

EYES OF THE HEART

SERIES: EPHESIANS: THE
MYSTERY OF CHRIST



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Ephesians 1:15-23
Second Message
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Ephesians 1:15-23

In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy didn't appreciate what she had on her beautiful Kansas farm. In fact, she tried to run away from home—but she ran into a tornado. Dorothy had to be knocked out by a tornado and dream of a different, less friendly world, to appreciate her wonderful family and friends. When she woke up, she woke up to reality and realized, "There's no place like home."

In Ephesians 1:3, the apostle Paul informs us that God has "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3). Do we appreciate what we have in Christ? Do we even know what we have?

We probably won't run into a tornado, get knocked out, and dream of another world, but who knows? In any event, God wants us to appreciate what we have. Therefore, he gives us the Holy Spirit. What does the Spirit do for us?

Ephesians 1:15-23:

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, 17 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 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 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.

The Spirit of wisdom and revelation

Paul has already told the Ephesians that they have been "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13). Now he prays that the Father would "give" them the Spirit. Clearly, they have already been given the Spirit. If you believe in Jesus, you have been given the Spirit and sealed with the Spirit. Paul therefore must be praying for something beyond the initial giving of the Spirit.

Paul is praying that the Spirit would impart to us "wisdom" and "revelation" concerning "the knowledge of him"—that is, the knowledge of God. The New International Version, a looser translation than the English Standard Version that tries to capture the essence of the language, has Paul praying that we "may know him [God] better." In order to grow in our relationship with God, we need wisdom and revelation. We get wisdom and revelation from the Spirit.

The Spirit gives us wisdom and revelation by enlightening the eyes of our hearts. Biblically, the heart is the center of your being, the seat of your thoughts, your emotions, and your will. Our hearts, of course, don't have eyes. Literally, our hearts don't see. Paul wants the Spirit to make us aware, but in using poetic language, he stirs our imaginations.

Three central blessings

We need the Spirit to enlighten the eyes of our hearts. Can he do this even now, as we open our hearts to the word of God in the book of Ephesians, which the Spirit breathed out? Indeed he can!

Every time I teach the Scriptures, I pray for the ministry of the Spirit. I treat the sermons I preach, from study to preparation to delivery, as works of the Spirit. I pray for the ministry of the Spirit throughout the process.

Often, by the time I'm ready to preach on a Sunday morning, I'm feeling pretty good about what I have to say (although I'm less confident in my ability to say it!). Even then, no matter how much the Spirit has been involved in my sermon preparation, I know that my words are just words unless the Spirit does something with them. Even the words of the Scriptures, which were breathed out by the Spirit, are just words unless the Spirit does something with them.

Holy Spirit, enlighten our hearts with your wisdom and revelation!

If we are to grow in our "knowledge" of God, we will need the Spirit to enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we will "know" three central blessings. Paul is not simply praying that the Spirit would make us aware of these blessings, he is also praying that we would become aware of the importance of these blessings. Moreover, he is praying that we would grow in our awareness of the importance of these blessings.

Although he uses the word "what" three times, it's not as if we can ever know the extent of the "what" he prays for. For example, how could we ever know the extent of what is "immeasurable"?

Missing out

Theologian Alister McGrath writes of his experience with faith in Christ:

I had given much time to trying to understand the basic ideas of the Christian faith and appreciating the wonderful way in which those ideas interlock. I had gained a lot from gasping the wonderful coherence of Christian doctrine.

Yet, at times, this seemed to be little more than just kicking ideas around. It was as if there were one part of my life that dealt with ideas, and this somehow never seemed to come into contact with anything else. It began to seem unreal and irrelevant. As I wrestled with this, I began to realize that my faith was actually quite superficial. I had *understood* things, but had failed to *appreciate* them. I had not made the connections that would have led to the enrichment of my faith and the deepening of my spiritual life. I had missed out on some of the great riches of the faith.¹

To benefit from God's blessings, the great riches of the faith, it helps to know what they are. To appreciate the importance of these blessings, and to grow in our appreciation for them, it is imperative that we know what they are. So, what are they?

The hope of his calling

First, Paul prays that the Spirit would enlighten our hearts so that we would literally know "the hope of his calling."

If you believe in Christ, God at some point called you to believe in Christ. He called you by arranging for the gospel to be shared with you, as Paul says elsewhere: "he called you through our gospel" (2 Thessalonians 2:14). You may not have known that God was calling you when you heard and believed the gospel, but that's exactly what he was doing.

The two friends in *The Shawshank Redemption* have different opinions about hope. Red tells Andy, "Hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a man insane You better get used to that idea." Andy tells Red, "Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies." Who's right? Maybe both.

If our ultimate hope is in this world, we'll be disappointed, because we hope for more than what this world can provide. Paul says, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19). However, if our ultimate hope is in the new world, we'll be satisfied—more than satisfied, because God is "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). Paul says that this kind of hope "does not put us to shame"—or, does not "disappoint" us (Romans 5:5).

God calls us in the gospel not least to give us hope. Our hope will culminate in the new and eternal age, when we will be fully human, flawlessly bearing God's image, knowing and serving him, creatively bringing his wise and loving care to the new creation in a grand and eternal adventure.

Know this: if you believe in Jesus, your story has a good ending. No matter how hard the chapters get, your story has a good ending. Also know this: the hard chapters are part of the story. All good stories, even those with good endings, include hard chapters. In fact, the hard chapters set up, and contribute to, the good ending. Moreover, the story of the world has a good ending. Therefore, take heart! Believe in the hope of his calling!

The riches of his inheritance

Second, Paul prays that the Spirit would enlighten our hearts so that we would know “what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”

Israel’s “inheritance” was the land of Canaan, the promised land. The New Testament expands the inheritance of the people of God to the new creation—the new promised land, if you will (Matthew 5:5, Romans 4:13).

This “glorious” inheritance involves “riches”—not riches in the conventional sense, because in the new creation, such riches won’t matter. The value of knowing God even now is invaluable, and you don’t need riches to know God. In fact, riches can get in the way of knowing God (Mark 10:24-25).

Paul has already said that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, who is the “guarantee,” or down payment, “of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14). A down payment is part of the whole. It isn’t the whole, but it guarantees that the rest is coming. So it is with the Holy Spirit.

Fleeting moments

The Spirit in the present gives us a taste, often in fleeting moments, of what it will be like to be with God and each other forever in the new creation.

Brent Curtis observes:

This side of the Fall, true goodness comes by surprise, the old writings tell us, enthralling us for a moment in heaven’s time. They warn us it cannot be held. Something inside knows they are right, that if we could do so, we would set up temples to worship it . . . We understand that we must allow our desire to haunt us like Indian summer, where the last lavish banquet of golds and yellows and reds stirs our deepest joy and sadness, even as they promise us they will return in the fragrance of spring.²

As many of you know, I go on at least one personal retreat a year. On one retreat several years ago, I was pacing my room in the afternoon, groaning audibly for intimacy with the Lord, who seemed absent. The next afternoon, I was pacing the room and groaning once again, but this time, I was groaning in ecstasy, because the Lord seemed palpably present. Same place. Same motions. Same sounds. Different experience. Why I sensed distance one day and intimacy the next day I don’t know.

But I do know this: the Spirit gives us tastes of what it will be like to be with God and each other forever in the new creation, and I believe that as I paced my room, he gave me such a taste.

Such tastes of the coming new creation don’t always come in dramatic fashion. The Spirit gives us flashes of joy, moments of serenity, pangs of longing, even throbs of sadness—sometimes when we’re by ourselves, often when we’re with others. C.S. Lewis called them “patches of Godlight in the woods of our experience” and “glimpses of the coming glory vouchsafed to us who now live in the valley of tears.”³

The greatness of his power

Third, Paul prays that the Spirit would enlighten our hearts so that we would know “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.”

The power available to believers in Christ is immeasurably great. But what is the nature of this power? And if the Spirit enlightens us, how can we benefit from it? The power available to believers is according to the “working” of God’s great might, which he “worked” in Christ. God worked his great might in Christ in two ways.

First, God “raised him the dead.” Christ was not simply resuscitated to die again. No, he was resurrected, never to die again. In his resurrection, Christ has a new kind of body. It’s a physical body, yes, but it’s a new kind of physical body that will always have his life in it. When God raised Christ from the dead, he defeated death.

Second, God “seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places”—that is, the unseen realms in which spiritual powers exist. Christ was not only resurrected from the dead, he also ascended to heaven (Ephesians 4:10). In the heavenly realms, the Father now shares his throne with the Son (Revelation 3:21). The ascension of Christ to his heavenly throne, both as a human and as a king, begins to fulfill the expectations present in both Psalm 8 and Psalm 110, which Paul echoes in verses 21-23.

As he sits on his heavenly throne, Christ’s power is “far above,” or far superior to, all other spiritual or earthly power. In particular, Paul has in mind evil spiritual beings (Ephesians 3:10, 6:12). Moreover, Christ’s power is far superior to any other spiritual or earthly power “not only in this age but in the one to come”—that is, throughout time.⁴

Echoing Psalm 8:6, Paul says that God “put all things under his feet”—meaning, especially, that all rival forces have been subdued (Joshua 10:24-25). In seating Christ at his right hand, God defeated evil spiritual beings. The beneficent dominion that God intended for humans has been restored—at first for one human (Genesis 1:26).

Given as head to the church

The nature of the power Paul speaks of is especially power over other authorities—and more especially, evil spiritual authorities. Remember, the power of God, evident in the resurrection and enthronement of Christ, is “toward,” or available to, “us who believe.” God not only raised Christ from the dead. He not only seated him at his right hand. God also “gave him as head over all things to the church.”

The word “head” in the Scriptures is commonly used of authority (Judges 10:18, 11:11; 2 Samuel 22:44). Christ, as head, is in authority “over” all things, especially, in this context, all other authorities and, even more especially, all evil spiritual authorities. In Colossians 2:10, Paul says that Christ is “the head of all rule and authority.” God has given Christ to the church in his capacity as head, or ruler, over all things.

Paul further defines the church as the “body” of Christ. Paul further defines the body of Christ as “the fullness of him who fills all in all.” The “fullness” of God dwells in Christ (Colossians 1:19, 2:9). The “fullness of him”—that is, the fullness of Christ, who is the fullness of God—therefore dwells in the body of Christ, the church.

Christ, who dwells in the church, “fills all in all”—which means that Christ rules the universe (Jeremiah 23:24). Christ ascended to his heavenly throne in order to “fill all things” (Ephesians 4:10). In the fullness of time, Christ, who rules the universe, will “unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:10). Even now, in Christ “all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

One of the ways that Christ expresses his rule over all things is through the church, his body, which he gifts to fulfill his purposes (1 Corinthians 12:6, Ephesians 4:8-16).

The power to believe

God has triumphed over the powers. The power that we have is the power to believe that God has triumphed over the powers. If we believe that, then it doesn't matter

what happens to us and it doesn't matter what anyone or anything, including every name that is named, says or does. This kind of belief is powerful.

The writer of Hebrews asserts that we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:6). We can also add, “What can Satan do to me?” and, “What can Tragedy do to me?”

Pilate, a powerful earthly ruler, said to Jesus, “Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:10-11). What did Pilate do to Jesus? He ordered his execution. Jesus was unconcerned, because he knew that Pilate was subject to a greater authority. God triumphed over Pilate, a powerful earthly ruler, by raising Jesus from the dead.

If you believe that God has triumphed over the powers, then in the most important sense imaginable, you have nothing to worry about.

Enjoy the Lord

God has blessed us with hope, with an inheritance, and with power. The Spirit helps us know of these blessings and grow in our appreciation of them. The purpose to know about the blessings and to grow in our appreciation of them is not simply that we enjoy them but that we might also enjoy the blesser—that we might grow in our appreciation of him.

If someone gives you a thoughtful gift, you will not doubt appreciate the gift. But doesn't the gift tell you something about the giver? Doesn't the gift make you appreciate the giver? Doesn't the gift enhance your relationship with the giver? So it is with our relationship with God, who blesses us in astounding ways. The Spirit helps us “know” what we have been given so that we will grow in the “knowledge” of God.

Moses prays to the Lord, “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days” (Psalm 90:14). I pray this prayer most mornings.

Remember Alister McGrath, who missed out on some of the great riches of the faith? He eventually began to appreciate them, and he says that when he did, “I found myself wishing that I had encountered them long before. Then I began to do some serious reading and reflection. It took me ten years to sort myself out, but it was worth it.”⁴

To completely sort ourselves out, it's going to take a lifetime, but we have the Spirit to help us, which makes for an exhilarating lifelong adventure. What will the Spirit do next in our hearts?

Endnotes

1. Alister McGrath, *The Journey* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 3.
2. Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 140.
3. C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964), 91-92.
4. McGrath, 3.