prison, he had received considerable information

from and about the churches. From that he had heard two things that indicated the genuineness of their salvation, and for those two cardinal marks of a true Christian, faith in Christ and love for other Christians. Those two dimensions of spiritual life are inseparable (1 John 2:9-11).

Now, we see the glorious report. Love of the saints is automatic with faith in the Lord Jesus. We cannot directly do anything for Christ. The way we give to Him is through His saints.

Love for other believers' evidences saving faith (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:16-18; 4:20; 5:1), and is a cause of thanksgiving (verse 16).

The emphasis (in verse 15b) is on true saving belief, with the lordship of Jesus as the object of that belief. Some Christians, perhaps intending to protect the gospel from any taint of works righteousness, underplay Christ's lordship almost to the point of denying it. Others would like to accept the term Lord only as a reference to deity, not sovereignty. But such a separation is artificial because divinity implies sovereignty. The One who alone is God rules alone.

In (verse 15c), we see a second mark of genuine salvation is love for all the saints, and because of such love Paul offers thanks for the Ephesian believers. "We know that we have passed out of death into life," John says, "because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death" (1 John 3:14).

True salvation produces true love and true love does "not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18).

Always in the New Testament true spiritual love is defined as an attitude of selfless sacrifice that results in generous acts of kindness done to others. It is far more than a feeling, an attraction or emotion.

Sadly, the love the Ephesians had for all the saints did not last. In the letter to the churches of Asia Minor in Revelation, the Lord says of the church at Ephesus, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Revelation 2:2-4). They had lost within a few decades, the great love for Christ and their fellow believers, for which Paul had so warmly praised them.

It is unfortunate that some Christians have a loveless kind of faith. Because it is loveless there is reason to doubt that such faith is even genuine. True faith cannot exist apart from true love. We cannot love the Lord Jesus without loving those whom He loves.

1 John 5:1 says: "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him".

In verses 17-18, Paul was praying that believers will have the disposition of godly knowledge and insight of which the sanctified mind is capable (verse 8), so as to grasp the greatness of the hope (Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:2). And the inheritance that is theirs in Christ (verses 3-14).

The Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation: Paul prayed that the Father would grant the Ephesians **the spirit of wisdom** and that He would give them **revelation**. But these are not so they may see into the lives of others, have the ability to predict events, or do what we commonly think of as “prophet stuff.” He wanted them to have **the spirit of wisdom** and **revelation** simply so that they would have a better **knowledge of Him** (God).

“**Wisdom**” is a gift from God. “Knowledge” is accumulated learning. The Spirit of wisdom would be a gift through the Holy Spirit of God. This would be above the natural ability of man. Paul prays specifically that God may give the faculty of understanding so that we can know our resources, which he calls a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. The spirit of wisdom is given through the Holy Spirit. The graces and comforts of the Spirit are communicated to the soul by the enlightening of the understanding.

Revelation, though used here as a synonym of wisdom, deals with God’s imparting knowledge to us, whereas wisdom could emphasize our use of that knowledge. We must know and understand our position in the Lord before we are capable of serving Him. We must know what we have before we can satisfactorily use it.

In the knowledge of Him: Our Christian life must be centered around this purpose – to know God as He is in truth, as revealed by His Word, and to correct our false, idolatrous ideas of who God is.

The knowledge of Him: It is important for us to have an accurate knowledge and understanding of who *we* are. Yet it is far more important (and beneficial) for us to know and understand who God is.

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened: If the Ephesians will know all God has given them in Jesus, it will take a supernatural work. It will require that **the eyes of your understanding be enlightened** by God.

Paul used a great expression when he speaks of *the eyes of your heart* (*heart* is more literal than *understanding*). Too many Christian *hearts* have no eyes (places where they gain real knowledge and understanding), and too many Christian *eyes* have no heart – God wants both to be combined in us. “The word ‘*heart*’ in Scripture signifies the very core and centre of life, where the intelligence has its post of observation, where the stores of experience are laid up, and the thoughts have their fountain.” (Alford) The eyes of your understanding enlightened, would mean that God has allowed your innermost being to understand. The Light has shined on you from within and revealed the meaning to you.

A spiritually enlightened mind is the only means of truly understanding and appreciating the hope and inheritance in Christ and of living obediently for Him.

II. Enlightenment: Why? (Ephesians 1:18b-23)

What is the hope of His calling: Paul prays for God to enlighten them about the magnificent truths that summarize God’s master plan for the redemption of mankind which is His eternal plan that will bring men back to Himself through His own Son, thereby making them His children.

Paul wanted them to know this. Few things give us a more secure and enduring **hope** in life than simply knowing that God has called us and has a specific **calling** for us to fulfill.

The **hope of His calling** has its perspective on the *future*. The believer has a glorious future of resurrection, eternal life, freedom from sin, perfected justification, and glorious elevation above the angels themselves.

The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints: Paul wanted them to know the greatness of God's inheritance in His people. We usually think only of *our* inheritance in God, but Paul wanted the Ephesians to understand that they are so precious to God that He considered them *His* own **inheritance**.

Inheritance of the saints: Our being glorious children of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ of all that God possesses is the consummation and end of salvation promised from eternity past and held in hope until the future manifestation of Christ. There is nothing more to seek, nothing more to be given or received. We have it all now, and we will have it throughout eternity.

The exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe: Paul wanted them to know how great the **power** of God is **toward us who believe**. Christians should know they serve and love a God of living power who shows His strength on behalf of His people.

This second request of Paul is for the Lord to give the Ephesian believers understanding of His great power that will bring them to their inheritance in glory. Paul uses four different Greek synonyms to emphasize the greatness of that power.

1. **Dunamis** (power), from which we get dynamite and dynamo. This power is only for Christians, for those who believe. It is all the power we are ever offered or could ever have.
2. **Energeia** (working), the energizing force of the Spirit that empowers believers to live for the Lord.
3. **Kratos** (strength), which may also be translated "dominion" (1 Timothy 6:16), or "power" (Hebrews 2:14).
4. **Ischus** (might), which carries the idea of endowed power or ability. In all those ways, the Holy Spirit empowers God's children.

Paul did not pray for power to be given to believers. How could they have more than what they had? He prayed first, that they be given a divine awareness of the power they possessed in Christ. Later in the letter (chapters 4-6), he admonished them to employ that power in faithful living for their Lord.

The main thing it reveals is the fact that it is not our own power that works within us, but His power.

Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

This ends the "request" portion of Paul's prayer. The following section explains more of this mighty power and what it did. Paul asked these things because they were important to ask for. We could say that the prayer of Ephesians 1:17-19 is essentially a request that the promises of Ephesians 1:3-14 be found as real in the lives of the Ephesian Christians.

In the same way, your prayers for the spiritual growth and enlightenment of others are important. If Paul believed it was important to pray these things for the Ephesian Christians, it is important for us to pray them for others – and for ourselves.

According to the working of His mighty power: The power that works in us is the **mighty power** that raised Jesus **from the dead**. With this **mighty power** available to us, there never needs to be a “power shortage” in the Christian life.

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead: That very same power that was shown at the resurrection of Jesus is the same power that we have when we pray for the sick or do mighty miracles in His name. The power is in Christ. It is in His name. He healed in His own name when He was on the earth. We can now use that powerful name.

Paul’s prayer here is that we understand the power of His keeping, His securing us and His fulfilling the marvelous hope which is ours in Christ. The resurrection and ascension power, the divine energy that lifted Christ from the grave to the earth, and from the earth to heaven, is the power that will lift us to glory.

At times, all of us are tempted to doubt, to wonder if God can do a certain thing for us or through us or ultimately bring us into His presence. But when we look at what He brought about in Christ, at what He faithfully accomplished on behalf of His son, and at His assurance that He will just as faithfully accomplish His work on our behalf, what ground do we have for doubting?

And seated Him at His right hand: Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father because the work is finished. He is also, the Right Hand of God. In a spiritual way, we believers are seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. “The *right hand* is the place of friendship, honor, confidence, and authority.” (Clarke)

In light of such assurance, how can a Christian feel insecure, forsaken, or powerless? The same unlimited divine power that raised Him from the dead will raise us from the dead, and the same power that seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places will seat us there with Him.

In the meanwhile, that resurrection power is at our disposal for living to His glory (Ephesians 1:19-20; 3:20). It is so certain that this power will bring us to glory that Paul spoke as if it has already occurred, because it has already occurred in God’s eternal plan. (Ephesians 2:6).

Far above all principality and power and might and dominion: Moving from Christ’s might to His majesty, Paul’s third request is for the Lord to give believers understanding of the greatness of His Person who secures and empowers them. Jesus Christ is advanced above all, and he is set in authority over all, they being made subject to him. It is the **mighty power** that raised Jesus to heaven after His resurrection, raising Him above all demonic foes and every potential enemy of all time – this *same* power is at work in Christians.

Principality, and power, and might, and dominion refer to various classes of spiritual and/or angelic beings. God’s power has exalted Jesus far above all these spiritual creatures. Paul wanted believers to comprehend the greatness of God compared to other heavenly beings. “Rule and

authority and power and dominion” were traditional Jewish terms to designate angelic beings having a high rank among God’s hosts. God is above them all (Revelation 20:10-15).

What great blessing we can have when we take time to set our own concerns and needs aside and simply focus on the Lord of glory. Allowing the Holy Spirit to do in us what Paul asked Him to do in the Ephesians. Give us deep understanding of the truth that our Lord is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. And every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

The following Scripture says it all:

Philippians 2:10 “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;”

His name is exalted above all others.

He put all things under His feet: This great resurrection power placed Jesus above all things. Now all things are **under His feet**. It set Jesus as the **head over all things**, including the church.

And gave Him to be the head over all things to the church means God appointed Him head (ruler), over all things for the benefit of the church. Jesus is the divinely appointed ruler over the entire universe for the church’s benefit.

And hath put all [things] under his feet, and gave him [to be] the head over all [things] to the church: This is (a quote from Psalm 8:6), indicating that God has exalted Christ over everything (Hebrews 2:8), including His church (Colossians 1:18). Christ is clearly the authoritative Head (not “source), because all things have been placed under His feet. He is our exalted Leader. He is our Lord, He is our Savior, He is our King, He is our High Priest, He is our Life.

Acts 17:28 “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.”

He is the head of the church, who we are. He is the Creator of everything and everyone, and we are His creation.

There is no limit on time, as Paul said Christ will be supreme not only in this age, but also in the one to come, that is in the eternal kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ (2:7).

The church, which is His body: If Jesus is the head, then the community of Christians make up **His body**. The idea of **the fullness of Him** here is probably connected to the manner in which Jesus fills His church with His presence and blessings.

Most importantly, as far as believers are concerned, God gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Christ not only is the head of the church but its fullness.

Since He has such a unique and intimate relationship with the redeemed whom He loves, all His power will be used in their behalf to fulfill His loving purpose for them. He is completely over us and completely in us, our supreme Lord and supreme power.

His body is a metaphor for God's redeemed people, used exclusively in the New Testament of the church (4:12-16; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

Paraphrased, this verse reads, "For the church is His body. It is the fullness belonging to Him who fills the universe with all things." That is, Jesus, who so wisely and skillfully fills the universe with all material elements necessary for its existence, also wisely and skillfully infuse His people (the church), with His own life and character.

This verse then, explains why (in 1:22), God made Him head over all things for the benefit of the church: the church is in such an intimate relationship with Him, and is of such character, that she is considered His own body. So, it is for her good that Christ is the divinely appointed ruler of the universe. Since He "fillet" the church with His own life and character, she is a receptacle containing the graces and virtues of God Himself.

We Christians, are the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are His bride; we are His habitation. He is the vine, and we are His branches. He is the Tree of Life and the Water of Life. He is the spiritual and the physical Light of the world.

The point of this great petition is that we might comprehend how secure we are in Christ and how unwavering and immutable is our hope of eternal inheritance. The power of glorification is invincible and is presently operative to bring us to glory.

Lesson Summary

There are numerous lessons that can be learned from Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus, here are just a few.

1. First, Paul begins with thanks. "I have not stopped giving thanks for you."
2. He is thanking God for their "faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all God's people." That is the focus of Paul's thanksgiving: the spiritual matters, the gospel matters, the faith, and the love of God's people.
3. Paul prays frequently. "I have not stopped giving thanks for you." Paul did not stop praying for them – they were on his prayer list, and he was faithful in praying for them. It may also mean that Paul carried around him an ongoing continual attitude of prayer in addition to his daily times set aside for prayer.
4. Paul is praying that they might "know God better." His focus is their knowledge of God. Their relationship to God. Their knowing about who God is, and their personal knowledge of God being experientially true.

5. How, according to Paul's prayer, are they to achieve this getting to know God better? They will do it as God gives them "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." The knowledge of God is increased by an increasing revelation of the Spirit, through God's Word, as He illuminates our hearts to understand His revelation in the Bible.
6. This knowledge that Paul is praying for is not merely information, it is transformation. He is asking that the "eyes of their heart may be enlightened." This is the work of the Spirit to give them a spiritual sense of who God is.
7. The purpose of this ongoing getting to know God better is so that they might live in the light of the certainty of heaven. It is "in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people." When Christians know God better and better, they are assured of the reality of heaven and reassured of their destiny.
8. Paul wants them to know the power of God. "His incomparably great power for us who believe." How little do we understand of the power of God for His people who believe! How differently would we live, with what greater boldness and confidence, if we knew the incomparable power of God for us who believe!
9. What then is this power that is at work in us who believe? It is the very same as the power that raised Jesus from the dead. "That power is the same as the mighty strength God exerted when he raised Christ from the dead."
10. Paul closes his prayer with overflowing praise for Jesus. "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

Finally, when we consider last week's lesson as well as the lesson for today, Paul writes to the saints in Ephesus and emphasizes that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ. We are redeemed through Christ's blood. Through the mystery of God's will, we have obtained an inheritance. The Holy Spirit is the seal of our inheritance. Paul prays that they know God and understand what He has given them. God raised Christ from the dead and gave Him great power, putting all things under His feet, including the church.