

---

## Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)*

### **The Knowledge of the Holy**

***Ephesians 1:15-23***

***15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.***

What I am about to say to you, you have heard before. I have often quoted a statement made by A.W. Tozer that is worth hearing again and again. In his book, "The Knowledge of the Holy" (which each of you would do well to read), Tozer wrote: "*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*" In our text this morning we find Paul interested in the very heart and lives of his readers. There is something Paul desires for them; something he clearly tells them is worth his own time and most especially his own prayer time. And just what is it that Paul tells these believers he prays for on their account? He prays that they might have a thorough, intimate, and experiential knowledge of God.

Now, please bear with me as I desire to lay a framework for us concerning what Paul refers to in verse 17 as "***the knowledge of Him***" – that is the understanding; the highest contemplation and comprehension; the "*epiginosko*" – "*epi*" – upon; and "*ginosko*" – knowledge - the knowledge upon knowledge of God. Such a knowledge of God was referred to by Charles Spurgeon as "*the highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God...*" For Spurgeon, the knowledge of God is the believer's understanding of "*the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls Father.*"

The subject of the knowledge of God, that which we find Paul praying for on behalf of the Ephesian believers is further described by Spurgeon as "*a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity.*" "Other subjects," Spurgeon goes on to say, "*we can compass and grapple with; in them we fell a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, 'Behold, I am wise.'* But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild donkey's colt; and with solemn exclamation, 'I am but of yesterday, and know nothing.' No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God..."

And while it is true that as we gaze upon the immensity that is the knowledge of God and realize just how small we are; there is also another side; another reason for our taking the time to consider the subject of Paul's first prayer for the Ephesians; for note only does a true knowledge of God humble the mind; but it also expands it. It causes us to thinking greater and grander thoughts that we would ever be able to imagine otherwise. It has been rightly said, "*He who often*

---

## Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)*

*thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe.”* And the greatest contemplation of the knowledge of God is the science of Christ, the constant consideration of what God the Father, through the person and work of God the Son on the cross; through the power and ministry of God the Holy Spirit has accomplished on behalf of those who believe.

As we have already considered great doctrinal truths concerning the work of God in our salvation from verses 4-14; the teachings of divine election; predestination; adoption, redemption, grace, forgiveness of sin, of the divine economy, illumination; inheritance, sealing and guarantee; Paul now presents us with yet another great doctrine, that of divine knowledge – Paul prays for believers to be given an even greater knowledge of God.

Now, let me address a temptation that faces us this morning. That temptation is to consider the subject of this text; the knowledge of God for which Paul prays, as simply more “theology” – another “doctrine” – just some more facts about God. Such knowledge about God may “seem” impractical and irrelevant for daily living. Let me present you with a scenario. Let us suppose we ask the Panjwanis, our missionaries to India, to bring with them a villager from the remote location from which they minister, way up in the Northeast part of India; a place greatly removed from the modern conveniences, technologies and busyness of our culture. Let us say that we bring such a person to New York City and drop him off at Times Square and leave him. What would happen? It would be a cruel thing to ask him to try and function in such a scene, not knowing anything of his surroundings, not knowing anything of our language, not knowing anything of our culture and practices. Beloved, to live in this world, without truly knowing God, the God who made it all and who runs it all, is a painful, disappointing, maddening exercise in futility. If we disregard the study of the knowledge of God, we are sentencing ourselves to a life through which we stumble and blunder our way through without a sense of direction. Such a life is a waste and in the process a person loses his or her soul.

We need the knowledge of God. We need not simply know about God; we must know God. I know that most of you in here have a testimony of your coming to faith by which you say that you have come to know God; but does it ever occur to you to say, without hesitation, and with reference to certain events in your life that you have known God. Do you see the difference between saying, “I know God.” – that is you have some facts about His person and works versus saying, “I have known God.” – that is I have experience with God; I have walked with Him and here are the ways I have experienced Him.” This is the kind of knowledge that Paul prays for believers; that they will have known God intimately; experientially. With all the doctrine we have considered in verses 4-14, now comes the very practical prayer that such knowledge will be more than mere education in facts, but rather one's experience in the flesh.

If our concern in coming to church is simply to gain theological knowledge as an end unto itself; if our own Bible studies are motivated by nothing more than a desire to know all the right answers to the questions, then we are a path to what one theologian described as the “*state of self-satisfied self-deception.*” Here we find Paul praying that the hearts of believers would be guarded against such a thing and rather motivated to know doctrine; to know about God so as to enjoy Him. You see, our knowledge of God is simply a means to an end; and that end is to understand God's truth in such a way as to respond to it and to conform his life to it. Our great concern in learning and understanding the knowledge of God is that by it we might worship and serve God all the more; all the better!

# Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)*

This then is the heart, the purpose of Paul's prayer. And with this introduction, I would have you look with me at verses 15-17. Here we find Paul introducing the subject of the knowledge of God. This will preoccupy us for a couple of messages as it that for which Paul most earnestly prays for believers. Let us consider three things about the subject of the knowledge of the Holy; first, who needs the knowledge of the Holy (15); second, how important is the knowledge of the Holy (16); and third, how do we obtain this knowledge of the Holy (17)

## **I. Who Needs the Knowledge of the Holy (15-16)**

*15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;*

As Paul begins to describe his prayer here, it is clear that the things for which he prays are not for everyone. When we read, "For this reason" we are being pointed back to the truth that "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" belongs to those who are marked by the works of God that we have seen in verses 4-14. Again, it cannot be stressed enough that if Ephesians 1:3-14 are about anything, they are about the incredible work of the Triune God in doing everything necessary to bring us to salvation in Christ; the work of the Father in verses 4-6; the work of the Son in verses 7-12; and the work of the Holy Spirit in verses 13-14.

The point is this, if we are saved, it is only because we have believed on Jesus Christ. However, equally clear is that verses 3-14 inform us that if we have truly believed, it is only because God the Father first chose us for salvation, because God the Son first provided the redemption for us through His own blood; and then, having believed, the Holy Spirit sealing us in Christ forever. As Paul begins his prayer that these believers would "know" something, what he points out that such things are to be known by those who have been specially predestined in eternity past, redeemed in time, and sealed for all eternity by the triune Godhead. The additional things that Paul desires for believers to know are simply a consequence of their having been so wonderfully saved by God's grace.

The danger with looking at all these great doctrines of how God alone has saved us may cause us to think that we are "only" to be passive recipients of God's grace. To be sure, those who are dead in their trespasses and sin (as described in Ephesians 2:1) are, according to Ephesians 2:5, "made alive". Those who are dead are passive, they can do nothing. But, if they are made alive, then they can and must do something. Paul reveals this action of those who are blessed by God with salvation. They are those who demonstrate the reality of God's salvific call in their lives by consciously, willingly and purposely believing and trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ as being done on their behalf. Paul says, "having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus..." Here Paul speaks of those whom the Triune God had, in eternity, secured for salvation. These are those who will, in time, hear the gospel message of the cross of Jesus Christ and believe on Him alone for that salvation.

Let me put this very clearly. Those who are predestinated for salvation by God alone in eternity past are those who will also exercise faith in Jesus as at a point in time. And how will this faith reveal itself? In part, such a faith is known by those who live lives of genuine love toward all those who likewise believe on Jesus. Two things Paul says he has heard; of their faith in the Lord Jesus, and of their *love for all the saints*. Those who need to "know" God are those who have a sense of communion with the Father through Christ, AND a sense of communion, something in

---

# Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)*

common with; fellowship with all others whom Christ has saved. And now let me tell you something provocative...even this faith in Christ and this love for the saints is not “our work” in that it originated in us. Notice that Paul here is giving thanks to God for the faith and love of these Ephesians believers. What purpose would Paul have for thanking God for this faith and love unless these qualities also came from God alone? You see, if people are able to believe on Jesus of their own free will, apart from God's sovereign grace, as so many assume is so, then the praise for such qualities ought not be given to God because He didn't have anything to do with them. In the days of the Reformation in the 1600s, John Calvin took issue with the Catholic Church which taught that God must help us by His grace in part, “but, for all that, they will still have man exalted and to attain to faith by his own doings.” Calvin called this a devilish opinion and showed how it robbed God of the glory that He alone deserves in our salvation.

So then, if faith and love come from God, we, like Paul, ought to thank Him in our prayers for these things. We can commend and encourage those who are walking in faith and love, but we must be careful and direct all the praise and glory to God alone. We need to remember that if we are left to ourselves – LISTEN - we are never be inclined to faith in Jesus or to love toward the saints. Since “all” spiritual blessings are from God, we must continually pray with gratitude for all of the saints when we see them walking with God.

Now, all of this is to say that the spiritual blessings that believers are to “know” are not for everyone to know. They are only truly “known” by a very particular group; to those who are the chosen for salvation; the redeemed in Christ; the sealed by the Holy Spirit. Such people demonstrate they are chosen by God by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and demonstrate that faith in Jesus by a love, an affection; a willingness to engage in the lives of the saints. Let me ask you, are these things true of you? Do you know that the truths of verses 3-14 are true of you? If so, do you demonstrate that by your love for other believers. Do other believers know of your love for them? If so, then these spiritual blessings are for you to know. The things Paul prays for are for who “know” they are in Christ. This brings us to our second point as seen in verse 16...

## **II. How Important is the Knowledge of the Holy (16)**

*...do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;*

There is something else we need to notice from verse 16 and it is how Paul stresses the importance of all he has written and is about to reveal when he wrote that he does *not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers...*

Paul was known for a lot of things; being a great Pharisee; being a persecutor of the Church; of having come to faith in Christ in a most dramatic of ways; of being a great teacher, preacher and missionary. Added to this list is that Paul was known as a great prayer-warrior for the believers under his care. You cannot read his letters to the churches without frequent references to his prayers for those to whom he writes. So then, as Paul heard about the Ephesian believers' faith in Christ and of their love for all the saints – all this moved him to pray earnestly for them. Paul was compelled to thank God for them; but even more than that, it moved Paul to pray that they would know the things that they needed to know; things we will be looking at later in the text.

And lest you think this was just for show, just a fluke and random, “I'll be praying for you” kind of sentiment, let me point out that this would not be the only time that Paul would pray that these believers would “know” the truths concerning the spiritual blessings that were theirs in

---

# Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)*

Christ. Look with me in chapter 3, beginning in verse 14. Here Paul begins with the same opening as in our current text saying:

*14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*

A characteristic of Paul is that he often would pray for his believing friends, that they would continue on in their faith and know by experience the reality of spiritual truths. Paul desires for believers to know deeply, to know intimately and to know fully the things that he was writing about. And so he prayed that they would. How important is it to have a knowledge of who the Holy is and what He has done. Paul prays for it continually and repeatedly. He says that he does not “cease” thanking God for the blessings God has brought in their lives and that prays that they will “know” more! Do you pray for others in the body like this? Continually, constantly making mention of fellow believers in your prayers? Paul knew something we might easily forget – it is absolutely imperative and necessary that believers “know” the spiritual blessings that belong to them. Why; why must we “know” in doctrinal truth and experience such blessings? Because, unless you know them, you cannot live according to them.

And while we are on this “God-thing” – noting all the things that God has done for our salvation; let me remind you that even the knowledge of such things cannot be known unless God graciously enabled us to do so. Not only is salvation found in Christ alone; but knowledge of salvation is found in Christ alone. You cannot be saved apart from God and you cannot know you are saved apart from God. And so Paul prays that God would grant such knowledge to them. This brings us to our final point...

### **III. How Do We Obtain the Knowledge of the Holy (17)**

*...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.*

After informing these believers that He is praying for them, Paul tells them specifically of what he is praying, *...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.*

Notice that He speaks of God as “*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” This is purposeful as Paul is identifying God for us as the God who planned our redemption through Jesus; as the God who brought it about, from eternal predestination to adoption; and the God who will see it through to our glorification in and with Christ. Notice how verses 3 and 17 are similar, sandwiching all that has been said as being the work of “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

In the first part of verse 17, Paul does not use the term “Father” in the phrase, saving that for the second phrase of the verse, calling Him “*the Father of glory.*” If there is anything we are to “know” with certainty it is that our salvation is glorious – it points to the weightiness and wonder of

---

## Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)*

the work of God to save us. Beloved, do not let this fact escape your notice, that three times already Paul has identified for believers that what God has done in bringing about our salvation was His own glory. Please note these with me; in verse 6 we read, *"to the praise of the glory of His grace"*; in verse 12 we read again that, *"we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory..."*; and yet again in verse 14 – see it with me, *"to the praise of His glory."*

This is our God, *"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ"* – who has proven to also be *"the Father of glory"* with regard to our salvation and because He brings us into His full glory in Jesus His Son. But let us again not miss the point of Paul's prayer. Here we are reminded that it is only by the grace – the unmerited favor of our glorious Heavenly Father that any one of us could come to truly "know" the richness and fullness of our spiritual blessings in Christ. This is why Paul thus prays that this "God of our Lord Jesus Christ" this "Father of glory" would give to us two things; first, *"a spirit"* (that is, an inner disposition and willingness); and second, that this "spirit" would be characterized by *"wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him."*

What are wisdom and revelation? Wisdom is the ability to apply the truth of God to our lives. Wisdom is not simply knowing about something; it is knowing by experience. Someone can know about baseball by reading a book without ever knowing the experience of actually playing the game; of throwing the ball; of swinging a bat for a hit; of catching the ball in a glove. This is wisdom, the knowledge of something actually experienced. Revelation, on the other hand, is an act of God by which He grants and imparts the truths He wants us to know and live by. You cannot live out the wisdom of God without first having the revelation of God. And we must not get tired of hearing this – the spiritual blessings of wisdom and revelation by which we might truly know God, all of these must be given to us by God. No one will stumble upon the great spiritual blessings of Christ. They are not the result of academic research or philosophic inquiry. Everything in Ephesians 1 are things we would never come up with on our own – we could not conceive of such things on our own. Paul's pray is that these things would be given to those for whom he prays. Beloved, we would never know the spiritual blessings God unless He first graciously granted us such information. Paul, quoting from the prophet Isaiah, reminds us of this very fact, that we would not know any of this unless God revealed it to us, in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 where we read,

*9 but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.*

But not only did God have to reveal it to us, before we could even know such truths He had to first change us and make it possible for us to receive the such truths. Jumping ahead for just a moment, notice in verse 18 that Paul prays for all of this to happen. His prayer, *"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened..."*

Beloved, if it were not for God's grace, we could not know the truths of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. Paul would actually take the time to describe what our condition is apart from the grace of God in 4:18. Notice what he says of the persons who are outside of God's grace, *"being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart..."* As God grants us a spirit of

---

## Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

*To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)*

wisdom and revelation we can, want to and do respond by placing our faith in the person and work of Jesus. It is God who graciously opens the eyes of our hearts so that we can know the things He wants us to know. Do you know such things?

Are you among those to whom Paul is writing these things; the chosen, the redeemed, the sealed? You say, "Pastor, how can I know if I am among these who are spiritually blessed?" I say to you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved! Call upon the name of the Lord and you will be saved!" And, if you are among the saved, then what does God want you to know? I submit myself to the words of the Lord given through the prophet Jeremiah who said,

*23 Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord.*

Let us not boast in what we "know" apart from the Lord; and let us not ever take solace to boast of our ignorance – both extremes betray the position and condition of the child of God. Let us be careful that not one of us is found or content with such extremes. Rather, let us pray ***that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to [us] a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.***

### Questions:

1. Someone says, "Knowing God sounds like a difficult process. Why can't it be easier?" Your response?
2. How can a Christian who is prone to grumbling develop a thankful heart in all things?
3. How can we develop and maintain a passion to know God?
4. Can we know God rightly apart from understanding sound doctrine? Can we know doctrine without knowing God? If so, what's the difference?

*Soli Deo Gloria*

---

**Copyright © 2015 Edward K. Godfrey.** *This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, 1001 W. Walnut Suite 5a, Rogers, AR 72756.*