

Open the Eyes of My Heart

Ephesians 1:15-23

6/23/02

Intro

- Congregational meeting today.
- Vacation Bible school this week.

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In the last few weeks we have heard from Paul regarding the heavenly blessings that we have been given from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Here, in these verses, Paul builds on these blessings by telling them how he prays for them. That is where we gain our insight into these verses, in how Paul prays for them.

Paul has taught them great truths, but that is not enough, he wants those truths to change their lives. The Lord desires the same thing for us, that these truths would be more than information; it would bring change in our lives; and so Paul prays.

Now in these verses, Paul gives us great insight through his prayers into what we need in order to bring true and lasting change in our lives right now.

Intro – Notice that Paul mentions their faith and their love. He has heard these things about them. Paul was convinced that their faith was genuine because they also had love.

Faith and love are often seen together in scripture, because faith that results in love is a living faith – in contrast to a dead faith. For that, he thanks God because what they have learned, they have taken to heart.

Truth learned is not enough, it is one thing to know truth, and quite another thing to be changed by that truth.

And so Paul is encouraged to pray for them that this would continue in all that he is teaching them in this letter.

Paul's prayer is very specific. It goes to the very root of the cause of spiritual growth and maturity. Too often, we only pray regarding the symptoms.

Illus – *The man who kept giving his testimony every week how he kept getting caught in a web of sin, finally one of the brothers stepped up and prayed, "Lord, kill the spider!!"*

I. First, Paul prays for a knowledge of God for them.

Vs 17 A. He prays for a spirit of wisdom and of revelation.

- In Isaiah, it mentions the seven spirits of God. He is not saying that there are seven holy spirits, but rather, a seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- Paul here is recognizing that wisdom and revelation is a ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- It is the Holy Spirit that illumines scripture to us.
- These are great truths in Eph 1, but it must be that the Holy Spirit ministers to them so they can grasp these truths for themselves.

B. ...in the knowledge of Him.

- That is where truth finally leads; to the understanding of the Person of God.
- This is not just a book of ethical guidelines...
- It is given to bring us into the presence of God in every way.

Illus – Jesus prayed, "Father, I thank you for our relationship, and I pray that men may know You, the only true God, for this is eternal life,"

II. May the eyes of our heart be opened.

Vs 18

- A. This is where truth changes us into who God wants us to be.
- Truth comes first to the mind – and then to the heart.

Illus- the Mormons teach what is called a “buring in the bosom.” This is the heart without the mind. God in His Word says, “Come, let us reason together...”

- B. It is truth in the heart that truly changes us.
- If we only could know in our hearts, it would affect every aspect of our lives.
 - If we could only truly know that we are chosen in Christ, that we have an eternal hope, that we are loved beyond comprehension by God,

- We would never have a problem with death again, we would know that this earth is all the hell we will ever know,
- We could go beyond our discouragements because the eyes of heart have been opened.
- If we only knew how much God treasures us.
- If only knew that we are His inheritance...

Illus – Knowing in the heart makes all the difference. II Kings 6 tells us about Elisha and his servant when they were surrounded by the enemy...

III. May we know of the surpassing greatness of His power.

A. Our problem is that we desire to feel powerful.

Illus – When Jesus told His disciples that they would fall away, Peter felt powerful and said that he would not, even though the rest just might. His problem was that he felt powerful.

B. His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

- It is resurrection power. It is when we realize that we are dead without Him, that He is the One who brings life out of death, that we begin to find the power for our daily living.

C. Resurrection power pays no attention to obstacles, only to what God wants to do.

Conclusion

His power is at work in our lives in the making of a new creation. He is at work in builindg is us the very character and heart of our Lord and will work in every situation to do it!!

Part 2

I wonder how many of you are remembering my exhortation at the beginning of this series that you read through the book of Ephesians once a week until we have finished these studies. I'm sure that some of you have been faithful in doing this. Now, the rest of you repent, and begin again, will you? You will find that your life will never be the same again if you keep reading through this text thoughtfully and understandingly every week.

We have now arrived at the last part of the first chapter of this letter. We have been watching the Apostle Paul in his great concern for these Christians in Ephesus and the surrounding cities in the province of Asia. And we have learned from him that growth in Christians requires two fundamental conditions. It requires, first, the careful instruction of the mind in the great facts of reality. This is what Paul has been doing in the opening verses of this chapter -- setting forth the broad sweep of God's truth, the undergirding reality of the Christian life, the great facts upon which our faith can rest. He is careful to see that this is done thoroughly.

But, as we saw last time together, that is not enough. Beside the careful instruction of the mind there must be the prayerful enlightenment of the heart. So Paul is not content to leave these people merely taught; he also prays that the eyes of their hearts be enlightened, that the truth which they have heard and understood with their minds will come alive and capture their hearts, that they will experience a kind of "divine heartburn" -- like that of those two disciples whom Jesus met on the road to Emmaus and who said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" {Luke 24:32 RSV}.

I wonder if much of our teaching isn't lost because we are not faithful in praying for each other that our minds be instructed and our hearts enlightened. It is so necessary that this truth not be held with the intellect only -- a mere academic understanding of doctrine -- but that it be gripping, vital, and compelling, and that we will see its full impact. [This, of course, is the way God has designed us to operate: The teaching is to instruct the mind, the prayer is to awaken and enlighten the heart, and, thus, the will is enabled to act. And if people can't act as Christians it is very likely that one of these elements is missing.](#)

Here we are dealing with the great problem of motivation. The apostle understood these Christians. He was a veteran warrior of the cross. He had been a Christian for many years by the time he wrote this letter and he had undoubtedly gone through all the varying experiences that a Christian can be subjected to. He knew the lukewarmness which can set in, the lethargic, apathetic attitudes which can sometimes arise after a warm and hopeful beginning. And, here, he saw these Christians as dispirited, listless, turned off, and he understood their need.

Perhaps many of you are struggling with this very problem. No Christian escapes this entirely in his lifetime. There are times when we simply get cold and our spirits grow apathetic. The apostle understood that. He knew that these people had lost sight of certain

truth. They still held it with their minds -- they would have been able to pass an examination on the doctrine involved -- but they had lost sight of it in their hearts. It was no longer living, flaming, warm, compelling, motivating. So the apostle turns to prayer, and his prayer reflects his understanding of their needs. He specifies three things: He is praying that the eyes of their hearts will be 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, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, {Eph 1:18b-19a RSV}

Hope, riches, and power. You notice that he doesn't pray in general, as most of us tend to do. He doesn't simply say, "Lord, bless the Ephesians this morning." Most of us drop general, blanket prayer upon everybody and expect that to take care of the situation. But Paul knows these people better than that. He knows that they have lost their vision. That is part of their problem. They have sunk into an attitude of indifferent routine. It seems to them as though nothing is happening in their lives and they are going nowhere. They have lost their sense of hope. They know it as a doctrine, but they have lost the experience of it. So Paul prays that God will enlighten their hearts so that they may know the hope of God's calling, the hope to which he has called them.

You and I know the need for hope. This word, of course, is one part of the great triad found very frequently in the Scriptures -- faith, hope and love -- the essentials to living a full-orbed Christian experience. You find these linked together often in the pages of the New Testament. Hope always concerns the future. These people obviously had lost their sense that anything happening now affected the future. And this happens to many of us. We are all waiting for the coming of the Lord, but it doesn't really turn us on very much. We know it as doctrine, but it isn't very exciting. These people had come to that place. The hope of a believer is described for us very plainly in Romans 8, Verses 18-25, which we should read so that we will understand what hope he wanted to find awakened within their hearts:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. {Rom 8:18 RSV}

That is the hope -- a glory which is coming, a glory toward which we are moving day by day. That glory is waiting for us, Paul says. It is a glory which touches the whole world:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. {Rom 8:19-21 RSV}

That phrase, "the bondage to decay," is a very accurate description of what scientists call the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the law of entropy, the law which states that everything in the universe is running down, that it was wound up once but that now everything is declining, deteriorating. Paul includes not only the natural world, with its constant decay, but the human body as well. He says,

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly [and sometimes outwardly] as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. {Rom 8:22-25 RSV}

That was the hope which these believers entertained in their minds. They knew it academically. They knew that there was coming a day when their bodies would be redeemed, that God was working out that transformation, and that a whole new day was ahead. The central factor of this hope is the certainty of a new humanity. And you will notice that this hope is not just a faint possibility. It isn't an uncertain dream lying in the distant future. It is an absolutely guaranteed certainty, toward which we are now moving, that we will one day live in a whole new creation and will be men and women endowed with a spirit which can mount up with wings as the eagle, a soul that can run and not be weary, a body which can walk and not faint, equal to the demands of the spirit.

We know how true it is, in the words of our Lord, that the spirit is often willing, but the flesh is weak. About the best we can manage to say is that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is ready for the weekend! We need rest; we look forward to relaxation. But there is coming a day, says God, when we shall be in a new body, and it will be equal to all the demands of the spirit, so that we never get weary or tired. We're looking forward to that day.

"Well," you say, "that's fine. I understand that. But how does that help me now? Now, I'm bored, I'm caught up in a meaningless routine. Day by day goes by, and life is not very exciting. How does that distant hope help me now?" [The answer is that the Scriptures do not teach that all of this hope is going to be attained in one blinding flash at the end. I think that many Christians today misunderstand it in this way.](#)

Perhaps these Ephesians did too, and this was their difficulty. What the Scriptures actually teach about this hope had never dawned upon them. And that is that this is not going to happen all at one moment in the resurrection which occurs at the end of life, or at the end of the age, but it is something which is happening right now. It is true that the body is ultimately redeemed at that future time, but the new creation is taking place right now. Read the way Paul describes it in these most helpful words in Second Corinthians 4:

So we do not lose heart [we don't get discouraged]. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us [right now!] an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ... {2 Cor 4:16-17 RSV}

That is what is happening now! I never read the phrase "this slight momentary affliction" without thinking of what Paul says a little farther on in that same letter when he describes his own experience: He had been beaten with rods three times and had received thirty-nine lashes five times, he had been shipwrecked three times and a night and a day had been adrift at sea, he had even been stoned once (not on LSD or something like that -- rocks had been thrown at him) and left for dead, he was in danger constantly on the sea and on the land, in danger from false brethren, spent many a sleepless night and many a day without food or drink. All this he catches up in one phrase: "this slight momentary

affliction." And he says that this is working for us, it is preparing us. It is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

That is what Paul is praying that these Christians will capture -- the sense that God is at work in their daily circumstance, and that this is happening now, that, in the midst of the old creation, the new one is gradually taking shape. You can't see it, although perhaps as you look back you can see some of the results of it in your spirit and in your soul. But these very trials and pressures and problems and afflictions are preparing us for that future time.

That means that the flat tire you had on your car yesterday and which upset you so -- just as you were in a hurry to go someplace you came out and found it there -- is working for you. It is preparing you for this day. It is teaching you something about how to be patient, how to handle your pressures. It is giving you a chance to exercise some of the power of Christ which is available to you. That spot of shoe polish you got on your best dress, the weariness you feel at the end of the day, the arthritic pains in your shoulder, the spat you had with your best friend -- all this, you see, is working together for your good. That is the point. That is what Paul wants these Ephesians to see. They are not lost in a meaningless routine of events, drifting through with some degree of numbness day after day. No, it is all working together. It is preparing them for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. Learn to look at life that way! That is the hope of our calling.

There is no circumstance we go through which cannot, in the hands of God, be turned to our advantage. Granted, we often allow ourselves an immediate failure at that point, **but that failure is not the end of the story**. We can go back and say, "Lord, I see now that I didn't need to give way to the flesh, to its despair or its reaction of anger or impatience. Thank you for showing me that. When the situation arises again I'll be readier to rest upon your sustaining grace. I'll be more experienced in how to turn the problem over immediately to your strengthening hand upon which I can lean." **When you begin to see that, then every moment, every event, is tinged with the flame of glory, with the touch of heaven upon it.**

Paul knew also of their sense of impoverishment. He knew that these Christians tended to grow dull and flabby in their experience. They had begun with a vast comprehension of the greatness of God and the glory of life, and they had been set free from the habits which had held them in bondage and had limited their experience. But now, without realizing it, they were gradually drifting into a narrowness of experience. They were becoming limited and provincial. A sort of living rigor mortis was setting in. They were becoming established. (That means inflexible and rigid!) This condition afflicts many Christians.

I was in Portland, Oregon, yesterday. Some friends were telling me about a large evangelical church there, orthodox to the core, the people exposed to a great deal of Bible teaching. But the outstanding characteristic of that church is an increasing inflexibility and narrowness. Those who attend there are finding the walls of their lives moving in. They are limited in what they can or cannot do. There is a tendency to retire and to back

away from life and not to get involved in the real issues. And they are gradually falling into a rut which is extremely unappealing and unattractive to others around, but they seem to be only dimly aware of it. This can happen to any of us. But Paul is aware of this condition among these Ephesian Christians, and so he prays that they may know

...what are the riches of his [God's] glorious inheritance in the saints. {Eph 1:18c RSV}

Notice how he puts that. He is not asking that they understand that God is their inheritance. It is true that God is our resource. He is our strength; we draw upon him. We belong to him, and he to us. And that is the great resource of the Christian life. **But what Paul is emphasizing here is that we belong to God. We are his property.** He has an inheritance in us. It is his delight to use us. And if we make ourselves available to be used, then enrichment and fulfillment beyond our wildest dreams await us. But if we are afraid to let God use us, we will narrow down into this living rut of experience, and we will find that the Christian life is gradually turning drab and dreary and dull and gray.

So what is needed is an understanding of the adventure which awaits anyone who makes himself available to God. This is Paul's appeal in Romans 12: "I beseech you, brethren, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice unto God," {cf, Rom 12:1}. Give him your life -- day by day, not just in one crisis moment of dedication but in every situation. Say "Lord, do you want to use me in this situation? Okay, here I am. I'm available. I see this need right in front of me. **Help me, Lord, not to pass by on the other side. Give me the grace to be available now.** Lord, have you given me gifts? Is there equipment in my spirit that you want to use? Well, here it is, Lord; I'm available for you to use to meet this need." **And then move out, venture out, plunge in, risk a little bit! As you do, you will discover that this brings enrichment of life, that your life gradually becomes delightful in its adventure, broad in its understanding, rich in its varied experience.**

Yesterday I attended a conference at a beautiful estate on the Columbia River. It was a glorious autumn day. After the morning meetings I wanted a little chance to be alone so I took a walk. I was walking along a rather well-defined, wide path, when I saw a little trail wandering off to the side. I wondered where it went. It looked as if it headed down toward the river. I thought perhaps it might open up a vista of the Columbia River Gorge. It was a steep path, and I knew that when I came back up the going might be a little tough, but I decided to try it. I hadn't gone two hundred yards before I broke into a clearing where I had a tremendous, glorious view of the whole river, the gorge, the autumn colors, the cliffs, the mountains beyond. It was well worth taking that path! I was thinking of this verse as I walked back up that path, thinking of how Paul prays that we might understand the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints -- the thrill of being used of God. **It struck me that I had just experienced a living parable of that. I had to take the chance that the path went somewhere. It didn't appear to be much of a path, it could have dwindled into nothing -- so I had to risk something. But it was well worth the risk, because it enriched my life with the beauty of that scene.**

And God is speaking in that way to you. Many of you are just waiting for God to tell you to do something. But the New Testament never instructs you to do that. Its message is:

"God is with you; therefore reach out, risk something, venture, move out, plunge in, try something new that you've never done before and trust God to see you through it." The result will be fantastic enrichment of life. I wish we could take the time to have dozens of you in this congregation come up to the platform and share with us, as I know would be quite possible, how true this is, how **you have found that as you ventured out for God it has opened up your life and enriched it beyond your wildest dreams.**

There in Portland I ran into some folks who knew Dick and Pam Ewing. Many of you remember them from when they were at PBC while Dick was an intern. When they first came to us, Dick and Pam were such a quiet, retiring couple that you hardly ever even noticed they were around. We have to confess, as a staff, that some of us wondered if Dick would succeed as an intern because he was so quiet. But these folks gave me a report on what is going on in Portland. Dick and his wife moved up there near the campus of Lewis and Clark College, with no regular financial support at all -- no group backing them. They went alone onto this campus. No other Christian organization is working there -- just this couple. They met some students and invited them over to their home. They began to teach one or two of them the Scriptures and shared with them the truth that they had learned. They began to open up their lives to these students and helped them to see the richness of God. These first few brought others, and now there is a group of forty or fifty college students meeting with them every day. Dick is still a quiet person. He is very shy and retiring, and he doesn't teach with a lot of power and persuasiveness. But the richness of his own life is an evident testimony to the truth of what he is saying, and he is becoming a tremendous force for God on that campus. And his own life, as he shares in his letters to us, is so enriched, so much greater than he ever dreamed it could be.

I was just reading the letter sent out monthly from Taiwan by Lillian Dickson. What an amazing story her life is! She responds to every need that comes her way -- nobody mentions a need but that she doesn't do something about it. The result is that she has friends all over the world, and she has a ministry which is so rich and filled with exciting incidents that there is never a dull day, never a boring moment. **Now, that awaits anyone -- if you will let God have his inheritance in your life, if you will present your body to him and say, "Lord, here I am, available to you." There is one final element in Paul's request here -- that you may know**

...what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, {Eph 1:19a RSV}

The apostle knows that these Ephesian Christians, like Christians everywhere, are oftentimes immobilized by the grip of fear. He knows their insecurity. He knows that they are afraid of their neighbors, afraid of failure, afraid of persecution and ridicule. There is a deep sense of inadequacy and of impotence in their lives. They don't think they can do anything. They know how entrenched the forces of evil around them are and it seems hopeless to try to challenge any of the social situations of the day. They know what tremendous, relentless pressures the world can bring to bear upon those who seek to relieve some of these situations, and they are afraid.

The answer to fear is power. The minute you feel a sense of adequate power, you lose fear, because power overcomes fear. Love overcomes fear. These forces are mighty, powerful forces. And so Paul prays that Christians will get their eyes open, in a practical way, to the power available to them -- "that you may know ... what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us [not up in heaven somewhere -- *in us*] who believe." I am often distressed by the fact that so many Christians seem to give up. They feel that their struggles are just too much, that they just can't make it. It is because they have lost sight of the One who is giving them power. Paul develops this at some length here because it is so important to us. He wants us to see that this power was first demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus:

...according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, {Eph 1:19b-20 RSV}

It is resurrection power. That means that it is different; it is not like any other power. It isn't the power of a strong personality, nor of an educated mind. It isn't the power of a good family background, nor of money, nor numbers, nor leadership ability. It is the power that raised Christ from the dead, that is able to bring life out of death. What does that mean in practical terms? Well, it means, as I have often said, that it works best in a cemetery. If you are living in a cemetery, if everything is dead and dull and lifeless around you, try resurrection power. That is what it is for. **It means that this power takes no notice at all of obstacles, just as Jesus rose from the dead, paying no attention to the stone, to the decrees of Caesar, to the fulminations of the Jewish priests, nor to the guard in front of the tomb. Resurrection power doesn't pay any attention to obstacles. It just surges on ahead, leaves the problems up to God, and goes on. It means that resurrection power requires no outside support. It doesn't rely upon someone else, nor upon something else. It doesn't need a vote of confidence. It doesn't require any kind of undergirding expressions of support from anybody. It can operate alone, completely alone, if necessary.** And it means that it makes no noise or display. It doesn't try to arrest attention by some publicity stunt. It just works quietly and, without any noise, effects its transformation, brings life out of death. And further, you will notice that the apostle declares that it is supreme in the universe:

...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 that which is to come; {Eph 1:21 RSV}

It is far above, greater than any other force, stronger than anything which can be launched against you. So believe these words! This is what the apostle is praying for -- that you will really grasp this thought, understand that this is exactly what God means.

Some years ago a young man came to me with anguish in his eyes, obviously in agony. He told me of how he had been struggling to overcome a terrible passion, terrible feelings of lust which affected him all the time. These would sometimes grow so strong that he would fall back into habits which he knew were wrong and were horribly destructive of him and his loved ones, but he would give way nevertheless and he just couldn't resist. We sat down and talked about power, about the power of a resurrected Lord, and what he has made available to us. I remember turning to this passage and reading him these

words. At the time it didn't seem to affect him much, but I said to him, "**You know, God's power is made perfect in weakness. Your problem is that you are trying to feel strong. You want to feel powerful. But God says, 'No, resurrection power is the kind that works best when you feel weak.' So if you feel weak, thank God.**" And the next time you find yourself threatened with being mastered by these surging lusts, run to Christ in helplessness. Commit yourself to him again. Say 'Lord, I can't handle this myself. I can't control myself. If you don't help me, I'm sunk!' And simply cast yourself upon him." He said, "All right, I'll try."

A couple of weeks later, I saw him again. His face was wreathed with smiles when he came to me. He said, "You know, it works, it really works! I was reading again through that passage which you read to me, and I was struck by two words. It says that Christ is seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places [i.e., in the seat of power in the universe], far above, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. And those two words, 'far above', really opened my eyes. Why, of course," he said, "if God is at work in me, and if he has that kind of power, then nobody else's power even approaches his. No demonic force, no lustful urge, can be greater than the power of Jesus Christ. **When I saw that fact**, I was able simply to rest in the Lord, and it has been working. God has set me free!"

You notice that Paul stresses the fact that the name of Jesus is greater than any name that is named. When you name a name you are representing the resource upon which you intend to act. A policeman acts in the name of the law. The President of the United States acts in the name of the people. A salesman acts in the name of the company. And there are men and women today trying to act in the name of Satan. But here is a name which is above every name. Of any name that can be named the name of Jesus is greater, not only in time but in eternity as well, not only in this age but in the age to come. Never will there be a greater name than the name of Jesus. What encouragement that gives! The last thing that Paul tells us of this power is that it is all made visible in the church:

...and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness [the manifestation, the visible expression] of him who fills all in all. {Eph 1:22-23 RSV}

The only place this kind of power is ever going to be manifest is in you and me, in the midst of our pressures and problems -- power to be patient (that takes power, doesn't it?), power to love, when someone is irritating the socks off of you, but you must love him nevertheless (that takes power!), power to be joyful in the midst of distressing circumstances, power to be thankful, etc. That is what Paul talking about -- power to live as God intended men to live.

This conference in Oregon yesterday consisted of a lot of new Christians, many of them teenagers, and some older couples who had been Christians for several years. There were some non-Christians present, agnostics. A young Jewish athlete was there. There was a crowd of about a hundred twenty-five people. I was teaching the New Covenant, the new arrangement for life made in Jesus Christ, and was stressing the fact that this is God's provision to set us free from our inner hangups, to relieve us from guilt and fear and

hostility and anxiety, to relieve all our inner tensions so that we are at peace within and can operate out of a sense of oneness and wholeness in God's presence. I explained how this is so obviously available in Jesus Christ, and how it works, and I confirmed it with certain experiences.

At the end of one of the messages a man came up to me and rather abruptly said, "You know, we're going to have to find some way to shut you up!" I wondered what he was getting at. He said, "If you keep on talking this way, men like me are going to be out of work." I asked, "What do you do?" He said, "I'm a psychiatrist! But seriously, I want you to know that what you are saying, I have recently discovered, is the secret that can make psychiatry work." We went on to converse, and I found that, not too long ago, he had become a Christian. And now he was enjoying the discovery of a secret he had puzzled over and wondered at before -- why some of the psychiatric techniques he had been taught would work and others wouldn't. Now he understood that a new power is available, and that, in that power, these psychiatric approaches can be made to work consistently, and so he had begun to correct his psychiatry by the Scriptures. So this is what God is telling us. He has come to give us hope, and riches, and power -- power to be what he wants us to be, power to be what we, too, want to be.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, we ask that this mighty prayer of this great apostle will become true of us -- that the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened, that these words will not be merely empty words, not mere phrases that we repeat because they are in the New Testament, but that they will come alive in our experience and we too will discover how encouraging it is that our failures are working for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," that even in the times when we are distressed and we don't handle the situation rightly, if we will turn back to you then that situation will work out to our advantage. Lord, we thank you for this encouragement that if we will venture even a little bit, our lives are going to be enriched thereby. And we are grateful that above all, and undergirding everything else, is this amazing power that is within us, that is quietly able to bring life out of death, hope out of hopelessness, joy out of sorrow, and beauty out of ashes. Lord, we ask that we will understand this and live by it and act on it, so that the world around will begin to see it in us. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Part 1

With Verse 15 of Ephesians 1 we leave the great doctrinal passage in which the Apostle Paul has been teaching the great facts underlying the Christian faith, and we turn now to his prayer. This study will be a helpful revelation of the place of prayer in the Christian experience, especially in believers who are maturing, and in relationship to the study of Scripture. This brings prayer and the Scriptures together. The apostle, having finished the

great passage in which he has set forth what the three-fold God is doing for us, now adds these words addressed to the Ephesian Christians:

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, ... {Eph 1:15-18a RSV}

We will stop there and finish the rest of the passage next Sunday. I want to call your attention to the reason why the apostle prayed for these Christians. He starts with those very words: "For this reason," and then he goes on to list the evidence which makes him confident that they are Christians. The phrase, "For this reason," looks back upon the great passage that we have just covered, from Verse 3 through Verse 14, in which the apostle has been outlining for us the great, fundamental facts about our faith: Our call by the Father, His destining us to be his sons, the redemption and forgiveness available to us in the Son, the opening of our eyes to the whole plan of God, our sealing by the Spirit, our enlightening by the Spirit in our lives and hearts, and His guarantee that we shall inherit all that God has provided for us. It is for this reason, Paul says, that he prays for the saints at Ephesus and others who read this letter. It is because they need to understand these truths.

He is convinced that they are Christians because of two things which have come to his attention -- their faith, and their love. That is most instructive. The apostle evidently has heard in Rome of the faith of these Christians, many of whom were in cities around Ephesus and whom he had never met. He has heard of the fact that they have confessed Christ and turned from their pagan idols. They have acknowledged that Jesus Christ is Lord, and have taken open positions as Christians. But the thing which convinced him that their faith was true was the evidence of their love -- faith that works by love. It was the fact that love was beginning to be shown among them, love for all the saints, which made him aware of the fact that the faith they exercised was genuine. **(Because love requires that they move beyond their selfishness and serve others around them.)**

Those two qualities, then, have convinced the Apostle Paul that these Christians are real. Therefore they need to know and grasp the great truths he has outlined for them, and it is for this reason that he prays. Now, I want you to notice that. This indicates that the command of truth, the knowledge of doctrine, is never enough to enable one to grow up as a Christian. You can learn all that there is in the Bible, and be able to write a very profound and scholarly theological treatise on it, but if it hasn't reached the heart it is absolutely worthless. **Truth known never changes anybody; it is truth done,** truth which has flowed through the emotions and gripped them and thus motivated the will.

Thus this passage beautifully takes into consideration the way God has made us. He has made us so that truth hits the mind first of all. And that is where it should strike. We ought to be exposed to the facts, as Paul has exposed us here, but that is never enough. There are some people today who think that if you merely study your Bible and take the right courses and learn all these great facts, learn the doctrine, the truth of the Scriptures,

that is all you need. But the apostle makes very clear here, that is never enough. Just that much will never change anybody. But that truth must somehow move from the head down to the heart. It must grip "the eyes of the heart," to use the beautiful figure that Paul employs, and there must be a moving of the emotions so that the whole man gets involved, and, thus, the will is properly motivated. He is talking about motivation. **And this wise apostle knew that nobody ever gets motivated by truth alone. Truth can be dull and academic and deadly. Your heart also must be stirred. So he prays for that.**

It is instructive to see that prayer is what will do that. I must confess that I have been greatly moved by this passage because it has made me aware that we must add, deliberately and intelligently, this dimension to our teaching. Teaching truth is never enough. We can teach another person -- a student in the Sunday school or our own children at home -- and they are able to parrot the truth back to us, and oftentimes we are satisfied by that. We say that they know this truth. But the apostle was not satisfied. He knew that you don't know truth in that way. **You never know it until it has gripped you, and you have been changed by it. So that is what he prays for. God has designed life that way.**

Next, notice the one to whom he prays. He uses two unusual names for God: "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." Why does he call him that? Of course God is "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" when Jesus was here as a man. Yet there is no recognition, here, of the fact that the Son is equal with the Father. Paul is not praying directly to Christ; he is praying to the God of the Lord Jesus. That is amazing when you think about it. Why does he do so? Well, the reason is that the evidence we have that God will answer this kind of prayer is that he is the One to whom the Lord Jesus prayed. He is the One upon whom Jesus depended for the enlightenment of his own disciples. **For he, too, could not merely teach them and thus deliver them from evil. He had to pray for them in order that the truth might grip their hearts and they might be changed by the truth that they knew.** That is why you often find our Lord praying for his disciples, why he spent whole nights on a mountainside, at times, praying truth into his disciples' hearts.

Do you remember when Peter came to him with his confidence, his strutting boldness, and told him, "Lord, don't worry about me, I'll never leave you. These other rascals will defect and run away, but you can count on me, Lord. I'll stick with you." Do you remember the Lord's answer to that? "Peter, Satan has desired to have you, that he might sift you like wheat [that he might run you through a sifter so all the phoniness will be made visible]," {cf, Luke 22:31}. And Jesus implied by that, "I'm going to give you to him, I'll let him have you." Yet he went on to say, "but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." It was that prayer which held Peter together when, three times in one night, he denied his Lord. Finally, gripped by the awfulness of what he had done, he went out and wept bitterly in the streets of Jerusalem. But something held him steady -- it was the prayer of the Lord Jesus, the light which came from that prayer, which gripped his heart and held him on course. And so the very God to whom Jesus himself prayed, and upon whom he depended to keep his disciples in the truth that they were learning, is the same God to whom we are to pray, that the Father of glory may open our hearts and lives.

I love that phrase: "the Father of glory." There is a lot of hope in that! Do you know what that means? It could mean, of course, "the glorious Father, the Father who is himself glorious." And God is glorious. But I think that here it means instead "the One who originates glory, the One who begets glory, the Father who produces it."

I attended a wedding reception some time ago, and what a glorious occasion it was! Everyone was joyful and happy, rejoicing with the young couple. And it was in a beautiful setting. There was a scrumptious spread of food, and the decorations made it a lovely place. I circulated around, and off in the corner I found a man standing by himself. I talked with him and discovered that he was the father of the bride. He had been paying all the bills, and, as father of the bride, he was the father of glory. He had produced all the glory of this occasion.

And this is the idea conveyed by that title "the Father of glory." When you pray to God about understanding truth you are asking him to make this truth glorious, to make it come alive, to make it vivid, living, vital. That is what he promises and is able to do. He is the Father of glory. That is why Paul uses that title here. The God to whom Jesus prayed is also the Father of glory, is able to produce glory.

Paul turns now and prays for these Christians. Notice what he prays for: "...[that he] may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ..." Why does he say that? Aren't these Christians? Haven't they already been indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Yes. Paul has already acknowledged that. He has said that they were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. So he is not praying that they will be given the Holy Spirit. He is praying for a special ministry of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Isaiah, the prophet speaks of the seven spirits of God -- the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of knowledge, etc. He doesn't mean that there are seven Holy Spirits; he means that there is one Holy Spirit who has a seven-fold ministry of illuminating and enlightening the heart. That is what Paul is praying for here.

Notice that he doesn't take it for granted that this is going to happen. This is not an automatic feature of the Christian life. If you want the Scriptures, the Word of God, the truth, to come alive to you, you must ask for illumination. That is what this passage teaches us. And if you want it to come alive to someone else you must ask that they be given the spirit of wisdom and of revelation. Remember that James says, "You have not, because you ask not," {cf, Jas 4:2}. Everything that God has is for us, but it won't be given automatically.

Any wise father knows that you can't give to your children in that way. If you were to anticipate all your children's wishes and were always to have whatever they need ready for them even before they become aware that they needed it, they would soon take it all for granted. They would fail to develop a thankful spirit. They would fail to develop any sense of need in their lives. No wise parent does that. You learn to wait until your children sense some need, until they come and ask you for help, or until they realize that they are up against it and that there is no other way it can be provided. Then is the time to

step in. And God does that. He is teaching and training us, and he never allows the Scriptures to come alive for us without our sensing a need for this.

That is why for so many, probably for all of us, there comes a time when the Bible becomes dull. You read it and it doesn't say anything -- there is no illumination; or you are listening to a message and it falls flat -- other people seem to be blessed, but you get nothing out of it. What is the reason? Well, it is part of the great conflict which Paul speaks of in the last chapter of this letter -- the blinding, hardening, darkening work of the powers of darkness which keeps us from grasping the truth. To counteract that, there must be the ministry of prayer, of asking God for a spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that the truth may come alive with vitality. That is what Paul is asking for here.

I wonder sometimes if much of our teaching doesn't fall flat and much of the training of our children isn't a failure because we have never prayed this for them. Notice how the apostle does, how he is so concerned that these mighty truths should be more than mere sentences on the page, that they will really grip the lives and hearts of these Christians. And notice also that it is wisdom and revelation "in the knowledge of him" for which Paul prays. That is where truth finally leads. It leads to the understanding of the Person of God.

Do you pray like that when you read your Bible? Do you open the pages and say, "Lord, show me yourself?" This is not merely a book to read in order to learn what is going to happen as prophecy is fulfilled. It isn't merely a book from which to get some ethical guidelines on how to behave in the relationships of life. Primarily and **paramountly this book is designed to lead you to stand in the presence of the living God, to feel him, to know him, to sense his love, his wisdom, his strength, his might, his incredible grasp of circumstances, his control of human events, and to enable you to understand your relationship to him, to have him stand in your presence living, breathing, compassionate. That is what the book is for.** That is the wonder of it. No other book has that quality, but this one has. Christ can step out of the pages and be a living presence in your life and heart, if you pray and ask him to give you that spirit of wisdom and of revelation. But it will not come in any other way.

So, if your Bible study time is dull and dreary, take that as a hint and begin to pray that it might come alive, that you may know him. Remember what Jesus said in his great prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John. **He prayed, "Father, I thank you for our relationship, and I pray that men may know thee, the only true God, for this is eternal life," {cf, John 17:3}.** And if you want life -- life with that quality of abundance which characterizes God -- then that is the way to have it. It comes with knowing God, knowing who he is and what he is like.

I remember reading some time ago in the *China Inland Mission Journal*, an account of two churches among a group of churches in a certain province in the inner part of China. These two churches flourished tremendously, while the others were just dawdling along at a slow pace. The mission director of that area became very interested in why these two churches were doing so much better than the others. He investigated and found that a

couple of years earlier, at a conference in England, information had been given out regarding all these churches, and certain individuals had been requested to pray for the churches. One man took these two churches upon his heart and remained steadfast. Every week he had been praying faithfully for the Christians in these churches, that the truths they heard would be understood. The result was that these churches were like flowers with abundant sunshine and rain. They grew bountifully, while in the other churches the same truth was being taught, but no one seemed to grasp it and lay hold of it. This was tremendous testimony to the fact that prayer has this power to open eyes.

Now look at the last thing the apostle says in this introduction to prayer -- the instrument by which this occurs: "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know ..." Then he lists the things they are to know (we'll look at them in detail next Sunday): The hope of our calling, i.e., our future expectation; the riches of Christ's inheritance in the saints, i.e., his present inheritance, and the exceeding greatness of God's power, i.e., the present experience of the believer. Paul's prayer is that we may know these things, but they will come to us as the eyes of our hearts are enlightened.

That's a strange expression, isn't it: "the eyes of the heart." We know how eyes are expressive. You can sometimes look at a face that seems dull and impassive, a "poker" face, but if you look at the eyes you can see something happening within. Oftentimes I have visited people in the hospital whose faces and whole bodies are wasted away, but their eyes are speaking volumes. Eyes are extremely expressive. And they are the instrument by which we perceive, by which we see things. The mind also has eyes. If you listen to truth in any area, or if you study a subject by means of a book, your mind is perceiving. The eyes of your mind are grasping ideas. But the apostle tells us here that not only does the mind have eyes, but the heart as well. The heart needs to see things, needs to grasp truth and understand it. And the heart is always used in Scripture as the seat of our emotions.

In other words, God is facing what the present generation has so beautifully rediscovered for us: We consist of more than mere minds operating; we need to have our emotions stirred and caught up and captivated by truth. Truth must come first to the mind, then to the heart. But the will is never properly motivated until the heart has been moved as well. The whole man must respond to the truth of God. When that happens, then a deep-seated certainty results. You will know something when both the mind and the heart have been touched.

You remember the episode which Luke records for us in his 24th chapter -- that walk to Emmaus when the risen Lord appears to those two disciples. They are so defeated, so downcast by the horrible thing which has happened in Jerusalem. The Lord joins them, but they don't know who he is. He walks along with them as a stranger. And unfolds to them all the passages in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the promised Messiah, including his sufferings and his resurrection. Do you remember what they said afterward as they were discussing this? They said to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us along the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?" {cf, Luke 24:32}.

That "burning of heart" represents the eyes of the heart being opened. It is the enlightenment, the inflaming, of the heart, so that it comes alive, vital, and is deeply stirred and moved. It is this burning of heart that the apostle desires for these Christians. When the heart begins to burn with truth, when truth from the Word of God becomes so vivid and real to you that your heart is captured by it and you begin to burn, when it takes root in you and you simply must respond to it, that is when you know with certainty that God is real, that the hope of your calling is genuine, that the power of his presence is available, and that the riches of his ministry through you is manifest to others as well.

I could illustrate this in many ways. I remember an incident some time ago here at PBC. A young man became a Christian, came into the church, and married a girl who had grown up in this church. At first his Christian life was glorious to behold. He was warm, open, responsive, and eagerly read the Scriptures. But after a while it all began to ebb away, as often happens. Many Christians go through this experience. He turned cold, lost his interest in the Scriptures, and quit coming to church. He was no longer interested in fellowship with other believers and he avoided them. To use the term of a generation ago, he "back-slid."

Naturally his wife became very concerned. So she and a friend decided that they would pray together for her husband every day. She decided in her heart that she would not nag him nor plague him nor push him. She wouldn't urge him to come to church, and thus gain some kind of outward conformity by pressure, because she didn't want him to come if his heart wasn't in it. She resolved simply to pray. And she and her friend met daily. For a month or more nothing happened. He went on in pretty much the same way. But they took the advice of the Lord Jesus: "Men ought always to pray and not to faint, not to give up," {cf, Luke 18:1}. So they kept on praying.

Gradually her husband's attitude began to change a bit. One day she came home and found him reading the Bible. But she didn't say anything to him, and he didn't say anything to her. But it was a note of encouragement. Then, one Sunday, he announced that he was going to church with her. Again she rejoiced inwardly, but didn't make a big deal of it. After a while, he finally said to her, "You know, dear, I've really been way out of it! Somehow or other I lost all my interest in the Lord. But God has moved in, and met me, and brought me back." And he came alive again. What a wonderful testimony to the power of prayer to open eyes!

It isn't enough simply to teach truth. It isn't enough to spread doctrine. It isn't enough to have a Bible class in which you are getting the students to learn certain facts from the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul, and the other great leaders of the early church, understood man much better than that. You never get the whole man until the heart is moved, until the eyes of the heart are enlightened, until truth is moved from the head down to the heart, and thus it has gripped the emotions. Then the will is properly motivated. Then the person begins to grow tremendously.

So what an encouragement this is to a ministry of prayer! Pray for one another. Pray for the class that you teach. Pray for your children -- that the truth they are learning, both at

home and at Sunday school, will become vivid to them. How many times have we allowed them merely to learn factual matters, and have never prayed about it, and then wondered why the truth doesn't seem to affect them very much. Pray for your father and mother -- that the truth they are learning may change their hearts so that they will be easier to get along with. Pray for your husband, pray for your wife -- that this enlightenment of the heart may come. See how Paul understands this and how he stresses it with us. He says, "For this reason ..." there is no use teaching you this truth unless I also pray for you, unless prayer changes your life so that you are 'turned on,' so that your hearts come alive with the truth of God." And, if we do the same, we will understand that God has designed truth to make its appeal to the whole of our humanity, the whole being, the whole man, and we will become whole in Christ.

So let us pray together now.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for this revelation of the way we are made. Thank you for the wisdom of the Apostle Paul, who knew that you can't simply pour out so many facts, write them down in a letter, and expect to have people grasp them and live by them. There must be the bending of the knee, the opening of the heart, the imploring of the Spirit, the bathing of the truth, the Word, in prayer, so that it becomes vital, living, attractive, compelling. Lord, help us to pray for each other. We need this truth greatly today, and we pray that you will drive it home to us with clarity and with power, in Jesus' name, Amen.