

## STUDY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

### PRAYER IN LIGHT OF GOD'S ULTIMATE PLAN

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

#### **Introduction**

Ephesians 1:15-23 is one of the longer prayer sections in Paul's letters. Rhetorically, Paul's prayer does more than just record the content of his prayer for his audience to read. It serves to (re)establish the vision for their identity and reassert the nature of the faith-life into which they have been called.

One clear theme in this prayer is reconciliation in Christ — reconciliation to God and consequently also to one another, reconciliation that crosses established lines Greco-Roman culture and human traditions had drawn that kept certain peoples apart. Reminding people of our rootedness in God's reconciling action in Christ and of its very real consequences for how we live in relation to one another is something we can never wear out.

#### **Paul's statement of prayer and declaration of thanksgiving**

*"Therefore, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (vv15-16)*

Paul expresses his ongoing remembrance and prayer for his audience. He especially draws attention to their "faith" and "love." Paul specifies that this remembrance and prayer is on the basis of what he has "heard." We should always be clear as we use the word "faith" that it should not be reduced to just mental assent to some creed, but as active trust in what God has done and will do, and life lived in participation in, response to, and reflection of what God has done. Do people "hear" of our faith?

This is also closely linked with "love for all the saints." Again, Paul is thanking them not for warm feelings toward others, but love in action. This "faith" and "love" will be fleshed out later in the letter in terms of the pursuit of unity, breaking through those lines that inhibit reconciliation and unity in the world. The community in Christ should never have within it, evidence of the disunity that plagues the surrounding world. Where this is the case, how can the transformative life of love rooted in active faith be heard?

#### **A Great Vision**

*"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe" (vv17-19a)*

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).

Our Christian life must be centred around this purpose - to know God as He is the truth, as revealed by His Word; and to correct our false, idolatrous ideas of who God is. As important as it is for us to have an accurate knowledge and understanding of who we are, it is far more important (and beneficial) for us to know and understand who God is.

Who is God? This will be a revelation we keep growing into. Our revelation of Him grows as we spend time with Him through His Word, Prayer, and acts that promotes intimacy with Him.

**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 their understanding be enlightened by God.

The 3-fold vision-prayer:

1. What is the hope of His calling?
2. What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints?
3. What is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe?

### **What is the hope of His calling?**

First, he prays that they may know the hope. Hope in this verse is not some wishy-washy "hope so" desire, but a firm expectation -- "the looking forward to something with some reason for confidence respecting fulfilment, hope, expectation." This is eager watchfulness. Jesus Christ is the "hope of glory" for us (Colossians 1:27b). Christ's return is our "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). Jesus provides the expectation that he will work through our prayers and our hands. 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 fulfil.

We have been called to a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11). It is our calling to look forward, to anticipate, even to hasten Christ's coming in power and in glory (2 Peter 3:12). Paul prays for our hope to expand and embrace a big future, rather than shrivel in hurt, bitterness, and discouragement or die in a parched desert of spiritual starvation. To a grand view of our future in Jesus Christ we have been called, brothers and sisters. Our hope -- when we catch this view -- is truly glorious!

### **What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints?**

Second, Paul wants us to know about our inheritance. An inheritance consists of the carefully accumulated possessions of another, set aside and preserved to pass on to one's heirs. Ours is a "glorious inheritance," Paul says -- an inheritance which is attended by glory, which consists of glory in his presence, and which makes us rich beyond all comparison.

We are to comprehend the degree of the riches of his inheritance. "Riches" here refers to "wealth, abundance, plentiful supply." It is not a meagre, strained, debt-laden estate that you will inherit, but one that is abundant, overflowing, beyond counting. But more than that, it is an inheritance "in the saints." Ours is not a solo journey, but one we will share forever and ever with all God's people, living and dead. Oh, don't worry, there's plenty for all. But it is shared with the family.

Sometimes we are tempted to isolate ourselves from others. We've suffered too much rejection, we have a "history" that makes us love-shy, and so we practice our own form of hermit-Christianity. But our inheritance is "in the saints," as part of a corporate body.

### **What is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe?**

First, hope. Second, inheritance. Third, Paul prays that we might know "his exceeding (incomparably) great power for us who believe." The idea here is of power directed (1) "into us," "toward us," or (2) "for our benefit." In this case, God's immeasurable power is into and unto us believers. It is "exceeding greatness" -- a pair of Greek words.

Hyperballō means "to attain a degree that extraordinarily exceeds a point on a scale of extent, go beyond, surpass, outdo."

Megethos means "greatness, a quality of exceeding a standard of excellence."

Paul heaps one word upon another to impress upon us the extreme, humongous, immeasurable nature of the power. God's full horsepower at our disposal, working in and through us who believe.

What is this power (Greek dynamis), this "might, strength, force, capability"? The Holy Spirit.

You see, the very same power that empowered Jesus' ministry on earth dwells in us. The very same power that called Lazarus to come out of the tomb lives in you in the Person of the Third Person of the Trinity. The power in Jesus' hands that touched blind eyes and made them see, that broke bread and fish and fed 5,000 is in you.

But I don't see anything of the kind, you say. I feel powerless. Exactly. Laying hold of this power today is a function of our faith. It is a function of seeing the truth in our hearts and then acting upon it. That is why Paul is praying diligently that the eyeballs of your heart may be opened, that your blindness be cured, that your faith be broadened. And mine too.

In the past we have lived far below our hope, our inheritance, and our power. But we need live there no longer. God is opening our eyes and stirring up our faith.

### The Great Christ

*"according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."* (vv19b-23)

Now Paul gives a vision-expanding, mind-blowing glimpse of the extent of the power that resides in us through the Spirit. Paul's prayer for the Ephesian Christians -- and for us -- runs into praise for his Jesus. His Christ is not but a pleasant memory, a hallowed tradition, or a sacred icon. His Christ is a living Victor.

1. **God raised him from the dead** (verse 20a). God broke the power of death which held Christ, and set him free forever, the first fruits of the resurrection. Jesus' resurrection, as we'll see in Ephesians 2:6, prefigures our own resurrection.
2. **Christ has been seated at God's right hand** (verse 20b), the place of power and authority, of co-regency with God the Father.
3. **This "realm" (NIV) of the "heavenlies" (KJV) is a place of spiritual authority** over every created being -- animal, vegetable, mineral, demon or angel, saint, or sinner, over every other pretentious name or title or position of honour in this world or the next (verse 21)

This phrase "heavenly places" or "heavenly realms" in verse 20 we first saw in Ephesians 1:3. It also appear in Ephesians 2:6 and 6:12. It refers to the unseen spiritual realm in which dwell God, angels, and various members of a kind of evil demonic hierarchy: "rule, authority, power, and dominion" (verse 21).

4. **God has placed all things under Christ's feet** (verse 22a). This is a military expression in which the victor in battle demonstrates his superiority over his defeated foes. They are not only under his feet in spiritual authority, but he has conquered them and become head over them.

You may not see this victory in your corner of the world yet, but it has been accomplished. The decisive battle was fought and won at Calvary and the Empty Tomb is clear evidence. The rest is just a mop-up operation to secure the victory to every realm and place on this earth. In a sense, you are part of the Occupation Force for Jesus where you live, work, study, and play, and part of an Expeditionary Force to

extend his victory to its logical conclusion among every tribe, people group, and nation on the face of the earth.

5. **Christ has been appointed head of the church**, which functions as his body (verse 22b-23).

The Greek word for "head" is the noun "kephalē". It means first the physical head, and then extends to a figurative use as "being of high status, head." With living beings, kephalē can also refer to superior rank. Kephale is a key concept in Ephesians that we'll consider in greater detail later.

### The Great Church

*"And He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (vv22-23)*

This passage concludes with a marvellous vision of the Church. The word "church" used in verse 23 is Greek ekklēsia, from ek, "out" + kaleō, "to call," with the root idea of "the called-out ones." Classical Greek used the word to refer to a "regularly summoned legislative body, assembly." The book of Ephesians has a very high view of the local congregation, much higher than both the world and church members who act as if the church were merely a human institution.

Notice three things about Christ's church:

1. The church is the recipient of Christ's conquering and headship over all things. His headship is "for the church." Christ values the church extremely highly since his work is to directly benefit the church.
2. The church is his Body. He is the head, we are the body, the hands and fingers, the voices, and feet. We are Christ's music and spokesmen, his messengers and workers, his lovers-of-humanity and his clear eyes of acceptance and forgiveness and love. We are his representatives. Don't tell me the church is obsolete! We have a great calling as Christ's body, and we've just begun to learn how to be little Christ ("Christians") in his world.
3. We, the church, are the fullness of Christ, who fills and fulfils everything. We are to be the full expression of Christ. We are to be so filled with Christ that our content becomes Him, that our love becomes blended with His love, that our laughter echoes his own joy, that our sacrifice mirrors his. We are to be the fullness of Christ. Indeed, we are "complete in Him" (Colossians 2:10, KJV).

No wonder Paul prayed for the Ephesians, prayed that their eyes might be opened. His prayer extends to our eyes also. And our view of the Church, which needs to be radically expanded to see Christ as Head and we, in the churches, his body.