Prayer for Knowledge of Christ

Let us turn to our Bibles, to Ephesians 1, Ephesians 1, verses 15 to 23. Ephesians 1, 15 to 23. Let us listen attentively to the word of God.

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of his glory and his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities in power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. And he put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all and all. Let us pray.

In this prayer of the Apostle Paul, God, may we see the zeal and his love for the saints at the churches of Ephesus, that we would see that as an example for ourselves to pray for one another, to pray for the churches as well, as we are able and have the knowledge therein. But also, God, the content of his prayer, that we would grow in the knowledge of the spirit of wisdom and understanding, that we would therefore know the great glory of salvation we have through Christ Jesus, and especially of his power, his almighty working power toward us who believe. In the name of the Lord we pray, amen.

As much as the Apostle Paul, of course, was a brilliant and godly man, a leader among leaders, he was still a man of the people, caring and praying for them, again, as such an example for us and our leadership in particular. And in so doing, he displays a heart of love and compassion. He also shows us the importance, of course, of prayer here, as well as the need to ever grow in our knowledge of our Savior and his work for us, which is, of course, the content of the prayer.

He thanks the Lord for his people here at the churches of Ephesus, but he also prays for them that their eyes of understanding would be enlightened even more, because they're clearly already saved. He's writing to Christians. He wants them to grow in Christ.

Prayer for Thanksgiving

Let us see how. Here, the first point, verses 15 to 16, prayer of thanksgiving. We read, first of all, the source of it.

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for the saints, he heard of this, I heard of them, he clearly was keeping in touch with the churches of Ephesus. His letter shows extensive correspondence, as we know, all his letters. He has most of the letters of the New Testament.

Today, it's easier, unlike back then, where it took weeks at the earliest and months at the latest to get news to you. They didn't have a mail system the way we have today, and certainly not the transportation that we had. You have a servant or somebody like that, you pay somebody to go do it for you.

You get the information, he gets the information, he keeps in touch, therefore showing his care and consideration as an apostle. He established these churches. He's not there to stay.

He's an evangelist in the sense of traveling around and setting up new churches. And so he doesn't stay at that church and become their pastor. Even today we do that to some extent.

We have evangelists, we call them, and they establish a local church. You heard we have about 12% new churches. And in doing so, he may or may not stay there.

And the people may or may not want him as their pastor, whatever the case may be, and he goes off or perhaps starts another church. That's what Paul does. But even doing so, he remembers those he started the church with, and he has care and compassion, and he prays for them, and he rejoices before God for them.

And we are especially blessed because communication is easier for us. We can learn a lot more about other churches. Even the church at Ephesus, although we are other side of the ocean, just by virtue of the internet, by virtue of contacts in social media, whatever else.

I have people contacting me from Southeast Asia sometimes and things like that, asking these things about questions about religion and the like. And so we have this, but at the same time we can overdo it. We can be swamped by this.

We shouldn't pretend we have to know everything in all churches to thank God for God's work amongst them. And of course, be careful of scams. Now here he is rejoicing in God's work among them, of course, in particular.

The good news is medicine for the soul. Paul often has things on his mind, as we saw in 1 and 2 Timothy. We're going to go to Titus soon.

Things of concern, problems in the church. The book of Ephesus is interesting because there's no clear problem listed in the church. There's lots of problems.

The church is a Corinth, right? We finished that a couple of years ago. It's on and on, it seems, every chapter. It's like, what is up with these people? Here, this gives lots of explanation, encouragement and the like.

And here we have, specifically, a rejoicing before God, our Savior, for the work that He has done among the saints. And this is an encouragement to the Apostle Paul. It should be an encouragement to us as well, to hear good news, to hear the growth of churches, to hear the growth of Christians, that they are learning and persevering and loving God all the more in spite of what's going on around them.

And that should strengthen and encourage us as well, that we are not alone. Now naturally, church leaders have contacts you don't have. I'll have contact with other pastors and church leaders, of course, and organizations.

At the same time, you have all kinds of contacts I don't have at work in the neighborhood. Other Christians, I mean, specifically. And so you have knowledge that way.

We can combine that knowledge together, as we do during prayer time, and we can continue to pray and rejoice. Not only prayer in the sense of petitions, but prayer in the sense of rejoicing and things giving before God. Prayer simply means talking, although I know often, at least the way I use it, it means petitions.

But specifically, just talking to God and asking or praying or thanking Him as we have here with Paul. He thanks and rejoices before God. And in so doing, He specifies here in particular, He does not cease to give thanks for you.

He does not cease to give thanks. It's a continuing thanksgiving. It's a continuing praise before God.

Of course, not every waking thought of His. He has other things on His mind, other churches. So that's not what He means, obviously, in the literal sense.

But it shows, nevertheless, His zeal for them. But what's the reason for His thanksgiving? We have that if we back up a little bit here to verse 15. I heard of what? Your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.

Faith and love. Faith in Christ, that is the first thing of interest, of course, to any Christian when it comes to new converts or even older converts. We ask, are they still trusting in the Lord? We're thankful, even if we don't even ask the question after we met them many years later, that they are still followers of Jesus Christ, especially through hard times.

And that should be an opportunity to praise the Lord and be thankful and happy, even. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of course, at the beginning of the Christian life. The implied evidence of this faith, we don't know exactly what it is, other than perhaps Paul saw some of it, of course, himself.

This is easily many months later when he wrote this or years later at times, and there are more converts. So this would be in the case of baptism and their own words. You would know this and take the word of the pastor, for example, or context that he has there.

We do the same thing as well. Christians wandering around are people who profess to be Christians who had never been baptized. We should think twice about that and ask what's going on, perhaps help them or redirect them.

But here, presumably, they have this. Baptism is an easy outward sign of it. Of course, their own words that they love Jesus is all the more sweet for us.

And they love the saints as well. Your love for all the saints. Paul isn't so heavily-minded and so-called pious as it is in some exaggerated ways of thinking that he just talks about Jesus and loves the Lord and never says anything about the church or the saints.

The two go together. For Christ is what? The head of the body, as we're going to read at the last few verses here. And so he thinks of both.

Love of the saints. One of the first things that comes to my mind is John 13.34 where Jesus speaks to his apostles. By this all will know that you are my disciples.

So not just within the church, but outside the church, everyone's going to see that you are my disciples. How? Well, by profession of faith, right? Well, that's true. I don't think Jesus is denying that at all.

He implies that elsewhere, of course. By baptism, of course, that's part of the Great Commission. He tells people to be baptized, but by actions in particular.

Here he emphasizes to his disciples who struggle with their actions and their arrogant hearts, right? They're arguing who's going to be sitting in the left hand or the right hand of Christ in the kingdom, who's going to be great amongst them. And Christ tells them, well, no, you're supposed to be servants. You're supposed to not think that way and exalt yourself.

And this is another way in which he emphasizes this. If you have love for one another, not words, but clearly actions of love and care and consideration. And thus the world sees that we take Christ seriously and the mercies of Christ because we show such mercies to one another.

Not just preaching, not just the words, although we ought to have those, but deeds that match the words to love, to care, and to even sacrifice for one another. The world seeing that we take care of our own, like families take care of their own families, therefore understand that we are committed and it's not just a club. It's not just another place we meet on Sunday.

And this is one reason why knowledge and information about prayers and praises are important. Churches and denominations, of course, are seen before the world to take care of their own when we have love for one another. Here Paul shows love of affection through his words.

We show affection through our words as well and our actions, or more officially, through the church, through the diaconate. And he continues here mentioning them in his prayers. I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention to you in my prayers.

Now, it's prayers plural, so it's more than one. So he's continuing to pray for them as he said there. He gives thanks, in fact.

I do not cease to give thanks. The prayer here then is either private or public or both. It's not really important in one sense.

What's important is it's on his mind. The apostle who's out elsewhere, no longer in Ephesus, establishing churches and the like, still has them in mind and has them on his prayer list. Don't keep it in your head.

It's okay. You can be a young person and write it down. The old people probably figured that after a few decades they better start writing things down.

Write it down and pray for the list. There's nothing wrong with that. And here he has this list and he has them on the list, that they would always be before his mind and heart because he loves them, even though he's far away from them.

This is clearly not vain repetition, but an emphasis and a desire of one who loves others. He learns more and more details over time. We learn more and more details over time.

And so our prayers modify a little bit and we can add more thanksgiving before God, in this case, more concerns and petitions. But for what exactly? We have part of the answer already in verses 15 and 16 with respect to his prayers, making mention of you in my prayers, speaking to God. Backwards, that is thanksgiving to God for their faith and love that they had already shown and displayed.

This is several weeks or perhaps a month later. It's delayed. It's past tense, backwards looking, but also forward looking, which brings us to verses 17 to 23, his prayer, his petition in particular, not just a prayer of praise, but a prayer of petitioning or requesting before God.

Prayer for Knowledge

Verses 17 to 18, that's right. I make mention of you in my prayers that or in order that to this end that God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation and understanding, a prayer for knowledge. And it begins as he often does with many, many ways of describing what he's saying.

I make mention of you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, it's a prayer to God, the God of Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, of majesty and wonder. He just described that in verses 3 to 14. Therefore, I also, after I heard of your faith, because of this connection to Jesus Christ, the Father and the Holy Spirit, he addresses the Father of honor and glory and of Jesus, our Lord Jesus, again, our Lord being a title of divinity of Jesus Christ, the God man, that is the Father here and the Son together in his prayer petition before God.

And when we pray to God, our prayers are sometimes explicitly Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, or certainly implicit. We'll mention the Father. We may mention the Spirit and the Father or the Spirit and the Holy Spirit and the Son or the Holy Spirit and the Father and the like.

You don't always have to mention all three. Paul doesn't. Where's the Holy Spirit in this prayer that is explicitly mentioned? It's not, not in the opening parts here.

The point being, it should certainly always be within our purview when someone would ask us, of course, I include all of them, but I'm specifying some of them for particular reasons. And what is his prayer here? Wisdom of revelation, as I said, of knowledge that you may know. There you go.

That you may know that the eyes of your eyes of your understanding may be open and the like, that the Father may give you the spirit of wisdom. Verse 17, we'll work from 18 to 17, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation. A lot of words to say that God may give you more knowledge.

And he says it several times, the eyes of your understanding, right? And the like. Wisdom and revelation. Paul's theme here of knowledge and facts, he wants his listeners here in Ephesus, he wants you fellow Christians here today to grow in the spirit of wisdom, of revelation, of knowledge, of understanding, of enlightenment, of knowing.

Those are the key words used throughout these verses of this prayer. What do they have in common? They're synonyms. Knowledge, revelation, understanding, enlightenment, wisdom and knowing.

To grow in our mind. But of course he doesn't mean mind only, but all of who you are. The mind is but one faculty of the soul.

Your emotions and will are another, and they are to be following the mind that's illuminated by the truth of the Word of God. Knowledge is important in the Christian life. It is important in life in general anyways.

We know this when you make wrong decisions, when you make uninformed decisions. You find out the bad consequences in your life. The children learn this as they grow up a little bit here and there.

They get into teenage years. I can do this, mom and dad. Oops.

You didn't have all the knowledge because you didn't ask for wisdom from perhaps your parents or the teacher or whoever else the case may be. Otherwise you're shooting in the dark. Facts, knowledge and wisdom or precisely the application of understanding to the facts before you are paramount in everyday life.

How much more in the Christian life? Christians unfortunately are tempted in my experience, I certainly had this growing up as you know as a charismatic, somehow thinking God bypasses the ordinary means of common sense and providence. It just gives you this immediate insight to things when in fact it takes lots of years of experience, instruction, teaching, hard knocks, right? The school of hard knocks of life to get things in a better order. And it's best to avoid all that as of course young adults by listening to those who've been through it all.

And to use common sense and to put two and two together to draw proper conclusions in our life so that we can be more honoring before God, our Savior. It is implied in how Paul argues, as he argues from for example the light of nature a number of times, that he assumes his readers and today Christians are not just going to turn off their brain and say, well I can't do it without a Bible verse. Give me a Bible verse and I'll start doing it.

Now of course what we have here is a growing in the knowledge of who Jesus Christ is and you don't know about Jesus Christ except in the Bible. We have to make that clear of course. You can't know salvation and the covenant of grace and of mercy except in the Bible.

Outside of it you can learn all kinds of things that are worked together with and coordinate with is truth of the Christian living. And so knowledge is important. Everyday knowledge and that everyday knowledge is part of our Christian life and to doubly so therefore we are added on top of this in the Christian life.

To deny the Trinity of course is soul damning stuff and so therefore knowledge that Christ is divine is important stuff. We have to grow in our knowledge and wisdom and revelation. Here I take wisdom and revelation to be somewhat parallel ideas.

This is not an uncommon Hebraic way of speaking where they pile on synonyms and similar ideas, although it sounds like he's being very precise. I don't think he is. It's the here, in particular the spirit of wisdom and revelation and the knowledge of him to give you that spirit.

Your translation may or may not have the word spirit capitalized because it wouldn't be either way in the Greek. It's all capital if I recall in every case depending on which version that people give you. But the original ones were all capitalized.

So you have to make a judgment call. Some commentators think it means the spirit, the Holy Spirit giving us wisdom. If it is or it isn't, in either case you need the Holy Spirit to have wisdom.

That is when he says the spirit of wisdom and revelation he means the source or the essence for yourself. But it probably is this Holy Spirit. As I said, either way you need the Holy Spirit to have such revelation and wisdom of what? Of Jesus Christ and the knowledge of him and as we know that's going to be Christ as he unpacks this idea later on through these verses.

Here, in other words, Paul dealing with Christians, men and women and children. Children are there in Ephesians, right? Obey your parents and all things. They're already saved.

They're already baptized. Isn't that enough, pastor? They have that knowledge. They know who Jesus is.

They swore to the church. They become covenant members and the like. Isn't that enough? And he's like, no, I want you to know more.

You're just starting out life. Just like children are just now growing up and learning more and more as they go through their single digit years and then their preteens and teens or adolescent years and like, do I have to keep learning? I thought I got it all done. No, you still got more to learn.

And in fact, your whole life as an adult, again, a lot of parallel. Everyday life, you know, as an adult, you got lots to learn. You got to learn more about the car, about the house, about jobs, about contacts, about relationships, even though you were taught a lot as a kid.

And same with your spiritual growth. This Bible's huge. There's lots to learn and lots to apply in our life and wisdom that we need.

And so this again is reminding us it's not just enough to know Jesus to be saved and I can go off on my own, but we are disciples, which means pupils, followers of Jesus in the school of the Lord, which is the church. And Paul unpacks some of what he desires for his audience. Not everything, of course, but what he thinks they especially need here and now.

Opening the eyes to hope, inheritance, and power, verse 18, that you may grow in the wisdom and revelation of the knowledge of him, of Jesus, and of course, redemption and everything attached to that and around that, a lot in the New Testament, for example. But he specifies the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of the calling and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance and what is the exceeding greatness of his power, of hope, inheritance, and power. That's what he wants your eyes to be open to, in particular with respect to Jesus Christ.

That Christians would further know more of these things and embrace them, therefore, all the more. When he writes here, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, he's just saying another way, again, of knowing more. He's being emphatic, in other words, that they would grow in spiritual knowledge and wisdom, specifically hope.

So it's a subpoint here, verse 18, that you, a little bit after verse 18, that you may know what is the hope of his calling. The calling of the gospel itself is hope. It gives us hope of a better tomorrow, brothers and sisters, of a better life when Christ returns in particular.

But even now, we have a better life. We have a foretaste of that, as we read in verses 13 and 14, of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee or a surety of our salvation, a down payment here and now of what will actually be in its full consummation when Christ returns. We will no longer have sin and sorrow.

He also wants to learn of the inheritance or the riches of the inheritance. What is the hope of his calling? What are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints? It's easy to lose sight of the subject sometimes because Paul heaps on clauses and adjectives after another to describe salvation, to describe Christ, to describe wisdom. So here, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints? The glory itself is a great bounty of glory, of grace, and salvation.

That's what riches mean, not money. I remember reading this as a kid. Riches, what? It just means bountiful, a great bounty of grace, of wonder, of glory, of his inheritance, of his salvation amongst his people.

His saints are the inheritance. We are the purchased possession of Jesus Christ. We were promised to him by the Father.

Do you know that? That's what the covenant of redemption was about in eternity past, which gave us the covenant of grace. That we were promised to be his inheritance, to be his bounty and his resurrection. That we are bought by his blood and by his death for redemption.

It's another way of describing therefore what? That we are bought out of, redeemed out of, the kingdom of Satan by the blood of Christ Jesus and brought in as his inheritance forever and ever. That's why it's the riches of his glory, of his great magnificence for what he has done for us in Christ Jesus that we did not deserve. And he ties this redemption, the knowledge of him, that you would know the hope, that you would know of the inheritance in the saints, of his inheritance in the saints, Christ.

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power? Verse 19. So here we have Paul tying these things together. He says these three points.

Prayer of God's Power

But this third point, he's not going to let it go. He's like a bulldog or he's like a Doberman. He won't let go of this idea of the power, of the sovereignty, of the almighty grace of our Lord God from verse 19 down to verse 23.

One commentator says it's almost like he goes off on a And of course you can see it's actually tied thematically at least to that third desire that they would grow in the knowledge of Jesus with respect to understanding his power. Grow in understanding the sovereignty of God almighty. I guess you could say it's a proof text for Calvinism, right? Learn more about God's sovereignty, of his power, of his might, and his deliverance for us.

What is, he says in verse 19, the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe. And that power is what according to the working of his mighty power. Kind of says it again.

Which he worked. There you go again. That's an expression of power.

In Christ when he raised him from the dead. That's clearly an example of power and sovereignty and might over death itself. And raised him by that same power above all principalities.

And he unpacks that in the next few verses. That's what he is praying for. And that is what we can learn from in this prayer.

To learn a prayer of God's power, about God's power, and of course by God's power, of his omnipotence, of the creator God, a preserver of all reality, stretched out his arm and power

to save little old you. Paul is rejoicing in God's sovereign mercy. It's not about our power, our will, our might, or anything around us that we can use to draw us unto heaven.

But his power to overcome our sin and our stubbornness. Your sin and your stubbornness. You may say, well I was, I repented.

Okay, but why? What was the change? What changed you? It's the power of God. He doesn't rejoice and thank the Lord for them having a humble spirit. It's great that you guys had, you were so, you're already inclined to be humbled so obviously you're going to be saved.

There are lots of humble people in the sense of at least outwardly they give deference to you perhaps. You've met people like they're very quiet and the like and they give lots of money and the things you've read perhaps about that. Doesn't change anything.

It won't bring them to heaven. The change is by our Lord, our Father, the sovereign God of creation. And it's that power toward us who believe.

It's not toward anybody else, this saving power. He only saves those who believe, who trust and rely upon Jesus Christ. And he ties this and expands upon the power of God Almighty in these verses.

Verse 20, as he heard a little bit earlier, which he worked in Christ, this almighty power, according to this almighty power, this power he said before, which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead. This shows divine power involved in the resurrection of Jesus in a way unique than any other because there have been people brought back from the dead in the Old Testament. But we don't praise God in the sense that we're praising Jesus Christ as a second member of the Trinity, in which Paul specifies that he worked in a special and unique way that I'm going to tie this very work of your redemption of you who believe to the resurrection of Christ and this power worked in him, the God-man.

Of course, it isn't God and part of the God-man, Jesus Christ is both God and man. That was, needed this power, but it was the man part that had the power of God raising him from the dead. And this same power that conquered death, which implies, he doesn't unpack it, of course, that he conquered sin because death is the sting of sin.

It is the consequence of sin and transgressions. And seated him at the right hand by the same power in the heavenly places, seating him there, verses 20 and 21, means the finished work of Redeemer. It's done.

It is finished, Jesus said on the cross. But sitting also here in this context, as we see explicitly in verse 21 and following, is an image of him being king and conquering his enemies because he's done. The kingdom is established and it will continue to conquer over all.

And that's why Paul continues on here, far above, he sits at the right hand in heavenly places, the Father's right hand, far above all principalities and power and might and dominions, and we would say, and presidents and generals and judges and senators, they got nothing on Jesus. And every name that is named, of course, he means named in the

sense of royal power, majestic power, public power and authority and honor. He's above all these, anything you can come up with.

Not only in this age, the age in which we reside in now, in the world before it is taken into heaven, and that which is to come. Jesus sits in heaven as a reigning king over all kings. He's the king of kings and Lord of lords, as revelation clearly says in those words.

And Paul and his prayer is that we would understand this all the more. Paul wants us in describing here, Jesus as the reigning king and ruler of all, to know that the kingdom of grace was established by Jesus Christ, as well as the kingdom of power. And if that's not enough, Paul puts a capstone upon his prayer in verses 22 to 23.

And he put all things under his feet. Well, he kind of said that before, right? If he's sitting down and he's above all principalities and powers, everything's below his feet, isn't it? In the imagery. He makes it clear now.

And gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. He is ruling all things for the sake of the church, even now, and that church is his body, implying, of course, he is the head. Now, this dense verse, this capstone, he put all things under his feet and gave him to be head over all things, which is his body, the fullness, describing the body, the fullness of him who is all in all.

Matthew Henry has this to say, the same power that supports the world supports the church. And are we so sure he loves his church for it is his holy body? And we are sure he loves his church for it is his body, his mystical body, and he will care for it. It is the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

Jesus Christ filleth all in all. He supplies all defects in all his members, that is the church, filling them with the spirit, even with the fullness of God. And here in this last verse in particular, where we read all things to the church, Christ is over all things to the church, all nations, all presidents, everybody and everything, to or for the good of the church, which is his body, the church is his body, and what about this body? The fullness of him who fills all in all.

It seems odd to me, why would you write the body as the fullness of Christ who fills all in all? How can the church, the body of Christ, be the fullness of him, who himself is the fullness or the completion of all things that depend upon him, of course? Paul doesn't mean that the Son of God as divine is incomplete any more than the Son of God as divine needed help in the resurrection. As God, he wasn't beheld by death. It was the man part.

Rather, the mediator, the God-man, is emphasized here in these verses. And so Matthew Henry explains, and yet the church is said to be his fullness because Christ as mediator would not be complete if he had not a church. A king without a kingdom is not complete, is he? That's the idea.

How could he be a king if he has no kingdom? This, therefore, comes to the honor of Christ as mediator, not as God per se, but as the God-man, the one who saves his people, that the church is his fullness. That's the idea. Brothers and sisters, these dense verses here, which is

one long prayer of Paul for the church of Ephesus and for us today, to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, not to be satisfied with elementary faith and love, but to grow on to maturation, to grow in our knowledge of Jesus and his work for us, and his amazing salvation, and his power in particular, almighty, sovereign, the same sovereignty that created all things, sustains and feeds us right here and now, delivered us from our wickedness, the power of God unto salvation.

May this be everyone's desire, I pray this morning. Amen. Let us pray.

We are here, Lord, to sing praises before you, but also to learn more of your truth. And may this prayer for the knowledge of Christ be our prayer to ever grow and learn of you and your ways for us, to our betterment, we pray, our maturation, but ultimately to your praise and your glorious honor, we pray these things by your mercies upon us, through Jesus, our Redeemer. Amen.