

<b>SCRIPTURE FOCUS</b>	<b>Ephesians 1:15-23</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>09.08.19</b>
	FROM: Mike Smith, Discipleship Minister	First Woodway Baptist Church	
<b>LESSON SUMMARY</b>	In the Christian life, we need God to work within us to help us comprehend the deep things of the faith. Part of that comprehension concerns God's power, which he exercised to put Jesus in charge of all things.		

*all scripture taken from NIV unless otherwise noted*

## ENCOUNTER THE TEXT

<sup>15</sup>For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, <sup>16</sup>I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

In vv 1-14, Paul outlined the great goodness of God in Christ and noted that the Ephesians had become recipients of that goodness. These realities in mind combined with reports of the Ephesians' faith and love have led Paul to express thanksgiving for the Ephesians when he mentions them in his prayers.

<sup>17</sup>I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup>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, <sup>19</sup>and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

When Paul mentions the Ephesians in his prayers, he repeats a specific petition: that God "may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." This is followed by a petition that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened" with the result of knowing hope, inheritance, and the extent of God's power. The original Greek makes it difficult to know how the Spirit of wisdom and revelation is connected to the enlightening of heart. It may be that Paul meant these as successive petitions, meaning that the Spirit of wisdom is directed toward knowing God better, and the enlightening of the heart is connected to hope, inheritance, and knowledge of God's power. It may also be that the enlightening of the heart is an intensification or explanation of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. In this case, the enlightening of the heart that leads to knowledge of hope, inheritance, and God's power is an explanation of what Paul means when he prays for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to help them know God better. However we choose to connect these petitions, it is clear that knowing God himself, hope, inheritance, and God's power are at the heart of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians.

Regarding how the Ephesians are to come by this knowledge, Paul's prayer is telling. Rather than coming by the knowledge themselves through study or effort, the Ephesians must receive it as a gift of God. This is clear in Paul's talk of both the Spirit of wisdom and revelation and the enlightening of the heart. Regarding the first, the "Spirit" may refer to either the Holy Spirit or the human spirit (the NIV has opted to go with the Holy Spirit, hence the capitalization). Whatever the case, the knowledge is imparted from God to the believer. As to the second, enlightenment language is dependent on illumination from an outside source of light. When Paul speaks of knowing God better, knowing the true nature of hope, grasping and knowing the extent of God's power, he is speaking of a work that God does in the life of the believer. This does not

mean that the Christian should not put any effort into learning about God and the faith. Indeed, much of Ephesians will expound on these things! Instead, Paul is talking about a deeper knowing. We might talk here of head knowledge descending to our hearts. The idea here would be that it is different to know about God than to truly know God, that it is different to understand the tenants of hope than to truly believe and rely on it, that it is different to have a theoretical knowledge of how much God values us than to know it in our bones (more on this below), and that it is different to cognitively understand God's power than to truly grasp its extent for the believer him/herself.

As to the content of the knowledge that God imparts to the believer, we are dealing with four themes:

- Knowledge of God himself – Knowing God for who he truly is.
  - True knowledge of God frees us from misconceptions that we bring to the faith. Perfectionists need to come to know God's grace. Those with poor experiences with earthly fathers need to know God as the perfectly good heavenly Father, etc. When we think about God rightly, we are better able to enter into relationship with Him.
- Hope – Trust in what God will do when Christ returns.
  - Verses 4-5 of this chapter spoke of Christians being chosen to be holy and blameless and being predestined to adoption into God's family. Because God has chosen and predestined, these outcomes are foregone conclusions for Christians. We *will* be transformed completely to live holy and blamelessly before God. We *will* be adopted fully into God's family. Of course, we experience tastes of this transformation and adoption now, but they will come in full when Jesus returns. These are huge elements of the Christian hope.<sup>1</sup>
  - On a larger scale, hope refers to the new creation that God will bring about when Christ returns. This will be a moment when God says no to all that is wrong and yes to all that is right (this is a good definition of final judgment), and ushers his people into a new heavens and new earth marked by perfect relationship to God and perfect joy. This imagery is painted beautifully in Rev 21:1-5. See also 1 Cor 15:20-28; 50-56 for talk of final victory and its ramifications for believers.
- Inheritance – The great value God places on his people.
  - “The riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people” can refer to either the inheritance Christians will receive from God or to Christians themselves as God's inheritance. Because the former understanding is roughly the same as the hope already discussed, I lean toward that latter understanding.
  - Clinton Arnold helps us understand what it means for Christians to be God's inheritance:

The two terms used here (“wealth” [riches] and “honor, glory”) are used in the Greek OT frequently to depict the wealth and honor of a king ... The point here is that Paul wants his readers to know how deeply God values and cherishes them. They are God's incredibly valuable and glorious inheritance. As an earthly king values treasuries full of silver and gold, God values *his people* as his wealth and honor.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The insight that hope refers back to the beginning of the chapter from Arnold, 108.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold, 108-109.

- Power – The vast power of God that is available to believers.
  - Paul expounds on just what this power is in the next section.

**That power is the same as the mighty strength<sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,<sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.<sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,<sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**

As Paul expounds on God’s “incomparably great power for us who believe,” it becomes clear that he isn’t speaking of power in general. Instead, the power available to believers is “the same mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead...” Resurrection power is at work in the lives of those who trust Christ.

Talk of Christ’s resurrection is followed by talk of Christ’s victory. God raised Jesus from the dead and then seated him in the place of highest authority. This exalted place means that every “authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked” are now under Christ’s rule. Read here that the rebellious powers of this world have been conquered and now must bow to Christ. If you’d like to look more into this presentation of resurrection and exaltation, theologians call it “Christus Victor.” Not only has God redeemed us by the blood of Christ. He has also triumphed over all that is wrong in the world. We Christians now wait for Christ’s rule to be made complete at his return.

Having spoken of Christ in exalted terms, Paul brings the church into the picture. Christ has been given to the church as the head of all things. He then speaks of the church in a remarkable way: the church is “[Christ’s] body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” In this, we find that Christ’s authority is for the church (it ensures our inheritance), over the church (his is head over all things, including his people), and through the church (we are the fullness of Jesus in the world). That last piece will come to the fore again as the letter progresses.

## TEACH THE TEXT

Ephesians 1:15-23 can be divided according to three key themes: illumination, power, and church.

### ILLUMINATION

When we speak of illumination, we are talking about God doing a work in the lives of believers that they cannot accomplish on their own. In this passage, Paul speaks of this work as God giving the Ephesians “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation” and enlightening “the eyes of your heart.” These acts of God will allow the Ephesians to (1) know God better, (2) comprehend the hope they have in Christ, (3) understand just how much God values them, and (4) grasp the vastness of God’s power for them.

Paul’s verbiage in this passage sets us firmly within a tension of the Christian life. While we can seek to know God ourselves, God must also make himself known to us. In a sense, we might say that God needs to give

himself to us if we are to know him fully. This reality of the Christian life underlines the personhood of God, meaning that God is not some impersonal force to be manipulated. Instead, God is a person to be known, which means that there is a give and take of relationship. More than this, our need for illumination highlights our dependence on God. Ultimately, it is God who makes us able to grasp the deeper things of the faith.

If the above notions are true, we are confronted with two questions. First, if we are dependent on God, are our hands tied? What can believers do to know God better? Second, how does God bring about this illumination? Regarding question one, though it is true that we are dependent on God, it is also true that we pursue Him. I think here of Moses in Exodus 33 requesting that God reveal his glory. This is a powerful image of pursuit that we can emulate. Regarding question two, when we speak of illumination, we might automatically think of a dramatic experience in which our eyes are opened to new realities. God can and has worked in this way (think of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus), but he is not limited to it. In my own walk with God, I have had dramatic moments and gradual realizations. The latter have come as I have puzzled over scripture and as God has used events in my life (very often beyond my control) to bring me to new vistas of faith. The key here is to affirm the wide variety of tools at God's disposal rather than seeking to box God's movement into one particular form.

## POWER

Moving now to power, Paul speaks of Jesus in exalted terms that may be foreign to students. Very often, our people's understanding of Christ centers on forgiveness through the cross. This is absolutely true, but it is only part of the story! Along with forgiveness comes victory, and Christ's victory fuels the Christian hope. After all, we hope for the day when Christ's authority (which now extends over all things) will be made fully manifest when he returns. When we speak of Christ's victory, we speak of a reality that is extended to believers partially in this age (as we progress in holiness) and fully in the next (when we are made fully like Jesus).

Beyond speaking of the work of Christ in terms of power and authority, we can also chew on the idea that resurrection power is at work within us. This a powerful truth and hope for life in the moment, for it is God's power that frees us from worldly chains and makes us able to step further and further into Christ's kingdom.

## CHURCH

As you move through Ephesians, you'll discover a very high view of the church that starts here in v 23. The idea that we are "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" may be new to your students. In some sense, we together are an extension of Jesus into the world. I would go so far as to say that the church is the continuing presence of Jesus in the world. Of course, we don't fulfill this vocation apart from Jesus. Instead, we are dependent on his work within us through the Spirit.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### Vv 15-16

1. How would you describe Paul's general attitude toward the Ephesians?
2. What is the "reason" Paul references in v 15?

## Vv 17-19a

1. What is the substance of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians?
2. What does it mean to know God better?
3. What is the hope Paul is talking about?
4. What does Paul mean when he talks about inheritance?
5. What exactly is the power that is for those who believe?
6. How are the Ephesians to come by knowledge of these things?
7. If God has to reveal all of this to them, what should the Ephesians (and we) do in the meantime? Are their hands tied?

## Vv 19b-23

1. What does it mean for believers to have resurrection power working inside them?
2. When you think about Jesus, what are the first things that come to mind?
3. Have you ever thought of Jesus in terms of power and authority? What does that mean?
4. Why does Jesus' power and authority matter to us?
5. What does it mean that the church is Christ's "fullness."

---

### Sources Consulted:

Arnold, C. E. (2010). *Ephesians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. Wright, T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone: the Pastoral Letters: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Slater, T. B. (2012). *Ephesians*. (R. A. Culpepper, Ed.). Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc.

Wright, T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Explore the Bible Curriculum

© Mike Smith 2019