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## 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.*

When we speak about the knowledge of the Holy, what might first come to our minds, and rightly so, is that which we know to be true about God. The knowledge of the Holy includes considering the attributes of God; those characteristics that set God apart as God. So then, whether we speak of the attributes of omniscience or omnipotence; God's all-knowing; all-powerfulness as that which is unique to Him – or we talk about the attributes of God's holiness and love; those things which God has in perfect measure, but we humans can share in; all of this forms a body of information; facts and experiences by which we know God to be God. This is the knowledge of the Holy.

But there is more. For when we say the knowledge of the Holy, we may well be speaking of those things that God would have us know. The knowledge of the Holy is not simply us looking up at God and beholding certain truths about Him. It is also looking to His Word to consider what it is He has told us about ourselves; about our needs; and, perhaps most significantly, about what He had done for us in Christ.

Last week we began this text of Ephesians 1:15-23 noting that Paul was intent on the Ephesians believers having an increasing understanding or knowledge of God. Paul, in verse 17, specifically prays that God would do something necessary for them; that is to give them both wisdom – the ability to apply the truths of God, along with revelation – the receiving and understanding of the body of truth. Ephesians 1 has been an intense revelation of major bible truths. This is why I believe Paul first prays for wisdom in verse 17. Many of us would agree that the application of the truths of election, predestination, redemption, the forgiveness of sins, of sealing by the Holy Spirit seems like a formidable task. Those are deep truths. And so, there is a danger for us to see the knowledge of doctrine as the goal or the end of our pursuit of God. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our great pursuit is to rightly experience and serve God. The doctrines inform us and drive us; but knowledge in the head does not make a person wise in life. It is not the hearers of the word who are blessed but the effectual doers of the word. Not those who simply sit and learn, but who apply and go. The question that the believer must ask and answer anytime he or she is presented with the truth of God is this, "How am I to apply this to my life? How am I to live out this truth to the glory of God?" What God wants you to know are those things that enable you to live life to its fullest extent according to the "word" or revealed knowledge of God. And so, Paul prays, note again in verses 18-19, **...that the eyes of your heart**

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***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.***

Notice that there are three things that Paul identifies as God wanting us to “know” in these verses; the hope of His calling; the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; and the surpassing greatness of His power. That serves as a nice and neat three point outline for us; but we need to begin with this phrase, “*that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...*” In other words, before we can even know what God would have us to know; God must first do something for us. Does this sound familiar? Everything in Ephesians 1 is about what God has done for us - not about what man does or even what man can do; but rather what God has done! Paul prays that God would continue to do for believers what is necessary for them to know God; the wonder of salvation in Christ; and excitement of living by the power of the Spirit of God.

So then, let us break these verses down into two simply points. First, what God must do; and second, what believers are to “know”.

### **I. What God must do!**

Paul's prayer is pretty straight-forward. He prays, *...that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...* This more literally reads “*that the eyes of your heart having been enlightened.*” It puts the idea of this eye opening event as having already happened rather than simply in the present. And this as Paul's design as the verb here is in the perfect tense, which speaks of something that has happened in the past, the results of which continue on indefinitely into the present and future. So, the eyes of a believer's heart are enlightened at salvation and continue to be enlightened by God <sup>[compare idea to Ephesians 2:8 if possible]</sup>. Paul had already spoken of the believer's enlightenment back in verse 17 when he prayed, that God would give us “*a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.*” To know these spiritual truths, God must open, enlighten, and bring the light of truth for our eyes to behold and our minds to understand.

The opposite of enlightenment is willful ignorance. This is exactly how Paul describes unbelievers. Turn over to Ephesians 4:18 where we see this opposite idea to being enlightened by God. This is the condition of every person before coming to Christ, having had their eyes opened to the truth. We read, “*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...*” Remember this – sin always blinds the heart and mind of unbelievers and renders them incapable of understanding the truth of the gospel, unless God opens their blind eyes. This is what Paul told the Corinthian believers in 2 Corinthians 4:4, 6, “*4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God...6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*”

Coming back to our text the, we see Paul clearly writing to believers; to the “*saints*” and to “*us who believe.*” And while it is true that God has opened our eyes, allowing us to see and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, Paul's prayer informs us that we must continue to ask Him to enlighten, to open, to bring understanding to the eyes of our hearts so that we will come to appreciate the deeps truths of God and live by them. This is what God must do for the believer.

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Now, let me address this phrase, “*the eyes of your heart*” as that is a rather interesting word picture, is it not? What do you envision? Yes, some heart with eyes on it. But we need to remember that when used in a context like this, Paul is not speaking about that beating organ that is pushing blood through your body. Rather, the word “heart” in this context speaks of the whole of a person; all that makes up a person internally and includes not just the emotion; but also the intellect and the will. In other words, God desires you to know His truths intellectually, but also with passion resulting in the changing of your behavior (your will). It is not enough to know the Greek words, the perfect verbs and their meanings if none of this thrills your hearts. The knowledge that Paul is praying for is that which is known intellectually – you have a grasp of the truth; it is known emotionally, thrilling your soul; and it is known volitionally – that is as an act of the will that causes you to align your life in ever greater submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Now, let me make a quick application for you. Believers are in constant need of the Holy Spirit to enlighten the eyes of their hearts to the great truths of the Bible. Many of you know of what I speak when I say that there are Christians who have a “stick your head in the sand” attitude when it comes to dealing with the difficult doctrines of the Bible. They say, “Who cares about theology, all I want to do is love Jesus.” There is an attitude among some who would say that studying theology is spiritually dangerous – an anti-intellectual bred of people. Beloved, to not study the theology of the Bible is to be intellectually lazy and it almost inevitably leads to great spiritual danger! If Paul thought it necessary to teach simple believers, many who were slaves, and many who were limited in their education the great doctrines of God as found in letters like that to the Romans and to the Ephesians, then why would we desire anything less?

Yes, there is the potential danger of spiritual pride the can flood in when a person thinks he knows more than others. There is a real danger of stopping short at knowing doctrine, rather than working hard to see the doctrines bring us to a greater personal knowledge of the God. But the converse is just as dangerous; to remain willfully ignorant of the truth means to not ultimately live by the truth. How long have you been a believer? Are there believers younger than you in the Lord who are applying themselves in such a way that they have surpassed you in both factual and practical knowledge of God? Have you stopped growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ? May it never be! May our prayer always be, “Lord, open the eyes of my heart so that I might know You, love You, and obey You better! This is what God must do for us – this is for what we must pray.

### **II. What believers are to “know”!**

With all this under our belt, let us turn our attention for a moment at the specifics of Paul's prayer answering the question, “What is it that Paul prays for these believers to know? What is on the heart of the great apostle and that which he beseeches God on their behalf?” And perhaps, more to the point, what is it that God wants believers to know; for while this is Paul praying, he is praying by inspiration, under the influence of the Holy Spirit. So what we see here is not simply the heart of Paul, but the very heart of God!

What we find are three things believers are to know and stated most concisely they are the believers hope; the believer's riches; and the believer's power found in God, through Jesus Christ.

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## A. The Believers' Prospect

*....so that you will know what is the hope of His calling*

The first item of prayer is that believers would “know” something. Now the word “know” in verse 18 is not the more familiar “*ginosko*” – to know by experience or to know firsthand; but rather is the verb “*eido*” – which speaks of knowing something the certainty – to know how something is going to work and that it will work. Have you ever tried to fix something and said, “I hope this works?” being uncertain if it would? The idea here is of knowing how something works so well that instead of saying, “I hope this will work” you say, “This will work, this will do the trick!” We are to know that the hope of God that has called us will accomplish its work. But then we must ask, “what is “hope”?” The word “hope” literally means “*to anticipate with pleasure.*” It speaks of a person’s prospect or future. Now, does this mean that “hope” is simply a subjective emotion or does it refer to the objective content of our promised blessings in Christ? You know me, I will take both ideas, believing it is impossible to separate the two. For when God enlightens the eyes of our hearts, He give us the ability to know objectively all that God has promised to give us in Christ – that is our hope; but such a hope also fills us with a subjective joy and thrill in our hearts.

But primarily I would have you consider “the hope of His calling” as a reminder of the believer’s future; a future that is good and secure! In context then, this hope is not for everyone. An unbeliever cannot have or even comprehend such a hope. The Scriptures, in fact Paul himself, informs us of this truth. Look over at Ephesians 2:12. Here we see how the Bible describes those who are apart from Christ, “*...remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*” Unbelievers have “no hope” but this is not to be the case for the believers and so Paul prays, “*that you may know the hope of His calling...*”

Our hope – our certainty is our inheritance. Believers are to know that they are destined to receive the most glorious and richest eternal inheritance because of their relationship to Jesus. The familiar words of the apostle Peter remind us of this. In 1 Peter 1:3, what do we read, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...*” And what is the content of this hope secured for us by Jesus rising from the dead? We read in verses 4-5 that it is, “*to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*” Beloved, there is no one and nothing that can seize this inheritance from us. To be sure, we may not see it fully with our eyes now and touch it with our hands, but we are to know that it is our possession right now. Where is it? It is being kept safe for us in heaven. It does not matter what may happen to us here and now...our hope is secure.

Our hope, our certainty is a promise. Part of this “hope” is a reminder that we are also destined and promised a most glorious eternal home with Christ. Jesus spoke of this “hope” in John 14:2-3 when He said, *2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.* Here is our hope – it is Jesus intent, plan, purpose and within His power to have us live with Him “forever”! And it will come to

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pass, because Jesus Himself promised to come and get us and take us to a most glorious place that He has been preparing for us. This is part of *"the hope of His calling..."*

Our hope, our certainty is a condition. Beloved, we are going to be glorified together with Christ. To be "glorified" is to be conform to the image of God's own Son, Jesus Christ. Have you ever wondered what God is doing in your life? Why is allows or brings certain things into your life? Everything is used to conform us in attitude and in being to Christ. God is currently doing this in us even now and Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 4:13. Look there with me, *"until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."* Now, one day, this process of glorification, of being made like Christ in attitude and being will be full and complete; so while we are "glorified" even now being in the process; one day it will be full. We see this truth conveyed in 1 John 3:2, *"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."* This is what we are to know with certainty, our inheritance, our promise and our condition! Do you know this? Do you really know this? If you do, then it will affect your outlook on life, your attitude toward others? Do you know this? But there is more!

### **B. The Believers' Position**

Not only are believers to know hope, but they are to also know *what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...* This speaks of the believer's position before God. We can often shy away from making the following kind of statement because it is often overstated by many in the church today and yet, when put into proper context, it is true; believers need to know that they are highly valued by God. Again, we are to know with certainty, *what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...* We are loved and valued by God! We just considered the truth that God wants us to know we have an inheritance awaiting us from Him. But here we see that God wants us to know that He has an inheritance in us! We spoke of this back in verse 11, noting that the verse literally reads that we "were made an inheritance" We are God's precious inheritance, His portion; we are valuable to Him! Now this value and worth is not because of what we were; for we were sinners. And this worth is not because of what we have or can do; for apart from Christ we can do nothing. Our worth and value, the reason why God so loves us is because of Christ in us. We need to remember that Jesus went to the cross, He went with the purpose in mind of redeeming us out of our sins in order that He might bring us into a right relationship with Himself forever. He did it for us so that He might receive us! God desires fellowship with us and His saints, His redeemed ones, are a source of great joy to Him because He has placed His love on us forever! Paul will expand this idea over in Ephesians 5:25-27 where he describes Christ's love for the church as an example of how a husband is to love his beloved bride. We read, *25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...* Why did Christ do this? We read, *26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.* We are made holy, blameless and valuable to God by the sacrifice and work of Christ.

Before Paul prayed this prayer for the Ephesian believers, consider the prayer of our Lord Jesus as found in John 17:22-24 where we see an affirmation that we are loved by God even as

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God loves His Son, Jesus Christ, *22 The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*

We are to know with certainty that we are God's highly prized inheritance. God the Father looks upon us as a great gift to His own Son. Our Lord Jesus loves and provides for us with greater intensity than a groom longs for his own bride. We must never forget how precious we are to Christ for this truth alone would cause us to be careful how we think of ourselves and other believers! Paul prays that our eyes would be opened to understand this - to know *"what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints..."*

### **C. The Believers' Provision**

So then, we are to know of hope, of riches, and finally, we are to know... *what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.* This speaks to us of the believer's provision. We are to know with certainty that God has given us something that enables us to meet every challenge and trial of life. Everyone needs the power and resources needful in order to deal with the troubles and situations that come their way. To this end, God would have us know not simply of the power to live for Him but of *"the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe..."*

As a pastor I have found myself at times counseling people who are struggling with making significant life changes. There is some addictive behavior they need to break free from; some sin that needs to be truly repented of; some habit that needs to cease in order to take up some more positive activity. And one of the things I hear people say both inside and outside of the counseling office is this, "But I just can't seem to do it! I can't give it up!" Or, "As hard as I try, I keep finding myself succumbing to the temptation! Pastor, I can't do it!" There is a sense in which such a person is right in saying, "I can't do it!" People often come to realizing that trying to live for Christ in their own abilities is an exercise in utter futility. But according to the Bible, there is nothing, not one thing that God calls us to do that He cannot enable us to do, if we are in Christ. There is nothing impossible for the person who is in Christ!

Now, we will often not feel this way about ourselves; but what is true about a believer is not found in the way he or she may feel at any moment, but rather is found in what God has said about the believer in His Word, right!? And what does God say? He says that those who believe have the surpassing greatness of the power of God at work in them so that they can do anything God calls them to do. Does God call you to cease from some sin? Yes and Paul prays that believers would know the power of God within them to cease! It is Paul who said in Philippians 4:13, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Beloved, we are to know that what was true for Paul is true for us. Look at Ephesians 2:20 where Paul expounds on provision of the surpassing greatness of His power at work in us. We read, p(Phil. 4:13). In Ephesians 3:20, he says, *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us...* Beloved, there is nothing that God will ever call us to do; to be a witness for Christ, a godly husband or wife; a joyful person in the Lord; a sin-denying saint, that He does not also supply all the power needed in Christ to accomplish it!

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Of the three things Paul prays for here, he uses the most descriptions of the power of God. Let's take in a bit more of the context reading verses 19 and 20, *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...* What kind of power is at work in us? Think of this; the very same power that God the Father worked in Christ Himself and raised Him from the dead. We will consider this more next week; but let us take in the rest of this prayer of Paul. What does he want believers to know? *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 ought to grab our attention and overwhelm us is that this is said to be the same power that is at work in you and me! Do you have troubles and difficulties of life pressing in on you? Do such trials seem greater than you can handle in and of yourself? Let me ask you something; are any of the difficulties you have faced or are facing a greater trial than bearing the sins of the world by dying on a cross? And here we are told that God's power was more than sufficient to raise Jesus from the dead and to seat Him in great glory at His own right hand. Beloved, this is the power you and I are to know with certainty and to live by. This is the power of God at work in us. We are reminded that there is no problem we will ever encounter that God's power is no sufficient to enable us to bring Him glory through it all! This is what we are to know!

Beloved, in Christ we have a prospect of hope, a position of value, a provision of power. This is what Paul prays for these believers. This is Paul's heart for he not only desires this for believers to know in general, but in 2 Timothy we see him desiring this for an individual, for Timothy when he wrote, *For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline...* Did you see that, of "power" – *the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe*; of "love" His valuing us as – *the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints*; and of "discipline" – living confidently in the prospect of our promised future, *the hope of His calling...*

Let me close by asking you something I would like you to consider carefully and answer to yourself honestly. Do you believe these things? Do you truly "know" with certainty and by experience these things? I would remind you that there is a difference between a professing Christian who lives a victorious life in and for Christ and one who continually flails and flounders about in the same old sin struggles and failures over and over again. The victorious Christian is the one who knows the promises of this prayer of Paul. He is the one who "gets it." He is the one who, seeks to live by the grace and power of God and to know what the spiritual blessings are that God has given to all His saints. He is the one who believes such things are true as facts and must become increasing true of himself and so strives to faithfully live accordingly. Will you be one such victorious Christian? Will you be one who "gets it" and lives accordingly? Later in this letter Paul prays for these believers again saying, *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called...(Ephesians 4:1).* You have been called to hope; to be valued and loved of the Lord; and to live according to His power. May we strive to live accordingly to the glory of God!

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## Questions:

1. Why is it important to know "what is the hope of His calling"? What are the practical applications of this truth?
2. Why is it important to know "what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"? How does this apply?
3. Why is it important to know "what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe"? How does this apply?
4. If God's power toward us is so great, why do so many Christians fall into serious sin?

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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