



Paul's Prayer – What We Must Know

Series: The Grand Plan of the Glorious God

Ephesians 1:15-23 (18-23)

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The heart of this prayer by Paul is a longing for the Ephesians to **know** God more deeply. Remember what we talked about last week. Knowing God is a matter of **personal dealing** with Him. You cannot know God through someone else. There are no go-betweens, and there is only one mediator, Jesus Christ. You need to deal with Him personally to know Him. Knowing God is matter of **personal involvement** in mind, will, and emotion in a relationship with the Lord. You have a personal stake in the relationship. It cannot be haphazard or unintentional. Knowing Him is a matter of **grace**. It is a relationship in which the initiative is taken by God. It is initiated by God, empowered by God, and made possible by God. Today we are going to look at the results of really knowing God – what it looks like

Enlightened Hearts (v.18-21)

Now understand what Paul is praying when he prays that the **eyes of the heart may be enlightened**. What he is getting at is this: Our nature, our natural bent is against God. To receive the truth of God requires that our disposition and desires be changed. So the key work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is not merely giving new facts and truth to the brain but changing the desire of the heart. The heart that he is speaking of is not the piece of meat in our chest that pumps blood. In Bible times people thought of the heart as the very center of a person. What you thought, how you felt, your motivations, impulses and passions all flowed out of your heart—from the very core of your being. The heart is the center of your will, your emotions, your thinking, your conscience.

Before the Holy Spirit changes our heart of stone to a heart of flesh, we have no desire for the things of God. We may desire the blessings that can only come from God, but we have no affection, no love, for the truth and the things of God. Paul describes unbelievers in Ephesians 4:18 as “darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” Sin blinds the minds of unbelievers and makes them incapable of understanding spiritual truth, the truth of the gospel, unless God opens their blinded eyes to see.

When we are regenerated, born again, the eyes of our hearts are opened to see and to understand and to believe the truth of the gospel but that is just the beginning. The whole Christian life involves the enlightening of the eyes of our hearts -- the opening and drawing of our hearts to the things of God, the renewing of our minds and the giving of greater understanding of the truth of God and its application in my life. There are thoughts, attitudes, values, actions in my life right now that do not please God. There will be stony parts to my heart as long as sin abides in me. Sin clouds my thinking, my will, my desires, my affections. I need to have the eyes of my heart continually enlightened to God and His truth. So Paul is praying that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened so that the truth of God would grip our mind and emotions, would sharpen our conscience, and would bring our will into greater submission to Lordship of Jesus Christ. Specifically, Paul prays that that they would have a

Heart that rejoices in the hope to which God has called them... Paul prays that **“having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.”** Now when we see that word hope used in reference to God and his children, His believers, His church, it is not at all like the hope that is in this world. Lots of times when we say that we are hoping for something, we mean we are wishing that something might happen though it may be really unlikely. The way that Paul is using this word is something entirely different. Hope, in the way that Paul is using the word, is absolute confidence in the promises and the faithfulness and work of God in our lives; it is the substance and essence of our salvation. Paul wants us to know, to experience, to consider, and to meditate upon the hope to which we have been called – the fullness of salvation. He wants them to know, to grasp, and to understand deeply the promises of the salvation to which they had been sovereignly called by the grace of God.

What is the hope to which we have been called? What Paul is getting at here is that we have been called from something to something and for something. God has called us out of death and into life, out of the mastery of sin to the freedom of being holy and blameless in His sight, out of the family of Satan to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, out of ignorance to wisdom in Christ, out of spiritual blindness to spiritual sight, out of weakness to power with God, out of rebellion to worship, out of fear to faith. That is the hope to which we have been called. This hope involves not only the joy of being blessed with eternal glories of heaven that awaits the people of God but life in God now. The hope to which we have been called involves everything that God has done, is doing, and will do regarding your salvation. And all of this is to the praise of His glory.

This is not some pie in the sky by and by kind of thing. The hope to which they have been called is one that affects them right now. Knowing that I have been redeemed by His blood should create a thankful and submissive and celebratory heart in me right now. Knowing that I have

been adopted with an irrevocable adoption into the family of God should give me a sense of security and purpose right now. Knowing that I have been sealed by the Spirit should convince me of His love and care right now, and the promise of His love for all eternity. Paul's prayer is that this church would live in the light of the hope to which they have been called, to experience the fullness of salvation -- but not only that, that they will have a

Heart that is captivated by the riches of His inheritance...Paul prays that they would know **what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.** The Greek, here, is ambiguous and so can allow for two possible interpretations. It can either refer to the inheritance as the children of God that we are given in salvation of which the Spirit is the guarantee, or it can either refer to God's inheritance of us – we are His possession, the saints themselves are the Lord's portion in whom He is, and will be richly glorified. Now Paul is usually very precise in what he says, so I think that this ambiguity is purposeful.

He wants the church to live in light of the inheritance that is ours in Christ, ***but also*** to live knowing the worth, the value, the love, the delight God has placed on us as His people. First, he wants the church to enjoy the fullness of the riches of the inheritance that is ours already in Christ. He wants us to focus on the riches of the blessings that we have right now. Our inheritance is not only to come, it starts now. He wants us to know the earthly blessings that God has for us now – **prayer, worship, the Word of God, the joy of the fellowship of the saints, meaningful work, eternal purpose.** But he also wants the church to know the heavenly joys yet to come – the joy of being openly acknowledged as the sons and daughters of God, our adoption fully revealed, our place as an heir made evident, being received into the new heaven; completely, finally and forever free from all sin and shame; filled with unimaginable joy; made perfectly holy in body and soul; joined with the multitude of saints from every tribe and nation and tongue, and with all of the angels in festal gathering, with all of the martyrs who loved Christ more than their own lives to behold and to be forever overwhelmed and awe-struck and thrilled and satisfied beyond measure with the beatific vision of God the Father in all of His resplendent majesty and the glory of Christ which he had before the foundation of the world, forever enjoying full communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Seeing the great God as He is and being forever enraptured by His beauty, His perfection, His majesty, and His great grace toward us. That is our inheritance and he wants us to know and delight in that now, but Paul also wants us to understand that we are God's inheritance as well and that's why I think he writes this verse with both possible meanings.

He means for us to know that we are God's riches, we are His inheritance. We are His prized possession because of what He is making us to become. The church, His spotless bride, pure and holy. This is a mind-boggling thought—that the infinite personal God would look upon

human beings as his portion, as his riches, as his inheritance, as his treasure! In Deuteronomy 32:9 we read, "For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance." The Bible says in Zechariah 2:8 that God's people are the apple of God's eye. God will do all things to preserve, protect, keep, save, defend, and fight for us because we are his treasure. In 1 Peter 2:9 we read, **But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1Pe 2:9 ESV)**

Although we were nothing and by nature were enemies of God, yet God loved us and chose us from before the creation of the world to be saved. He planned our redemption, sending his Son to shed his blood for us that we may be saved. Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. What is at the heart of the covenant God makes with us is God's statement, "I am your God and you will be my people." What dignity, what worth God has placed His people – we're given an eternal weight of glory in Christ. That blows me away and it is meant to.

So Paul's prayer is that we would know and experience the fullness of our salvation, and that we would know and experience and value the gifts that God has given us as His children and that we would know our value to Him and that these truths would transform our lives.

The first thing I ask is this: How can it be? How do I live in the light of these truths with such mixed motives, selfish ambitions, sinfulness and weakness that I see too often in me? In order to live out His calling in my life, to live as a redeemed, adopted son of God, to as the treasure of God I need power. On my own, I cannot love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength, nor can I love my neighbor as myself. On my own, I cannot obey God's moral law, nor can I respond to the commands of God through out the word. On my own, I cannot live a worshipful, thankful, faithful life. On my own, I cannot fulfill the commands of Scripture. It is impossible in myself to do that. Satan schemes against me, the world tries to seduce me, my flesh seeks to master me. How can I live this out? I need some power, some supernatural power above me and greater than me to fill me with strength and to make this a reality in my experience. That's where the third part of Paul's prayer comes in. Paul prays for us to have a

Heart that is confident in God's power...He prays for us to know "**what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.**" Paul takes us right back to our dependence upon God and wants us to know that God has committed His power to us for this very thing! God is committed to making this a reality in you. Do you see? Paul knows the Ephesians need power to live like this. He knows we need power to live like this. So Paul is not praying that the Ephesians would be given power, but that they would know the power that was **already working** in them.

Let me explain. This power is already at work. A Christian is the result of the power of God at work. No one makes themselves a Christian, God does it. There are no self-made men in the Kingdom of God. Paul says in Romans: **(Rom 1:16 ESV)** In 2 Corinthians 5, he says **(2Co 5:17 ESV)** A Christian is a new creation, not just a member of church, not a good person, not someone who has made a decision to reform themselves, but a new creation and there is only one who can create and that one is God. It takes the power of God to make a Christian. The fact that anyone at all believes the gospel is a great miracle that can only be explained in terms of the surpassing greatness of the power of God. Our salvation, the power behind election, the power behind predestination, the power behind regeneration, the power behind saving faith, the power behind the preaching of the Word of God by which we were saved, the power behind the raising of dead men and women to life, is surpassing power of God in us. And listen, Paul wants us to understand that just as God exerts His power to save, so he pours out His power to complete His work of salvation in us. He wants us to know **that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Php 1:6 ESV)**

In order to illustrate the power of God toward us in and in us, Paul uses the picture of the power of God displayed in Christ's resurrection and exaltation to the place of highest honor in all of the universe. He says this power is **(Eph 1:19-21)** The Greek words used here when Paul speaks of **the working of his great might that he worked in Christ** – those words describe surpassing, unlimited, immeasurable, beyond imagination, mighty, explosive, always-conquering power. That kind of power is available and is already at work in us whether we understand it or not. The power to live like this has already been working in you and is working in you now.

The very same power that **raised Jesus Christ from the dead**, that brought life from death, that shattered the grave, is the very same power that raised you from the death of sin and is at work in you now. And the power that raised Christ to pre-eminence in the universe and **seated Him at the right hand of the Father** in the heavens -- is the power at work in you now. And the power that raised Him to the place of power over every spiritual force, to the place of absolute, supreme power in the entire universe **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** -- that same power is the power that holds you and sustains you and sanctifies you and is yours if you are a follower of Jesus Christ. Great, awesome, unbelievable power is ours today – power to live godly lives, to fulfill our calling in Christ, to defeat sin and fleshly habits, to grow in virtue – in faith, love, patience, self-control, kindness, strength, zeal. Paul wants us to know that God has promised to us the power necessary to live in this way, to know and receive the fullness of our salvation, to know our inheritance and the deep love with which God loves us as His people. God is so committed to this that he has given to us, His church,

Christ as Head Over All (v. 22-23)

Paul says, **And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:22-23 ESV)** Jesus Christ is the great gift of God to His church. God has put all things under His feet and given Him to the church so that we would know His supreme power in our lives. God the Father has put all things under Christ's feet. The powers of the whole universe are subject to Him. The powers of hell are under his feet. The material universe is under his feet. The living world of biology and zoology is under his feet. Human life is under his feet. The kingdoms of man all under His feet. He reigns over it all.

And God has given Him to reign over His church as well, but not in the same way. We are not "under His feet" but we are His body and He is our life giving head and He nourishes and strengthens us, reigning over us as our Redeemer and Savior and Loving Lord. He reigns over us as Shepherd. Christ, who is sufficient in all things...Christ, who has no beginning and no end...Christ, who Himself *is* the Alpha and the Omega...Christ, who owns all the cattle on a thousand hills...Christ, through whom and in whom God set the stars in the heavens and gave them their names...Christ, whose throne is forever and ever...Christ, whose name is written "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS"... Christ, who binds Satan and casts him into the abyss...Christ, who casts all His enemies into the eternal lake of fire...Christ, whose blood powerfully washes all the stains of our guilt away...Christ, whose sacrifice for all the sins of the elect satisfied God... Christ, before whom the sun has no place in Heaven because He is its light... Yes, this very Christ is our head and we are His body. We are the body of Christ. We are supernaturally and intimately joined to Him as His very body and He is the source of all strength and hope and grace that we need to make Paul's prayer a present reality.

That means that the Lord Jesus has complete sovereignty over our entire lives, from the seeming trivia to the life-shattering events. He concentrates His loving power on His people. He is the loving head of the church, His body, to bring us to himself, to save us, to keep us, to restore us, to lift us up when we fall, to make us holy, to guide and direct us, to bring us back when we go astray, to take us to heaven and present us there before his Father faultless and with great joy. The Father has given Him to the church in all of His power for this great reason. Every conceivable virtue, every possible grace is found at this moment in Him. There is every grace beyond degree in Christ; the fullness is vast, unmeasured, boundless and free. The church is filled with the fullness of Christ -- His special, manifest, personal, empowering presence and strength fills the church to fullness, just as His glory fills all the earth. It is all in Him, the power of God, and it is all available to us, His people.

Now if that is true, why don't we see His power in our lives as we should? Look at verse 19 again and we see the condition of experiencing this power in our lives. It says, "...what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us..." Who what? "...**who believe.**" It is a **present** participle which means "*we believe and keep on believing and keep on believing and keep on believing.*"

We Must Believe

The power of God comes to the people who believe, who trust and obey God, who take Him at His word, who believe what He says and trust His heart. There is exceeding great power is available to us but we must believe, we must trust, we must abide in Christ, obey His words and trust His power in us to live out fully in our lives right now the hope to which we have been called, to experience the fullness of God's promises right now, to know and live in light of the inheritance that awaits us and to live out the truth that we are the special possession of God. That power is available to us in Christ.

But we need to live in it, by faith trust Christ to manifest His power in our lives, as we trust in Him and call upon Him to strengthen and deliver us by His grace as we abide in Him and as we train ourselves for godliness. **Phil 2:12-13**

Action points:

1. We must cultivate our relationship with God through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Obey from your heart the commands of God and trust the power of God to empower your faithfulness. Every one of our hearts is a battlefield.
3. We must press on toward the high calling of God in Christ. Paul describes it in Philippians 3:1-14.

These are great promises that are ours as Christ's church, great promises, a great hope, a glorious inheritance, a power to live to the praise of His glory and please the heart of God. But it is a promise that is only for His people who trust in Him by faith.

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