

Ephesians

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will (Ephesians 1:11 ESV)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called (Ephesians 4:1 ESV)

That You May Know

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Ephesians 1:15-23

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Introduction:

Thank you, Jeremy, for reading our passage, and good morning, church! If you haven't already, please turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians is one of the New Testament books that we refer to as 'epistles'. Epistle is just a fancy word for 'letter'. Ephesians, then, is a letter that was written by the Apostle Paul while he was under house arrest in Rome to the church in the city of Ephesus.

If you've read the book of Acts, then you know that Paul had a special relationship with this church. He lived and ministered in the city for more than two and half years – longer than any of his other missionary stops. He knew these people. He loved these people. And we catch a glimpse of his heart for them here. Look again at verses 15-16:

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶**I do not cease to give thanks for you**, remembering you in my prayers (Ephesians 1:15-16 ESV)

Take note of the warmth of this language. Paul is chained to a Roman guard, but as his mind turns to the Ephesians he smiles and writes, 'I hear such great things about you! Your faith is growing! You're loving one another well! I don't ever stop praying and thanking God for you!'

Before we dive into the text, can we take a moment to reflect on Paul's example here? Whenever these people come to his mind, he stops to give thanks! He's praying for them all the time! Let me

ask you, could you say that about your relationships? When *this* church family comes to your mind, is your immediate impulse to give thanks?

Perhaps you're tempted to object, 'Well, this is different. *Our* church can be messy. The church in Ephesus probably wasn't like that.' Except, the church in Ephesus *was* like that! In fact, the most prominent theme in this letter is a call to *unity*. Paul knew that these people had problems! And yet, every time they came to his mind, his first inclination was to thank God for them.

That is the heart posture of a person who is swimming in grace. Paul has just finished celebrating in the opening verses the love of God that CLEANSSES us of our sin and ADOPTS us even though we are so unworthy. It is BECAUSE Paul understands that grace that – when he thinks about the church in Ephesus – his mind does not rush to every flaw but instead to every delight!

If I could issue a practical encouragement: Don't be a fault finder. Don't be a critic. That's the Devil's job. He's the accuser of the brethren and he is really, REALLY good at what he does! He doesn't need our help. Instead, choose to tune your voice to the note of grace that God is singing over His people. In a world of grumblers, be a person who is continually giving thanks.

Paul's prayer for this church centred around one request. Did you spot it? Look again at verses 17-18. He tells them that he is continually praying:

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, **that you may know** (Ephesians 1:17-18a ESV)

Paul understood that what the Ephesians needed more than anything was to have the eyes of their hearts enlightened that they may KNOW. Before we dive deeper into *what exactly it is* that Paul wants them to know, I want to ask a broader question:

Why Does Paul Pray For Growth In Knowledge?

There were plenty of other things that Paul *could* have prayed about regarding the church in Ephesus. He could have prayed for the financial challenges they faced, or the health concerns within the community. He could have prayed about some of their sin issues – like the disunity that

he will address later in the letter. There are plenty of things that he *could* have prayed about, and he certainly wouldn't have been wrong to do so.

But why is it that we don't have any record of Paul praying those kinds of prayers? Why is it that – more often than not – when we find him praying, he's praying for growth in knowledge?

As I zoomed out and considered Paul's broader teaching, two reasons jumped out at me. First, I believe Paul prayed for growth in knowledge:

1. **Because right *living* is impossible without right *thinking***

Paul is not *ignoring* the felt needs or the sin struggles of the church. No, he is strategically *attacking* those needs at the SOURCE.

By and large, we tend to focus our attention on tangible *problems* or *behaviours*. We can become fixated on the *fruit* with very little consideration for the *root*. But Paul's example here reminds us that problems and behaviours – bad fruit – is the outflow of a deeper belief.

Which is why – whenever Paul writes to a church – he devotes the first half of his letter to *right doctrine* and only then shifts his attention to *right living*. Paul understands – and he wants us to understand – that how you *live* flows directly downstream from what you *believe*. Isn't that exactly what he says in Romans 12?

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed **by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2 ESV)

How are we transformed? How do we avoid being conformed to the sinful patterns of the world? By the RENEWAL OF OUR MINDS! That's how we change!

If you've been raised your whole life to believe that you are simply an advanced animal, and that there is no God – well that is going to shape you, isn't it? Perhaps it will manifest in some selfishness? Some anxiety? Similarly, if you've been raised to believe that God is always angry at you and that He won't accept your worship unless you're wearing a tie and reading out of the KJV

– well THAT is going to shape you too! Perhaps it will manifest in some insecurity? Or some pride?

Bad belief will *inevitably* lead to bad behaviour and so, when Paul sees distorted behaviour, he follows the stream back and identifies the belief that it flows from. More often than not, if you see a Christian stunted in their growth, what they need most fundamentally is to *remember the basics of the gospel*.

And so, before Paul turns his attention to the circumstances of a church, he first addresses their thinking. Right living is impossible without right thinking.

But, if that's true, then why does Paul bother praying at all? It sounds like these folks need a sermon! Why would Paul waste his word count when he could simply jump right into the task of correcting their thinking? Paul *prays* for growth in knowledge:

2. Because right thinking is impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit

We see this so clearly in verses 17-18:

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, **may give you** the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,¹⁸ **having the eyes of your hearts enlightened** (Ephesians 1:17-18a ESV)

Paul understood that real knowledge – spiritual truth – cannot be *grasped*. It must be *received*. And so – before even attempting to teach the church – he begins by asking God to *give* them wisdom and knowledge. As he told the church in Corinth:

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and **he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned**. (1 Corinthians 2:14 ESV)

I love the imagery that one old preacher uses to describe this. He writes:

One might as well try to catch sunbeams with a fishhook as to lay hold of God's revelation unassisted by God's Holy Spirit.¹

Do you believe that? Does your prayer life reflect that? The Apostle Paul was arguably the smartest man of his generation. If *anyone* had reason to trust in their own ability to *reason* people into the kingdom, it was Paul! And yet, here we see that behind this brilliant man's teaching ministry was a *constant* prayer ministry! 'They can't see it unless you show it to them, God! Send your Spirit and OPEN EYES today!' Similarly, the great preacher Charles Spurgeon – as he walked up the steps to his pulpit each week – would repeat to himself: 'I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe in the Holy Ghost.'

WOE to the preacher – the parent – the Sunday school teacher – who forgets this truth! All the illustrations – the clever anecdotes – the clearest line of reasoning – it is all POWERLESS to bring about spiritual transformation! Only God can press His spiritual truths into our hearts. And so, we need to follow Paul's lead and pray continually. God, help us to become a church that *prays!*

Now that's not to say that teaching doesn't matter. I could imagine someone thinking at this point, 'See! Enough with sermons! If we really want to grow, then all we need is prayer!' But Paul certainly didn't believe that! In fact, by his own accounts his teaching in Ephesus was *exhaustive*. So much so that he could say to the elders:

I did not shrink from declaring to you **anything** that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house (Acts 20:20 ESV)

'I taught you EVERYTHING' Paul says. So, he is certainly not *devaluing* teaching and preaching. He's simply reminding us that – without the help of the Holy Spirit – teaching and preaching will never lead to real transformation. John Calvin summarizes it well:

God does not bestow his Spirit on his people in order to set aside the use of his Word, but rather to render it fruitful.²

¹ Vance Havner as quoted by John Blanchard, eds. *The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*. Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), paragraph 7109.

² John Calvin as quoted by John Blanchard, eds. *The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*. Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), paragraph 7094.

That's exactly it.

That's why we pray before the sermon every Sunday. That's why we pray before we send the kids off to their classrooms. That's why I would encourage you to pray before leading your family in a Bible study or sharing the gospel with your neighbour.

Right living is impossible without right thinking. And right thinking is impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit.

But *what* exactly is it that Paul would have the church understand? What is it that he would have us know? Paul prays for enlightenment in three specific areas. As we make our way through this prayer, I want to invite you to join Paul in praying this over our own church. Look with me at verses 18-19. Paul says, I am constantly praying:

that you may know **what is the hope** to which he has called you, **what are the riches of his glorious inheritance** in the saints,¹⁹ and **what is the immeasurable greatness of his power** toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might (Ephesians 1:18b-19 ESV)

I Pray That You May Know:

Paul prays that God would help us to understand three spiritual truths. Let's join him in that prayer. First, I pray that you may know:

1. The hope to which He has called you

In chapter 2, Paul will go on to explain that real 'hope' is something that we *cannot* possess apart from Christ. In chapter 2 verse 12 he writes:

remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world.** (Ephesians 2:12 ESV)

That's who we were apart from Christ. We were people who had no hope.

Now, I would imagine that there are likely some of you with us this morning who have not put your trust in Jesus and perhaps you disagree with that assessment. You might object, ‘Wait a minute! Don’t you go telling me how I feel! I don’t feel hopeless at all!’

I am *also* not a fan of people telling me how I should feel. But what Paul is speaking to here is less about a *feeling* and more about a *reality*. In Titus 2, he shines a bit of light on what he is referring to when he speaks about hope. There, he writes of:

our blessed hope, **the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**, (Titus 2:13 ESV)

When Paul talks about ‘hope’ then, he is talking about our *sure and settled belief* that our King is going to return and that he will set everything right.

And so – granted – most people in our culture right now don’t walk around *feeling* hopeless. Most people don’t think much farther ahead than tomorrow. But the Bible is clear that without Christ we ARE hopeless. Because we don’t have an answer for the universal problem of DEATH. At some point or another, every human being is going to come face to face with a hungry grave. Are you able to see *a glorious future beyond* it? Are you certain that death no longer has the final word? THAT is hope!

If you are in Christ, then I pray that you KNOW that the grave has been conquered! I pray that you KNOW that Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place for you. That knowledge – that HOPE – will impact every area of your life. It will change the way you endure suffering. It will change the way that you grieve. It will change the way that you invest your time and money.

Before we go further, rather than simply *talking* about prayer, I want to invite you to turn to the person next to you – if you are comfortable – and to pray for a moment that we as a church would know that hope to which He has called us. (Pray)

Second, let’s join Paul in praying that we would know:

2. The riches of His glorious inheritance

We talked about this at great length last Sunday when we considered the opening verses of this letter. I will move quickly this morning, but I don't want to jump ahead because this is something that we so quickly forget. Christian, do you know the riches of His glorious inheritance?

Do you know that – if you have put your trust in Jesus – EVERYTHING that he earned in his life has been credited to your account? There is TREASURE in heaven with your name on it! In the same way that the child of a business-owner will one day inherit his business or the child of a millionaire will one day inherit his millions – YOU – CHILD OF GOD – have an inheritance from your heavenly Father! And so, Jesus could say:

Blessed are the meek, for **they shall inherit the earth.** (Matthew 5:5 ESV)

And:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for **theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** (Matthew 5:10 ESV)

If you are in Christ, then the new heavens and the new earth are YOUR inheritance! That means that every grief – every sorrow – is *temporary*. Suffering won't have the final word! In fact, not only is pain temporary, but in Christ we can say that every hardship is actually working *for our good!* Paul reminds us:

For this light momentary affliction is **preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,**¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18a ESV)

If this life is all that there is, then there is no answer to the problem of pain. Apart from God, our suffering is meaningless. But – because we follow the resurrected King – we can see our suffering as a gift! It serves a purpose. It forces us to lift our eyes up to the inheritance that's coming. It reminds us that this world is not our home. It whets our appetite for the day when we will hear a loud voice from the throne declaring:

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear

from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3b-4 ESV)

At this time, we’re going to do something a little different. I want to invite our sister, Donna Irving, to share how this truth has carried her through a terribly difficult season. (Donna Testimony) Again, I want to invite you to turn to the person next to you – if you are comfortable – and to pray for a moment that we as a church would know the riches of His glorious inheritance. (pray).

And, finally, Let’s join Paul in praying that we would know:

3. The immeasurable greatness of His power

In a world that is – quite honestly – *frightening* at times, it is so important that we have a right understanding of the power of our King. Look again at verses 19-23. Oh, that we may know:

what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:15-23 ESV)

Paul reminds us here that the Lamb who was slain is also the Lion who reigns! Christian, how often do you reflect on the reality that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father REIGNING over the earth right now? He is far above ALL rule and authority!

There are some very practical implications to this truth but let me highlight one in particular. There are a lot of Christians in our country wringing their hands right now over the passing of Bill-C9. Humanly speaking, I don’t blame them. The proposed change removes legal protections that allow us to share our sincerely held religious beliefs without fear of being taken to court. So, by way of example, if I were to read Romans 1 – a passage that identifies a number of sins and includes the sin of homosexuality – I could be charged with a hate crime when this bill passes. As someone who WILL preach Romans 1 – and every other passage in God’s Word – I’m discouraged by that development.

I've met with MPs. I've signed petitions. I've engaged the political process as a concerned citizen. And you should do that too if you feel so inclined.

But since I KNOW – and I pray that you know – that our King is seated on a throne OVER and ABOVE the leadership of our country – and every country for that matter – I'm not going to let this issue rob me of my peace. Presidents and prime ministers have no authority except that which has been entrusted to them by God, and they will give an account to Him for how they wield it.

Daniel was a man who was not unfamiliar with troublesome edicts, and he reminds us:

He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding; (Daniel 2:21 ESV)

There is no law that can be passed in our Country that does not first pass through our Father's hand. His purposes are constantly moving forward. Therefore, if he permits a season of adversity, we can be SURE that is certainly for our good.

No hand wringing needed.

And not only are earthly powers under his reign, but Paul also reminds us that the powers and dominions – the demons and the devil – are under His feet as well! Brothers and sisters, there IS a spiritual battle that is being waged all around us, and we will have more to say about that when we come to chapter 6, but – while we need to be AWARE of the enemy's schemes – we must not ever allow ourselves to become intimidated.

The devil is not a threat. He is a defeated foe. In fact, Paul writes, he is a FOOTSTOOL for King Jesus.

As chaotic as the world often appears, Paul prays that we would know that our powerful King is seated on his throne and he reigns!

And – here’s an incredible mystery – if we are in Christ then we reign with him. That’s what Paul says in verse 23. There, he turns his attention to the church:

which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:23 ESV)

John Stott gives a simple explanation of this profound verse. He writes:

The church is his ‘body’ (he directs it); the church is his ‘fullness’ (he fills it).³

The King who reigns over all things is the King who has sent His Spirit into the church.

We would do well to remember that as we look out over the seemingly endless needs all around us. Homelessness is on the rise. Sin is celebrated. Marriages are falling apart. Opposition to the gospel is increasing. Do we have any hope of making a difference in this world?

If we look to ourselves, the answer is no. These problems are too big for us.

But if we look up – if we turn our eyes upon Jesus – then the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

As we conclude, I want to invite you to turn one last time to the person sitting next to you. As the worship team comes to lead us in our closing songs, let’s pray that we may know the immeasurable greatness of His power. (pray)

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message Of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979, 2020), 44.