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That You May Know...

Ephesians 1:18-19

Intro: Paul began his letter to the saints in Ephesus by praising God for all the spiritual blessings He has bestowed upon them and upon all who trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. His list of these blessings are as glorious as they are varied; involving quite a number of different doctrines but the overall theme of Paul's praise is the sovereignty of God over the life of the believer. These blessings weren't given to us because of any intrinsic goodness or worthiness on our part; they were given as an act of sovereign love on God's part to His people. And, it is precisely because God works sovereignly in the lives of His people that Paul goes on to pray for the Ephesian saints in confidence knowing that his prayer is in line with the purposes of God for them.

As we saw in our last study, Paul begins his letter by explaining to the Ephesians all that God has done for them in Christ and then he prays that the work that God has started in their individual lives would continue. After thanking God for the faith and love of the Ephesian believers, the first thing he petitions the Father for is that they might know God better! Of course, this knowledge would not come solely or even primarily through human effort but would be supplied by the Holy Spirit who brings wisdom and revelation about God to those who desire to seek and know Him better. The Holy Spirit reveals truth to us from the Word and then gives us the wisdom to apply it. He also enables us to practice the truth.

Paul thought it was of the utmost importance that the saints in Ephesus knew God better but that's not all he wanted them to know.

18-19 – As Paul asks God to reveal Himself to His people by His Spirit, he goes on to make another request – he asks that the eyes of his readers' hearts might be enlightened so that they may learn certain things. This knowledge, this enlightenment must be received in the heart of the believer. We think of the heart as the center of our emotions but in the Bible, the heart refers to the inner person and includes the emotions, the mind and the will. The inner person, the heart, has spiritual faculties that parallel the physical senses. The heart can see (**Ps 119:18; Jn 3:3**), hear (**Mt 13:9; Heb**

5:11), taste (Ps 34:8; I Ptr 2:3), smell (Phil 4:18; II Cor 2:14) and touch (Acts 17:27). The inability to see and understand spiritual things is not the fault of the intelligence but of the heart. We cannot understand the things of God with the natural mind. The eyes of the heart must be opened by the Spirit of God

Of course, Paul's first petition – to know God better - is the highest form of knowledge possible for human beings. The *atheist* claims there is no God for us to know; the *agnostic* says that if there is a God we cannot know Him. But Paul had met God in the person of Jesus Christ and he knows that a man really can't understand much of anything else without some kind of working knowledge of God. It was, in fact, this willful ignorance of God that led mankind into corruption and condemnation. In Rom 1, Paul describes the digressive stages in man's devolution: from willful ignorance of God to idolatry (substituting a lie for the truth) to immorality and indecency. Where does it all begin? It begins with an unwillingness to know God as Creator, Sustainer, Governor Savior and Judge.

The believer must grow in their knowledge of God. To know God personally is salvation (Jn 17:3). To know Him increasingly is sanctification (Phil 3:10). To know God perfectly is glorification (I Cor 13:9-12). Since we are made in the image of God, the better we know God, the better we know ourselves and each other. It's not enough to know God only as Savior. We must get to know Him as our Father, Friend and Guide and the better we know Him, the more satisfying our spiritual lives will be.

In a way, Paul's current request is a continuation of the previous request or, more accurately, it's the flip side of the same request. First, Paul prays that the Ephesians would know God better; then he prays that God would enlighten them so that they might understand certain things. The fact that Paul prays for both shows that he understands that it is ultimately God and only God who both reveals Himself and enables us to grasp what He reveals. This is why Paul prays for these things and this is why we should pray for them too. We will never grow in the knowledge of God the way we ought to if we fail to ask God for these things. They are the essential basics of our Christian experience and spiritual maturity. If they are ignored or omitted from our prayer life then everything else we do is little more than playing religious games.

What is it exactly that Paul prays for the Ephesians to know? After praying that they might know God better, he now prays that they might gain knowledge of certain elements of salvation that God has achieved for them (**and us**). He makes 3 requests: that they might (1) know the hope of His calling (2) know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and (3) know the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe. The hope, the riches and the power – Paul prays for believers to become familiar with what these things mean to our Christian lives.

1) Paul wants them to understand the hope of their calling; that is, the goal of their salvation. Paul's linking of the words hope and calling are significant in this phrase. In Scripture the word hope *usually* looks toward the last things or to the completion of what has already been begun. By linking the idea of the "call" to "hope" Paul is saying that the calling of God, which he's talked about extensively in the 1st half of **ch1**, has a context (not a random calling). God has called us to something and for something. Earlier he said that God chose us to be holy and without blame before Him (**4**), to be adopted as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself (**5**), and all this to be for the praise of the glory of His grace (**12**). That calling is part of our hope but it's not all of it or even the biggest part of it.

The word hope in the Bible doesn't carry the same connotation as it does in out modern vernacular. It doesn't mean "hope so," like a child hoping for a certain toy at Christmas. In the Bible the word refers to an assurance for the future. So, the hope of our calling is the aspect of our salvation for which we *still look forward to*. If you're a Christian, the hope of your calling is that component of your salvation that still awaits fulfillment in the future. This hope is nothing less than our life in the new heaven and the new earth, our life in the full presence of God. It is the hope of the glory of God (**Rom 5:2**), the hope of sharing that glory, the hope of appearing with Christ in glory at the end (**Col 3:4**). It is the anticipation of being presented to Jesus without spot or wrinkle or any such blemish, but holy and blameless (**5:27**).

In Christian circles the worth of a person is determined not by their background (all just sinners saved by grace) but by where we are going. We are going to Zion. We're going to be like the Lord Jesus Christ in every way. Knowing this gives Christians confidence. It gives us the assurance that we really are God's children and that His hand is on us, leading us to a *certain* and *blessed* destiny. Our hope is not in uncertain things but is grounded on

what God has already done for us in the work of Christ. That's why the Bible speaks of a living hope (1 Ptr 1:3), a blessed hope (Titus 2:13), and a hope that is sure (Heb 6:11).

All this is well and good and very encouraging for the outlook of our future but what application does this wonderful knowledge have for us today? This aspect of the sure hope that results from our sure calling in Christ should be a dynamic force in our everyday lives, encouraging us to be pure (1 Jn 2:28-3:3), obedient (Heb 13:17) and faithful (Luke 12:42-48). The fact that we will one day see Jesus and be like Jesus should motivate us to live like Jesus today. What we will have to show before our great King on the last day will be infinitely more important to us at that time than anything; no, everything we will leave behind here on this earth.

My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.

2) Paul then prays for them to grasp what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; or, more literally, the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in His holy people. Paul continues his theme of glory here. He has already told us in v14 that God will redeem all those who make up His inheritance at the end of all things. Believers are God's inheritance; we are those whom the Father has given to the Son, His gift to the Messiah. This whole idea would be incredible were it not for the fact that God sees us in Christ. God's evaluation of His people is established, is grounded in His evaluation of Jesus Christ.

Why does this seem so incredible to us? Well, we should all be intimately familiar with our own spiritual poverty. We know who we were before Christ and even now, we struggle to live out the reality of our faith, of our calling. How can God look upon our constant failure as His people and still consider us as His inheritance? God can and does just that because He doesn't deal with us on the basis of our past or even our present; He graciously only deals with us on the basis of our future. Remember what God said to a cowardly Gideon – The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor (Judges 6:12). Jesus said to Andrew's brother, You are Simon...you will be called Cephas [a Stone] (Jn 1:42). Gideon did become a mighty man of valor and Simon did become Peter, a rock.

God can make riches out of poor men and women because He invests so much in them. He has invested the riches of His love and mercy, the riches of His wisdom, of His suffering and of His glory and grace. All these things and many more blessings accrue to a rich inheritance in the saints.

We need to know who we really are, as God sees us. Paul wants us to appreciate the value that God places on us, not because we are inherently worthy but solely because we have been identified with Jesus Christ. We have been chosen in Christ; His righteousness has been accounted to us; our destiny is to be joint heirs with Him in glory. If we maintain this picture before our spiritual eyes of who we are – nothing less than God's inheritance – we will be concerned to live in line with this unimaginably high calling.

Clearly, this doesn't mean that we should focus on ourselves, strutting around and patting ourselves on the back for being part of God's inheritance! We had nothing to do with it. No, Paul wants us to grasp the riches of the glory of God's inheritance – the great privileges that belong to God's inheritance simply because we are God's inheritance! Can there be any higher or greater incentive to live in the light of the glory of God and of heaven? In light of the grace and glory that will be lavished on us, for no other reason than that God has made us His inheritance in Christ, our lives ought to bring praise to God. This is why Paul wants us to grasp just who we are in Christ.

3) Paul prays for them to know the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe. Within the context of our passage today, the Christian is living somewhere between the call of God, which is in the past, and the riches of our inheritance, which (in their fullness) are still in the future. We live in the here and now, and the question for the present is how we are to live as God's children. How can we live as citizens of heaven in a world whose citizens do not acknowledge God's sovereignty? Paul's answer is to know God's power by experience. This is so important to him that he picks up on this idea and completes the chapter with it (19-21). We don't have the time today to do these verses justice so we will save them for next time. It will be enough to dig into this prayer in v19.

Paul speaks of an exceedingly great power. Now, just what this power does,

as it operates within the believer's life won't be fully explained until Paul's next prayer in ch3. What we can see in this prayer is that Paul can't be satisfied with a brand of Christianity that is orthodox in its belief but dead in its practice; one that is rich in the doctrine of justification but powerless when it comes to transforming people's lives. I recently read a quote from A.W. Tozer that bemoaned the fact that the church was raising up a generation of people that believed they could follow Jesus without forsaking the world. If he was heartsick over that in his life time (died in '63), he must be rolling over in his grave today (figure of speech). We currently have that misconception appearing in churches by the buckets-full.

Paul refuses to accept that concept. A faith that can't change you can't save you either. Paul has very specific ideas about what that power can accomplish in the believer's life and we will see that in ch3. But, whatever they might be, since it is God's power that Paul sees working in the believer's life, he knows he must pray for it and he knows that he must pray that the believers will know it – that they will experience it in their own Christian walk.

That's really the important idea here; this knowledge is to be experiential knowledge, just as in Paul's opening petition the knowledge of God is to be experiential. Paul was not going to be any more satisfied with an intellectual knowledge of God's power on the part of the Ephesians than he was going to be satisfied with a mere intellectual knowledge of God. It is important to know both these things intellectually; of course, that's the starting point. But, it must go beyond this; Paul wanted them to know God by experiencing not just His presence in their lives but His power as well, the very power of Christ's resurrection.

Sadly, many Christians do not know this power by experience; they only know it from a distance as they see God working wonders in other believer's lives. But God wants this resurrection power to be real in the lives of all His people. Charles Spurgeon said, "The very same power which raised Christ is waiting to raise the drunkard from his drunkenness, to raise the thief from his dishonesty, to raise the Pharisee from his self-righteousness, to raise the Sadducee from his unbelief." It is also true that this same power is waiting to raise the weak Christian to a position of spiritual strength, to raise the carnal Christian to a position of personal holiness, to raise a immature Christian to a position of continually increasing maturity. It is God' power that

work in us to bring us from glory to glory.

How are we to experience that power? If we're to live in the power of Christ's resurrection, we must come to know God. That's what Paul prays for first. And, if we're to know God properly - correctly, we must spend time with Him in His Word in Bible study, prayer, and meditation. You can never hope to get to know a person without spending time with them. No more can you get to know God without spending time with Him.

You might say that these things are not easy to do in a life that is filled with busyness and unending responsibilities and I would agree with you wholeheartedly. In fact, in my own personal life, I find that these are among the most difficult things I have to do. But, they are necessary and necessary things are rarely fun, exciting or easy. If we desire to know God; if we desire to know what God has and is and will accomplish in our lives then we must deliberately open His Word, consistently spend time in it and faithfully to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus Christ to our souls and open the Word of God to our hearts.

That's the real secret to knowing God better. It's not intelligence, outstanding instruction, or academic degrees. It's time spent with God. It's to people who sit at Jesus' feet that God opens His heart and reveals His character. If this is what you want, if this is your desire – then you must faithfully to ask for it and then be faithful to pursue it in practice. 😊