

Our Resources in Christ, Part 1

Scripture: Ephesians 1:15–23

Code: 1906

INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 1:15-23 is a prayer of the apostle Paul in response to the theological treatise of verses 3-14. There Paul tells believers what they possess in Jesus Christ. He discusses the believer's election, redemption, and inheritance.

A. The Power to Understand God's Truth

The truths of verses 3-14 are beyond the full grasp of the human mind. We can't reach that deep into the truth of God. First Corinthians 2 tells us why. Verse 9 says, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Man is unable to understand God's truth both externally and internally. In verses 10-11 Paul identifies the only way man can know God's truth: "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, except the spirit of a man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." We must depend on the Holy Spirit to understand the deep things of God. That is the only way we can understand Ephesians 1:3-14, which contains some of the deepest truths we could ever know.

B. The Prayer to Understand God's Truth

Having delineated what a believer has in Christ, Paul then prays for believers to understand those truths. In Ephesians 1 Paul begins his epistle by describing our position in Christ and then praying that we'd understand it. In chapter 2 he describes our position in Christ and in chapter 3 again prays that we'll understand what he said. Then beginning in chapter 4 he tells us how to respond to our position. The point is that you cannot live out what you do not understand--you can't function on principles you don't know. Unfortunately many Christians today are frustrated because they're trying to live a life that's never been clearly defined for them.

Paul knew he couldn't just pass on information to people, so he prayed for God to make it real to them. That's why the apostles said, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Why? Because the ministry of the Word must be energized by the Spirit of God. And God's men seek that through intercessory prayer on behalf of God's people. The central focus of such prayer is not for the illnesses of the people but that they would receive "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of [their] understanding being enlightened; that [they] may know what is the hope of his calling" (Eph. 1:17-18). It's not enough just to teach; God's men must pray that their teaching be energized by the Spirit of God in the hearts of the people.

C. The Priority of Understanding God's Truth

1. Knowing our position

a) Defining the parameters(1) In our secular life knowing your position is important. When people are hired for a new job, they usually receive a job description. Whether you're an executive or a worker on an assembly line, you still need to know what you are supposed to do. The same thing is true in athletics. As a former athlete I can remember each of my coaches stressing the importance of knowing my position so I could play it properly. One particular player on my football team in college,

probably the best athlete we had, wound up sitting on the bench because he couldn't play his position.(2) In our spiritual lifeIn any assignment we're given, the parameters usually are defined before you're asked to fulfill the assignment. After the parameters are defined, you must understand them before you can perform the task. The same thing is true in the Christian life: People won't behave in the desired manner unless they understand the definition and parameters of what they've been asked to do. Unfortunately in many churches the pastor tells the people what to do but never gives them an understanding of why they should be doing it.(a) Improper motivationPastors are supposed to exhort people to live the Christian life, to do what's right, and dedicate themselves to God. Unfortunately they usually do so through such improper tactics as pep talks, imposing guilt, intimidation, or exerting peer pressure. Each of those motives bypasses the true motive for living the Christian life.(b) Internal motivationThe basis of understanding who you are in Christ is simply knowing your position. That understanding alone is the foundation upon which you are to operate. If all you do is challenge yourself to live the Christian life and whimsically beat yourself into conformity, you will never understand your position.Paul prayed that the people would understand they are one with the eternal God through Christ and that all the blessings of heaven are theirs. Then he prayed they would act accordingly. Christians need to be taught positional truth so they will know how to act. If they don't know who they are, they won't know why they should act a certain way.b) Distinguishing the parametersIn studying the Bible, a distinction must be made between position and practice. If you don't understand which statements are positional and which are practical you'll never interpret the Bible correctly. For example, in 1 Corinthians 3:17 Paul told the Corinthians they were holy. But he also said to them, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness" (2 Cor. 7:1). On the surface you might think the Corinthians were holy some of the time and filthy the rest of the time. The fact is that positionally they were holy before God in Christ but not in their practice. Positionally a believer is perfectly holy and righteous in Christ. That is an eternal, unchanging reality. But his practice is weighed down by any unholy and unrighteous behavior. The goal of the Christian life is to make your practice equal your position.

2. Keeping our perspective

Christian growth has nothing to do with your position in Christ. When you were saved and placed in Christ, His righteousness was imputed to you. All your sins were forgiven, you received eternal life, and you were made perfect. That is your position before God. Your growth takes place through your practice, not your position.

a) A problematic conceptMany Christians think their growth and maturity makes God like them better. That's like parents who tell their children they won't love them if they misbehave or that they will love them more if they behave. But God isn't like that. What you do or don't do has no effect on your position before God. You can't do anything to make Him like you more or less because He loves you perfectly in Christ.b) A positional completenessEphesians 1:6 tells us we are "accepted in the Beloved." We already possess God's favor and grace because we are one with Christ. God sees us just as He sees Jesus Christ. Positionally your standing is perfect.(1) Colossians 2:10--"Ye are complete in him."(2) Hebrews 10:14--"By one offering [Christ] hath perfected forever them that are sanctified."(3) 2 Peter 1:3-7--"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue; by which are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control, and to self-control, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."

Are You a Spiritual Polliwog?

The Christian life is the process of becoming what you already are in Christ. Consider the difference

between the development of a polliwog and a child. A polliwog is born as a shapeless mass with a tail. After a while it sprouts some legs. Eventually it takes the form of a frog or a toad. However when a human baby is born into the world it comes with all the necessary parts--they just need to grow. The same thing is true of a Christian. When you were born into the family of God, you were not a spiritual polliwog. You were complete. You have all the parts of a Christian; you simply need to mature.

Solomon was right when he said, "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever; nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it" (Eccl. 3:14). When God saves a person, that work is total and complete. He stands perfect before God. The rest of his life is just a matter of growing so his practice will match his position. Christian maturity is like a baby learning to use all the parts he was given at birth.

Instead of seeking more favor with God or trying to be more fit for heaven, we should thank God, who has "made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). We already are fit for heaven. Nothing we do will make God like us more than He already does.

When we understand all that Ephesians 1:3-14 says we have in Christ, that ought to change the way we live. People cannot be exhorted to live righteously unless they understand who they are. That's why Paul offers up a prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23. Constant exhortation without an understanding of basic theology brings people under guilt. And that certainly won't motivate them. But the mature Christian understands his privileges, possessions, and resources so he can live consistently with who he is.

Theology: The Basis of Our Practice

In Ephesians 4:1 Paul says, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation to which ye are called." Paul devoted the first three chapters of Ephesians to describe God's calling; he devoted the last three to clarifying how believers should live. Similarly in the book of Romans he devoted eleven chapters to theology before telling the believers how to live. Galatians has four chapters on theology and two on practice. Colossians 1:1; 2:5 is theological; the remainder is practical. We have to build our practice on our position.

LESSON

I. THANKSGIVING (vv. 15-16)

"Wherefore, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."

"Wherefore" takes us back to Paul's previous statements (vv. 3-14). Paul's prayer is based on the believer's tremendous inheritance in Christ.

A. The Source of His Thanksgiving

How did Paul hear about the Ephesian church's faith and love? About four years had passed since he last ministered in Ephesus. He was now in prison (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20), probably his first Roman imprisonment. But he also enjoyed some liberties during his imprisonment. For example, people were allowed to visit him (Acts 28:30). No doubt several Christians brought reports of all the churches in Asia Minor. Sea travel was common in those days.

B. The Specifics of His Thanksgiving

Paul heard two things about the Ephesians: their "faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints." Faith and love are the basic indicators of a true Christian. A believer's faith in Christ is proven by his love toward all saints. First John 2:9-11 says that if you claim to have saving faith yet hate your brother, you're a liar. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). Love is defined as self-sacrificing service of to. True faith will

result in love.

1. Faith in the Lord Jesus

Salvation begins with faith--with believing that Jesus is Lord. Scripture is clear on that issue. Some people claim that Jesus can be received as Savior and then later as Lord. But the Bible doesn't teach that. Jesus must be acknowledged as Lord because He is Lord.

a) Philippians 2:10-11--"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father." b) Romans 10:9--"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (NASB). Paul knew the Ephesians' faith was genuine because it was placed in the Lord Jesus. He is not received as Savior and then later as Lord. He must be received as Lord--if He is to be received at all--because that's who He is.

2. Love for all the saints

Notice that their love was indiscriminate. A true Christian doesn't pick and choose the objects of his love; whoever comes into his life is to be loved.

Sometimes we hear Christians say, "I love him in the Lord," which seems to imply they have no personal affection for nor commitment to the needs of the individual. They extend a spiritualized love only because the other person is a believer and they feel like they have to. But that is not Christlike love. To love someone in the Lord is to love him as Jesus loves him--genuinely and sacrificially. The world picks and chooses, but a Christian is to show "love unto all the saints" (Eph. 1:15; emphasis added). We must not discriminate!

a) Philippians 2:2--Paul said, "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love." We are to love everyone the same. b) 1 John 3:17-18--"Whosoever hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassions from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

You can learn all the theology you want, but if you don't love, you're nothing but "sounding bronze, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1). True salvation goes from the head and heart of the believer to other believers and to an unbelieving world in Christ's name.

The Balance of Faith and Love

The Ephesian church had a good beginning, but the resurrected Lord had this to say about it many years later: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4). The Ephesian church went out of existence not much later. Faith and love must be kept in balance.

* Monks and hermits had a loyalty to Christ that separated them from the world. They lived alone to contemplate their faith, but it was loveless faith that hardly touched anyone.

* The heresy hunters of the Spanish Inquisition had loyalty to a faith that caused them to persecute anyone who was different. Theirs was a loveless faith.

* The Pharisees of Jesus' day had a loyalty to God that made them hateful of others, but theirs was a loveless faith.

Many so-called Christians in churches today are hateful, bitter, and resentful of other Christians. That reveals a loveless faith--a faith that might not be genuine, saving faith.

Genuine faith is marked by love for all the saints. You can't love Christ and put your faith in Him without loving the people He loves. First John 5:1-2 says, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and everyone that loveth him that begot loveth him also that is begotten of him."

II. SUPPLICATION (vv. 17-23)

A. The Spirit of Paul's Request (v. 17)

"[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him."

1. The believer's unnecessary search

a) Illustrated In his commentary on Ephesians, Warren Wiersbe tells an interesting story about William Randolph Hearst, the late newspaper publisher (Be Rich [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1976], pp. 29-30). Hearst was well known to have invested a fortune in collecting great works of art. As he collected them he stored them in various warehouses. One day he read about an incredibly valuable piece of art. Determined to purchase it for himself, he sent his agent to look for it. Months went by before the agent returned and reported to Hearst that he found it. When Hearst asked him where, the agent told him it had been in one of his own warehouses-- that he had purchased it years before! That's quite an illustration of someone frantically searching for something he already has.b)

Identified In Ephesians 1:17 Paul is praying that the Lord might spare Christians from a frantic search for things they already possess. He asks God to give them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" so they might know what they possess and make use of it. The typical Christian wastes time asking God for things He has already given. We ask God for strength, yet the Bible says we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13). We ask for love, yet the Bible says, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" (Rom. 5:5). We pray for grace, yet God says, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9). And we pray for peace, but the Bible says, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). We need to know what we have in Christ, and the wisdom to apply it. Our minds cannot conceive of the riches of our position in Christ. Only the Spirit can search the deep things of God and reveal them to us.

2. The believer's necessary attitude

a) Its source Knowing that we can't understand God's truth on our own, Paul called on "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" (Eph. 1:17). That is a designation of God linking the Father to the Son in terms of essential nature. The One to whom all glory belongs is the same in essence as the Lord Jesus Christ.b) Its significance Paul prayed that God might "give unto [us] the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." The Greek word translated "the spirit" is an anarthrous construction-- it appears without an article. So Paul was praying that God would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation.(1) Incorrect interpretations Some people believe Paul was asking God to grant believers the Holy Spirit. But we don't need to ask for the Holy Spirit because God already gave Him to us (1 Cor. 12:13). First Corinthians 6:19 says that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and Romans 8:9 says that all Christians possess the Holy Spirit. Others say Paul was referring to the human spirit, but we have had a spirit and soul all our lives.(2) The correct interpretation The Greek word translated "spirit" is pneuma, from which we derive the English words pneumatic and pneumonia. Pneuma can be translated "wind," "breath," "air," or "spirit." But it can also refer to a disposition or an attitude that governs one's soul. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3). He wasn't referring to the Holy Spirit or the human spirit, He was referring to an attitude of humility. When we see someone who is sad we might say he has a sad spirit. When we see someone play hard at some sport, we say he is spirited. Or when we see someone who is happy we say he is in high spirits. All those examples are attitudes. I believe that's what Paul was referring to in Ephesians 1:17. He wanted God to give believers an attitude of wisdom and revelation about Christ. However I do believe that the Holy Spirit and the human spirit are implied in verse 17. Paul's prayer was essentially, "May the Holy Spirit work on your spirit to create an attitude of wisdom and revelation about Christ." We know the Holy Spirit must be involved because only He can search the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10). The Greek word translated "revelation," used in verse 17 as a synonym of wisdom, refers to God's imparting of knowledge to us, while "wisdom" could emphasize our use of that knowledge. We must know about our position and resources in Christ before we can effectively use them. Paul wanted the Ephesians

to have a full, deep knowledge of Christ, not just an intellectual acquaintance with the basic facts.

CONCLUSION

The Christian life is predicated on what you know. Truth must be revealed to you before you can practice it. That's why I devote so much of my time to teaching God's Word. Paul prayed that we would gain a divine perspective--that we would set our "affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the only way a person will ever understand the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:9-11)?
2. In Ephesians 1-3 Paul's pattern is to describe our position in Christ and then pray that we might understand it. Why? What does he begin to do in chapter 4?
3. What must a believer know before he understands who he is in Christ?
4. What is the difference between our position and our practice? Why is being aware of that distinction necessary when we study the Bible?
5. Why did Paul tell the Corinthians to cleanse themselves from all filthiness when he already had declared them holy?
6. What is wrong with the perspective that God loves us more when we grow in spiritual maturity?
7. Which is the better analogy to use in describing a Christian: a polliwog or a human baby? Why?
8. How do people usually respond when they are constantly exhorted without being taught basic theology?
9. What two things did Paul hear about the Ephesian church that caused him to give thanks?
10. According to 1 John 2:9-11, what conclusion can you make about someone who claims to have saving faith but hates his brother?
11. True faith will result in _____ ?
12. What is wrong with the idea that Jesus can be received as Savior but not as Lord?
13. What quality of love is evidenced by the phrase "love unto all the saints" (Eph. 1:15)?
14. What is the unnecessary search most believers participate in?
15. What does "spirit" in Ephesians 1:17 refer to? Why?
16. Define "revelation" and "wisdom" as used by Paul in Ephesians 1:17.

Pondering the Principles

1. To interpret the Bible correctly we must be able to differentiate which statements discuss our position and which ones deal with our practice. Look up the following pairs of verses and determine which passage is positional and which one is practical: Romans 5:1 and 14:19; Romans 8:9 and Ephesians 4:30; Ephesians 1:5 and 5:1; 1 John 2:15 and 5:4-5.
2. Do you have trouble loving someone in your church, your Bible study, or your own family? Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and list each characteristic of true love. Which ones are you having the most trouble with and why? Ask the Lord to help you exhibit each quality of true love toward that individual you are struggling to love. Thank God for His Spirit, who will strengthen you to carry out His will in your life.

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