

# That You May Know Him Better

Ephesians 1:15-23

Key Verse: 1:17

**“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.”**

Paul began chapter 1 by praising God in one long sentence (3-14). Paul ends chapter 1 with intercessory prayer in another long sentence (15-23). Although he was in prison, he was not grumpy, anxious and frustrated. Rather, his heart was full of praise and prayer to God. Last week we studied how God has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. Though we seemed to understand, it did not really touch our hearts fully. It seemed a little vague and rather impersonal. Some thought, “In the kingdom of heaven we will enjoy rich blessings, but not now.” The Gentile believers in Ephesus may have felt the same way. So Paul sensed that it was very important to pray for them to know God better and to recognize that God’s blessing upon them was not vague, but real; and not just in the future, but present. Paul did not pray for them to receive new blessings, but to understand what God had already given them in Christ. Let’s study Paul’s prayer and learn what it means to us.

## **I. Prayer for spiritual growth in knowing God (15-17)**

Verses 15-16 show us Paul's heart for the Ephesians. **“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”** “For this reason,” relates Paul’s prayer to the previous verses, in which he indicated that Jewish and Gentile believers alike were equally in Christ. At that time, many Jewish believers regarded Gentile believers as second-class. However, Paul did not, for he really understood the gospel. There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles when they believe in Jesus. They are equally God’s children (Ro 3:22; Gal 3:28). So Paul was very thankful when Gentiles had faith in Jesus and began to love all of God’s people. Faith, hope and love characterize Christian life (1 Cor 13:13). The Ephesians had faith and love. But they seem to have lacked hope. Usually hope grows through persecution and hardship. When they lived in the midst of wealth and prosperity, it was difficult to have hope. Paul did not rebuke them for not having hope. He thanked God because they had faith and love, and he prayed for them to have hope. He gave thanks for them, not just one time, but constantly. He “did not stop giving thanks for them.” Here we learn from Paul how we should see fellow believers. Even though they lack something, we should

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see the work of God in them and give thanks, not just once, but constantly. And if we find that they are lacking something, we should pray for them, not criticize them. What was his first prayer topic?

Let's read verse 17. **“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.”** Here Paul calls God **“the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father....”** In fact, this God is unsearchable and lives in unapproachable light. No one has ever seen him nor can they see him (Ro 11:33; 1 Ti 6:16). However, this God revealed himself through our Lord Jesus Christ! John 1:18 says, **“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”** Colossians 2:9 says, **“For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form.”** So when Philip said to Jesus, **“Show us the Father and that will be enough for us,”** Jesus replied, **“Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father”** (Jn 14:8-9). In the Old Testament, God seemed very distant from his people and they were afraid of him. But the God of our Lord Jesus Christ has come very near to his people, as a Father to his children.

Paul calls God **“the glorious Father.”** As God revealed himself to Isaiah, seraphim called out, **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory”** (Isa 6:3). God is glorious, majestic and holy, and this God is our Father. Yet it is hard for many people to appreciate this truth. It may be because they have a poor concept of a father, as someone who is weak, irresponsible, full of shortcomings, and indifferent to the condition of his children. But our Father God is not like a sinful, human father. Our Father God is a glorious Father.

It is essentially important for us to know our Father God as he truly is. Many people have their own concept of God based on common sense, some experience, or natural revelation. Some think God is like an alien, or an impersonal force of nature. Their intellectual construct about God is, in fact, an idol. To truly know God we must listen to what God has revealed about himself in the Scripture. Adolphe Monod, perhaps the most influential evangelical preacher in 19th century France, said, “Philosophy taking man as its centre says ‘know thyself;’ only the inspired word which proceeds from God has been able to say, ‘know God.’” Why is knowing God important? Without knowing God, we have no life. Here “knowing God” is not just theoretical; it is relational and experiential; this knowledge of God gives us eternal life (Jn 17:3). The most important thing in the

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Garden of Eden was not the beautiful environment, but abundant knowledge of God. Man's tragedy began when he abandoned God and lost the knowledge of God. When man does not know God, his Creator and source of life, he is dead. But Jesus restores our relationship with God, which gives us life and paradise once again. Isaiah 11:9 describes this: "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

Without knowing God, we cannot really know ourselves. In his "Institutes of the Christian Religion," John Calvin wrote, "The knowledge of God and that of ourselves are connected...Without knowledge of God, there is no knowledge of self" (Book I, chapter 1). These days many people have an identity crisis. They try to find identity and meaning in doing something or in pleasing someone else, but this fails to satisfy them. They ask, "Who am I?" This is a big question. When we don't know who we are, we cannot find meaning or purpose in life. Then, how can we know ourselves? It is only possible in the deepest sense when we know God. If we consider an I-pad, it has meaning and purpose only in relation to its owner. If it is separated from its owner, it is useless. Likewise, we find identity only in our Creator God.

How can we know God? Should we take an online course? Well, it is impossible to know God by human effort. God is so deep and mysterious (Ro 11:33). For us to know God, God must reveal himself to us. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10a says, "**However, 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.**" So we need the revelation of the Holy Spirit in order to know God.

Paul prayed for the Ephesians to "**know God better.**" Though they knew God already, they needed to grow in the knowledge of God. Believers who do not grow cause many problems. When Corinthian believers did not mature, they were wrought with jealousy, quarreling and division and their church became troubled (1 Cor 3:1-4). After babysitting for a day, one person realized that he was not kind, loving or understanding, but rather impatient and rude. However, when we grow in knowing God, we become patient, loving, compassionate, kind, and so on. Then we can naturally be fruitful and we are happy. This is why it is so important for us to pray for ourselves and others to know God better by the help of the Holy Spirit.

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## II. Prayer for enlightenment about spiritual blessings (18-23)

In this part Paul prayed that the eyes of their hearts might be enlightened with three great truths. Look at verses 18-19a. **“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”** Paul first prays that the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened. We all have eyes. With our eyes we can read the Bible and see the beauty of nature. But the spiritual world can be seen only by the eyes of our heart, that is, our spiritual eyes. Our spiritual eyes were blinded due to our sins, such as pride, hatred, greed and so on. Unless God opens our spiritual eyes, we remain spiritually blind. But when God opens our spiritual eyes, we can see amazing things. Our lives are filled with joy and hope of the kingdom of God. Fanny Crosby lost her eyesight when she was just eight months old. She lived in a world that was dark and lonely. However, she met Christ personally and had her spiritual eyes opened. She could see the beauty and glory of Christ. She was so enlightened that she composed more than 9,000 hymns of praise and glory to God. She was thankful to God who closed her physical eyes to the dirty things of the world but opened her spiritual eyes to the things in heaven. It is a tragedy that due to our spiritual blindness, we Christians are ignorant of God’s blessings, even though he has poured them out upon us. William Randolph Hearst was a successful newspaper publisher and a collector of antiques. One day he really wanted to buy an antique china set used for European kings. So he sought it here and there. Then he heard that it had been purchased by an American publisher. So he researched who it was. It was him! He already owned the valuable china that he was seeking. He was wandering around in vain. It is the same with us. God has already given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. But in our ignorance we can wander here and there to seek them. This is why we need to pray that God may open the eyes of our hearts to know how precious and abundant God’s blessing is for us. What are these blessings?

**First, the hope to which God has called us (18).** When God calls someone, he is not random and purposeless. Rather, God has a clear and definite purpose for his calling. He calls us to something and for something. For example, when God called the Israelites out of Egypt, he called them to himself to have fellowship with him, grow in his likeness, and to become holy. He also called them for a purpose: to be his priestly nation as a blessing to the world. They had been slaves of Pharaoh. They were miserable and their existence was meaningless. But God’s calling elevated them to a very special position. In the same way, God called us to belong to Christ, have fellowship with him, grow in his image, and eventually become like

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Jesus (Ro 8:29-30; 1 Jn 3:2). We will all be like Jesus, holy and blameless in God's sight (1:4). This is our hope. Philip Henry, the father of the famous Bible commentator Matthew Henry, fell in love with a Christian woman who belonged to a higher social circle. Her parents saw the disparity in social status as an obstacle to their marriage. So they said to her, "This man Philip Henry, where has he come from?" She answered, "I do not know where he has come from, but I know where he is going." Not only did God call us to Christ, he called us to the highest social circle, to become a royal priesthood to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pe 2:9). God's calling is amazing. God's hope for us is even more amazing.

**Second, the riches of his glorious inheritance (18).** Since most of us are not rich, the word "inheritance" does not stir much emotion in us. However, to rich people it is a very important matter. In many cases, the heirs of an estate fight each other due to their greed. We Christians don't need to fight each other. The inheritance God has given us is so rich that everyone can be fully satisfied. This inheritance is glorious; it will never perish, spoil or fade away. This inheritance is not given merely individually; it is "in his holy people." These are the people Jesus redeemed at the cost of his precious blood. They will be like Jesus. In his famous sermon, "The Weight of Glory," C.S. Lewis explained, "the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship...There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal...it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry..." Now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror; then we shall see Jesus face to face. Now we know in part; then we shall know fully, even as we are fully known (1 Cor 13:12). In Christ Jesus we will have wonderful fellowship. We will praise Jesus together with great joy, singing in harmony. At that time we will all sing very well. We will praise the Lord together without any language problem. We will have wonderful eating fellowship, taking from the tree of life. Though we eat a lot, we will never get fat or develop cancer (Rev 22:2). What a wonderful inheritance we have in our Father God.

**Third, his incomparably great power (19-23).** Look at verse 19a. "**...and his incomparably great power for us who believe.**" Here the word "power" comes from the Greek word "doo'-nam-is," from which we get the word "dynamite." This refers to God's unlimited, almighty power. This power was revealed when God created all things out of nothing, and through miracles. The Israelites once demanded meat in the wilderness. God said, "**I will give you meat...for a whole month.**" Moses had a hard time believing this. But the Lord told him, "**Is the Lord's arm too short?**" (Num 11:23) Then he gave them enough quail to eat for a

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month. God is Almighty. He exercises his power according to his will. God's almighty power is always related to his will. We cannot demand God to use his power according to our will. Yet when God wills something, he will surely do it; nothing can stop him. God has incomparably great power for us who believe. When we ask God's help, we can have confidence that God is able to help us. God is able to provide for our needs. God is able help us overcome all temptations. God can give us victory over any hardship or difficulty. We are weak. We need God's power. Paul wants us to know that this great power is for us who believe.

Paul tells us that God's power was displayed through the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. Verses 19b-20 say, **“That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...”** There are two powers that make man a slave: death and evil. Death is inevitable, and it is merciless. Neither the wealth of the world, nor the latest advances in technology can enable man to overcome death. Man has no power to resist death. But God can. After Christ died for our sins, God did not let his body see decay. God halted its process and then raised Jesus to life. It was a glorious new life in a resurrection body. Jesus can never die again because he conquered death once for all (Ro 6:9). Christ became the firstfruits of resurrection for all mankind (1 Cor 15:20). Because he lives, we too will live. God has given us victory over death by his power through Christ.

Christ's exaltation destroys evil. After raising Christ to life, God seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, giving him the place of highest honor and executive authority. Verses 21 and 22a say he is **“far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet...”** Here “rule,” “authority,” “power,” and “dominion” refers to demons, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. The words “every name” in verse 21 refers to angels and people and every conceivable intelligent being. Christ reigns over all, and his enemies are being put under his feet. Revelation 5:13 describes Christ's reign over all: **“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’”** Furthermore, God appointed him to be head over everything for the church (22b). Jesus is the head of the church, which is his body. Christ fills his church with his presence which brings life and power to every part of the body. Christ fills everything in every way. Christ is the center and provider and source of everything that we need. Christ is supreme and sufficient. May God give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we know him better. May God

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open the eyes of our hearts so that we may know the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.