

# Hope and Power

Ephesians 1:15-20a

Two weeks ago we spent time in Ephesians 1:3-14 enjoying Paul's long doxology of praise. Paul now moves from praise to prayer. This morning, we're going to dig into his prayer for the Ephesians believers in Ephesians 1:15-23; actually we're only going to make it to the first part of verse 20.

Paul's prayer begins with thanksgiving. He gives thanks for the Ephesian believers' faith in Christ and their love for God's people. I'm reminded of the phrase on our church mug: "Rooted in Christ; Growing in love." I'm thankful for the same things as Paul right here in our own church. We are not a perfect church. Our faith is not perfect and sometimes we struggle in our love for each other. But overall, this is a great church. It is such a privilege to be part of this local church body here in Bemidji!



After Paul gives thanks for their faith and love in vv. 15-16, we learn that he keeps asking God something. He's been remembering them in prayer. In **Ephesians 1:17** he writes, "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.**" A key way to knowing God better is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. This doesn't mean that Paul is asking God to give them the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit already lives within believers. But Paul is praying that by the Holy Spirit they will gain further wisdom and revelation.<sup>1</sup>

By wisdom we mean the capacity to understand truth and then act accordingly. And here Paul is talking about wisdom that God imparts to those who are close to Him. This is something transcendent and supernatural; something that is given by the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

By revelation we mean making something known and disclosing a truth that was previously concealed or unknown to us.<sup>3</sup> Paul keeps asking this SO THAT they can know God better. Can you think of someone you'd like to get to know better? Maybe Franklin Graham, Toby Mac, or Carly Fiorina? We could get to know these people by spending time with them. Maybe have a cup of coffee or have them over for dinner. But how do we get to know God better?

Certainly reading our Bible, praying, attending church, and so on can help us grow in our faith. And, we should do those things. But, here, Paul prays something else, something supernatural; that God's Spirit would bring wisdom and revelation. Do you ever pray that way? Paul seems to think that we need the Spirit of wisdom and revelation SO THAT we may know God better.

**1 Corinthians 2:9-10** says it this way, "...as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"— the things God has prepared for those who love him—**these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.** The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." It's good and right for us to call upon God's Spirit to help us know Him better.

Before we leave v. 17, there's one other thing I need to say about Paul. He's tenacious! **Paul KEEPS ASKING for more!** Two weeks ago we looked at Paul's long doxology of praise in vv. 3-14. He talks about all the wonderful spiritual blessings that we have in Christ. Why can't Paul just be satisfied with that? Why press God for more? This is Paul's habit actually.

**Colossians 1:9**, "...We continually ask God to fill you with the **knowledge of his will** through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives."

**Philippians 1:9**, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in **knowledge and depth of insight.**"

Knowing Christ better was the consuming passion of Paul's life. And it seems to be his consuming prayer for other Christ-followers. If you are a Christ-follower, I realize that you already know God. But, do you want to know Him better? Since the creation of the world, He's been arranging things so that we can be in close relationship with Him. But, do we desire to know God better?

<sup>1</sup> See O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, bottom of p. 132 referencing Fee in note #162.

<sup>2</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 934). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>3</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000).

Why wouldn't we want to know Him better? Perhaps we each need to answer that question for ourselves: Perhaps we are terribly busy? Relationships take a lot of time. Perhaps we are simply content with life as it is? But contentment can be a cloak for complacency or settling for mediocrity in our walk with God. Perhaps we are "enjoying" a few sins here and there? And, we know that getting to know God better would mean that He would want to talk with us regarding those sins.

Or possibly, you just have a very reserved personality? You don't want your faith to get too... personal. You keep relationships at arm's length. Or, maybe there's just too much risk in being in a relationship with an unseen God? It's unsettling to get close to someone you can't even see.

But, here's the thing, **we have a personal God who wants us to get to know Him better.** This is an amazing opportunity. Unfortunately, as people, we prefer to build walls. I've heard it explained as our **outer and inner walls**. We let people through our outer walls and we say "hi" and easily make casual acquaintances. But very few get through our inner wall. We keep people out of our hearts and we are slow to trust or to open ourselves up in genuine ways.

**Does this describe your relationship with God?** "God, I'm fine with you coming inside my outer wall, but I'm not too sure about you being inside my inner wall. I'm a private person and You are a holy God. I just don't think it's a good idea for me to invite you in that deeply.

**The Christian life is an ongoing adventure** into new, exciting, and more challenging endeavors. Don't level off. Don't let your faith plateau. Let yourself desire more of God. Don't be content with where things are at. Press in; **let's keep asking for more!**

Moving on to **Ephesians 1:18** Paul says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be **enlightened** in order that you may know..." Do you ever pray for supernatural enlightenment? It sounds a little **charismatic** right? Maybe a little out there for us theological conservatives.

Enlightenment is Paul's word, not mine. Well, actually his word is **φωτίζω**<sup>4</sup>: "to make known in reference to the inner life or transcendent matters and thus enlighten, give light to, or shed light upon."<sup>5</sup> And so, if we focus on this idea of shedding light on something, I feel a bit more comfortable. Paul is praying that God will shed His light on what we need to know about Him. He keeps praying for spiritual insight.

This doesn't mean we just pray and wait for God to enlighten us.<sup>6</sup> We still dig in to our Bibles and study our commentaries and maybe even learn some Greek/Hebrew, but we do all of this prayerfully, asking God to shine His light on the truths we need to know. If we think that we are smart enough, we're not. If we think we can figure out these spiritual truths on our own, we won't.

Paul was very well educated. You don't hear him promoting the Jerusalem Seminary or Nazareth school of the Bible. Instead, we hear him praying to the Father for wisdom and revelation. He prays that the eyes of hearts would be enlightened. God wants to enlighten us with deeper truths of the faith.

Paul now goes on in **Ephesians 1:18-19** to articulate 3 particular truths. He says, "**I pray that you may know 3 spiritual insights.**" When Paul uses the word "**know**," he is indicating more than just **factual** knowledge. Paul wants them to understand these insights through **experiencing** these truths in their everyday lives.<sup>7 8</sup>

The first spiritual insight Paul wants them to experience is hope. In **Ephesians 1:18** Paul prays that they may know "the hope to which He has called YOU." **Hope** is a confidence of future blessing which brings a present-day strength to help us endure. God has called you to know His hope, to experience it daily. By His will and for His purposes in Christ, we have been brought into a place of hope.

If you are feeling hopeless, I urge you to pray that the eyes of your heart will be enlightened. If you know someone who has lost hope, pray for them. Pray as Paul prayed. Pray that God will

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<sup>4</sup> More precisely, *πεφωτισμένους*

<sup>5</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000).

<sup>6</sup> "We have no liberty to infer from this...that our responsibility is solely to pray and to wait for illumination...Others make the opposite mistake: they use their minds and think, but leave little room for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit." John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society*, p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> In Eph. 1:18, *οἶδα*, "to grasp the meaning of something, understand, recognize, come to know, experience" See Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000).

<sup>8</sup> "To know in mind and experience" Stott, John R. W., *God's New Society*, p. 55.

shine light so that you and those you know will have a confident hope in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Ephesians 1:12** mentions that the Jews were the first to put their hope in Christ. And then, we Gentiles were also included in Christ when we put our hope in the Good News about Jesus. But this has not always been the case. **Ephesians 2:12** tells us to, “remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, **without hope** and without God in the world.”

There are many people in our Bemidji community who are now living as we once did, “without hope and without God.” As the Holy Spirit enlightens the eyes of our hearts to the hope that we have in Christ, **that should compel us in our ministry**, our church ministries as well as our personal ministry. May hope motivate us as a grace community to greater love for the lost and greater witness in our daily lives. 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to be prepared to give and answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the **hope** that we have. **May we experience and live out hope in our own lives and then also make that hope known to everyone around us.**

Paul goes on in **Ephesians 1:18** to pray that they may know “the riches of HIS glorious inheritance in His holy people.” His inheritance? I thought it was our inheritance? Back in Ephesians 1:14 we talked about the Holy Spirit being a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. Hum? What is going on here? On the other hand, I guess v. 14 does also mention that we are God’s possession; that He owns us. **But still, do we get the inheritance or does God?**<sup>9</sup>

**1 Peter 2:9** might be helpful, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **God’s special possession.**” This idea goes all the way back to the Old Testament. **Deuteronomy 7:6** says, “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, **his treasured possession.**”

And so, there seems to be a double meaning here for the concept of inheritance. Christ followers do have a guaranteed inheritance in Jesus. It says so in Ephesians 1:14. But Paul is telling us in **Ephesians 1:18** that WE are also **God’s inheritance**; that He finds His riches in His holy people. God places extraordinary value on us; he sets us in high esteem in Christ.<sup>10</sup>

**Understanding this, changes everything in terms of how we view ourselves and how we understand the way that God looks at us.**

This truth is at the same time inspiring and humbling. **Psalm 8:4** asks, “What is mankind that you are mindful of them?” And yet we find here that His riches are in us.

**Matthew 6:21** says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” God treasures us. His heart is with us. This sheds light once again on the story of the **Prodigal’s Son**. The prodigal son’s father did not treasure the financial inheritance that his son wasted on wild living; he treasured His son. His son was what mattered. It’s not about the money. It’s about the relationship. We easily get this backwards in America.

Paul prays that we will experience the reality of this insight: the church, God’s holy people, Jews and Gentiles together, are God’s glorious inheritance. **Paul prays that the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened to see that we are His glorious inheritance!**

Paul now goes on to **Ephesians 1:19-20** and continues his prayer asking that we may know “His incomparably great power for us who believe.” This is the first time Paul mentions “power” in his letter to the Ephesians but it will not be the last time:

- **Ephesians 3:16**, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with **power** through his Spirit in your inner being.”
- **Ephesians 3:20**, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his **power** that is at work within us.”
- **Ephesians 6:10**, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty **power.**”
  - We’ll be talking about this power a lot more when we get to chapter 6 and talk about the Armor of God.

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<sup>9</sup> “The Greek expression...could mean either God’s inheritance or ours...either the inheritance he receives or the inheritance he bestows.” Stott, p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> O’Brien p. 136.

For now, **Ephesians 1:19-20a** tells us about, "...his **incomparably great power** for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he **exerted** when he raised Christ from the dead..." I like this phrase incomparably great. There is nothing else like this power. Don't bother trying to compare it to some other power. The power that is available for us who believe is the same as that which God exerted when He raised Jesus from the dead. That's the kind of power that we have access to. This power is "for us who believe."

I also like this word exerted in v. 20. It means He actually used it; He didn't just flex His muscles. By God's power Christ was raised from the dead. God's power can do that and it did! One way of knowing God's power is by knowing the historical fact of Jesus' death and resurrection. This is important to know. Another way of knowing God's power is by experiencing it in our present-day lives.<sup>11</sup> This is also important to know.

So, now might be a good time for us to consider where we are weak; especially where we think we are too weak. **Is there anything too hard for us who believe?** Well, according to **Ephesians 1:19**, no, there's not. Life might be hard and it might be challenging but it would be untrue for us to think that we don't have the strength to contend with it.

The power that is available for us who believe is incomparably great. Paul wants us to know that. He prays that the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened in order that we can experience God's power in our lives.

I mentioned we'd only get to v. 20. We'll come back to vv. 21-23 in 2 weeks. In this passage, Paul prays for us to get to know God better. He prays that we will be enlightened so that we can experience God's hope, the riches of His inheritance in us, and His incomparably great power. Brothers and Sisters in Christ, God's power is at work within us. He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. Therefore, let us be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Amen.<sup>12</sup>

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
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<sup>11</sup> See Stott p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from Eph. 3:20 & 6:10.