

Ephesians 1:15-23 ~ Scripture

Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

¹⁵ Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere,[a] ¹⁶ I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, ¹⁷ asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom [b] and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. ¹⁸ I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. [c]

¹⁹ I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power ²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. ²¹ Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. ²² God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. ²³ And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

Footnotes:

- a. 1:15 Some manuscripts read your faithfulness to the Lord Jesus and to God's people everywhere.
- b. 1:17 Or to give you the Spirit of wisdom.
- c. 1:18 Or called, and the rich and glorious inheritance he has given to his holy people.



Some of the Bibles I draw upon for these studies.

Ephesians 1:15-23 ~ Discussion Questions

1. For what (if anything) do you thank God on a daily basis?
2. Are you thankful to have people to be with? Who: family, friends, counselors, teachers, church members, or ? Why? Do you show that you're thankful for such people? How?
3. What motivated Paul to pray for the Ephesians? (1:15-16)
4. What did Paul ask God to give the people in Verse 1:17? What is the purpose of having wisdom and revelation?
5. Why did Paul ask that his readers' hearts would continue to be enlightened? (1:18)
6. What kind of help is available to all Christians? (1:19-20)
7. There are two distinct ideas in 1:21; what are they?
8. What did God place under Christ's control? (1:22-23)
9. Paul's letter and this prayer encouraged the Ephesian Christians. What can you do to encourage growth in other Christians? Elaborate and be specific!
10. The Ephesians showed faith in Christ and love for one another (1:15); what qualities distinguish your Christian walk? Again, elaborate and be specific. Do you think you should do more than you are now doing? What? What would it take to get you started doing that?
11. When did you last express a prayer of thanks for other saints (believers, Christ followers, people of God)?
12. If you were able to visit the archeological ruins of Ephesus today and had in your group several Christians, several non-believers, several pre-teen children, and a Muslim guide, where would you want to go? What would you tell others?

Ephesians 1:15-23 ~ Leader's Guide

1. For what (if anything) do you thank God on a daily basis?

2. Are you thankful to have people to be with? Who: family, friends, counselors, teachers, church members, or ? Why? Do you show that you're thankful for such people? How?

There are several related parts to this question that actually lead to other questions. Sometimes you probably feel that it would be nice to be alone—no one to bother you, no one to draw attention to your bad habits, no one to nag you, no one you have to be polite to, no one to complain about your choice of music or TV shows (or worse, to force you to listen or watch their choice). But for many reasons, being alone is not a good thing. God didn't intend us to be alone. Married people live longer than single people (even people with pets live longer than those without). Living alone may sound like a way to reduce stress, but actually the opposite is true: people who live alone are much more prone to depression than those who live with someone else. Solo living weakens social networks and produces feelings of alienation from society. Also, people who live alone are more cynical in their attitudes and more predisposed to hopelessness and negative feelings.

So let's say you're not longing to live alone and you appreciate being around other people. How do you show that? Or do you?

3. What motivated Paul to pray for the Ephesians? (1:15-16)

Paul saying "ever since I heard about your strong faith" is a bit strange. After all, he spent a few years with the Ephesians so why is he saying he just heard about their faith? The NIV Study Bible suggests that maybe the church has grown and he's hearing about new converts or perhaps, as we talked about last week, this is a letter to many churches, not just Ephesus, and he is referring to news from the whole area, only a part of which he had visited.

It was conventional in ancient letters to include a thanksgiving and prayer on behalf of those to whom the letter was sent, something that Paul often did in his other letters. The opening words are typical of Paul and we find similar words in Romans 1:8-15, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, Colossians (1:3-4), and Philemon 1:4-5. Note the two things he mentions first: 1) faith in Jesus and 2) love for other people, specifically "God's people everywhere." or "all the saints."

4. What did Paul ask God to give the people in Verse 1:17? What is the purpose of having wisdom and revelation?

Note: translators have differing opinions on whether Paul is praying that people receive *a spirit* of wisdom and revelation (spiritual wisdom and insight) or *the Spirit* of wisdom and revelation, meaning essentially, the Holy Spirit. Alford goes one step further and says, "*Spirit* here is neither exclusively the Holy Spirit nor the spirit of man, but the

complex idea of the spirit of man dwelt in and moved by the Spirit of God.

In his commentary in 1865, Robert Jamieson writes, “By the spirit of revelation is meant the perfect knowledge of the Gospel dispensation; for no man can be said to be a Christian, who has not made himself acquainted with everything laid down in the New Testament. It is said that God gives this spirit, and it is here compared with wisdom, certainly with the utmost propriety; for what wisdom, what knowledge, what learning, can be equal to that which makes men happy in time, and blessed in eternity? But still, although this is called the gift of God, yet it supposes that the Divine blessing will only cooperate with our pious endeavors.”

Okay, that’s a bit complex for my taste. What it means is that wisdom seems to denote the general gift of spiritual understanding whereas revelation is perceiving the drift and meaning of what God makes known, so that it may be a real revelation to us. The importance of seeking more knowledge, even after we have believed and received the Holy Spirit, is a necessary and healthful feature of Christian life. “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18)

5. Why did Paul ask that his readers’ hearts would continue to be enlightened? (1:18)

Paul prays that “your heart may be enlightened” (or flooded with light) that you may “know the hope...” or “be confident in the hope...” This implies that you would know and be absolutely assured of the certainty of eternal life, which he said back in Verse 1:14 was guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. In Biblical days, the word “hope” had a much more positive meaning (“certain belief”) than it does today (“optimistic attitude”). So Paul speaking of hope likely communicated to his readers a positive and wonderful blessing. So to his readers and to us today, this hope is not a vague feeling that the future will be positive, but it is complete assurance of certain victory through God. This complete certainty comes to us through the Holy Spirit who is working in us.

The next phrase turns out to be a question to both translators and commentators. In the NLT, it reads, “his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.” Earlier translations say, “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” or “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” So does this mean 1) the inheritance that we believers have from God or 2) the inheritance God himself receives, i.e., his saints or his people? The problem lies in the simple word, “his,” which can refer to either the Father or to Jesus. The nod these days seems to be that it refers to Jesus and that we believers become joint heirs with him, Jesus, of all of God’s promised blessings.

6. What kind of help is available to all Christians? (1:19-20)

In this verse, Paul piles term upon term to emphasize that the extraordinary divine force by which Jesus was raised from the dead (v 20) is the same power at work in and through believers. The NIV Life Application Bible notes that “the world fears the power of the atom, yet we belong to the God of the universe who not only created that atomic power but also raised Jesus Christ from the dead. God’s incomparably great power is available to

help you. There is nothing too difficult for him.”

What do you pray for? Think about it. 99% of what most people pray for is trivial for God. Why not pray for really big things that you think are absolutely impossible? Don't think of what you personally can accomplish and focus on a goal that's 10% better than what you know you can do—God's power has NO bounds, NO limits of any kind. And that power is available to you!

7. There are two distinct ideas in 1:21; what are they?

The first idea is that Christ is now seated at God's right hand, the symbolic place of highest honor and authority, and that “he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else...” As Christians we can be confident that God is in control of everything. We need not fear any dictator or nation, or even death or Satan himself.

The second idea is the idea is that Jesus' power is for all time—past, present, and future. Like the Rabbinic teachers of his day, Paul distinguishes between the present age, which is evil, and the future age when the Messiah will consummate his kingdom and there will be a completely righteous (everyone will be right with God) society on earth.

This thought that Christ is set up in heavenly realms is unique to Ephesians (1:3, 1:20, 2:6). But the further thought that he was already dominant over all powers, both present and future continues ideas set down in Psalm 110:1 and 8:6 and repeated in 1 Corinthians 15:25-27 and Hebrews 1:12-2:8.

Jamieson adds an interesting thought about this verse. He says, “it seems to have been an established doctrine among the Jews, and embraced by the primitive Christians, that there were different ranks among the angels in heaven. This notion, indeed, has not been contradicted in latter ages, and, therefore, we need not be surprised to find Paul representing our Divine Redeemer [Christ] as far superior to the greatest of these beings, who, notwithstanding their exalted stations before the throne of God, yet were inferior to Christ, who was the eternal Son of the Father, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person in all perfections.”

8. What did God place under Christ's control? (1:22-23)

In the NLT, the first phrase says “all things” and then Paul further explains is saying, “over all things for the benefit of the church.” [The meaning of this is much less clear in earlier translations (KJV, ESV, etc) that read, “gave him to be the head over all things to the church” (or the assembly).] The Oxford Bible Commentary says, “the final clauses (1:22-23) almost baffle comprehension and many commentaries spend several pages discussing them. The climax of what God did ‘in Christ’ (v. 20) was to give him as ‘head over all things for the church, which is his body’ (vv 22-3). The metaphor of the church as Christ's body goes back to 1 Cor 12 and Rom 12:4-8, and will later be elaborated with the idea of Christ as the head of the body (4:15-16). But here the thought is of Christ as head of all reality, given by God to or for the church (cf. Co1 1:17-18). That would be a difficult enough thought, though ‘head’ can mean both ‘ruler’ and ‘source’ (fountainhead), and so

Christ could be portrayed as embodying or epitomizing the rationale and pattern of divine creation. ‘Given to/for the church’ could then mean simply(!) that the church, here the universal church, had, through its faith in Christ and the God who worked through Christ, been given the key to understanding reality and enabled to rise above all that threatened human and social life.

The chief problem is the final clause (v 23), what it means and how it relates to what has gone before—‘the fullness of him who fills all in all’. Does it refer to Christ or to the church? Does it draw on ideas familiar from later Gnostic texts—Christ as a kind of cosmic being which comprises the totality of sentient reality? The answer is probably that the writer has been carried away by his language and imagery and is playing on the familiar Jewish thought of God or God’s Spirit as filling the cosmos (Jer 23:24; cf Ps 139:7). Christ now embodies that fullness (cf. Col 1:19, 2:9). And the church, his body, is (or should be!) the place where God’s presence in and purpose for creation comes to its clearest expression. Would that it were so!”

In “explaining” verse 1:23, the NIV Study Bible uses words like “probably,” the NLT Study Bible calls it “a difficult phrase,” Gill figuratively throws up his hands and tell us how the Syraic version reads, while the Pulpit Commentary calls it “remarkable” and concludes with this thought, “It is this Jesus, in the form of a servant and in the likeness of men, that is now Head over all things, and as such given by the Father to the Church. With such a Head, what need the Church fear, and what can she want?” This is probably as good a way as any to explain these last two verses, so we’ll leave it there.

9. Paul’s letter and this prayer encouraged the Ephesian Christians. What can you do to encourage growth in other Christians? Elaborate and be specific!

10. The Ephesians showed faith in Christ and love for one another (1:15); what qualities distinguish your Christian walk? Again, elaborate and be specific. Do you think you should do more than you are now doing? What? What would it take to get you started doing that?

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