

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Ephesians - it's all about Christ: Learning of Him - Ephesians 1:15-23

Introduction

Good morning. Our talk this morning comes from Ephesians 1:15-23. This is the third talk in the series. Last week the talk concentrated on Ephesians 1:1-14 under the heading "Chosen in Him", (Ephesians 1:4). This morning we will consider Ephesians 1:15-23. These verses will be looked at under four headings as follows:

1. Paul's response to news from Ephesus (Ephesians 1:15-16)
2. Paul desires their blessing from the Father of Glory (Ephesians 1:17-19)
3. What has the Father of Glory done for Christ? (Ephesians 1:20-22)
4. The impact on the Church (Ephesians 1:23)

1. Paul's response to news from Ephesus (Ephesians 1:15-16)

Let us read Ephesians 1:15-16, *"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."*

There are two prayers recorded in Ephesians; Ephesians 1:15-23 and Ephesians 3:14-21. Ephesians 1:15-23 cover the first prayer. Paul's prayers give us an indication of his concern and the scope of desired blessing for others. It is not generalised but specific to their perceived needs. Ephesians 1:15 indicates what prompted Paul to pray.

When we hear good news concerning fellow believers, do we like Paul turn and give thanks to God? The two points of "faith" and "love" that Paul brings to our attention are qualities that go hand in hand. If one is true, then so should be the other. Faith in our Lord Jesus means a changed life, born of God, a new nature distinct from the nature we were born with as 'sons of Adam'. This new nature is characterised, and should be dominated, by love - primarily love to God and to fellow believers. Love will also find expression towards those who are lost, in their sins and under the condemnation of a holy God. However, Paul is concentrating on the family of God in his prayer here. Paul has an attitude of thanksgiving for the Ephesian believers and indeed, we know that Paul had a caring attitude for all the churches, as we find in 2 Corinthians 11:28, *"Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches"*. When we consider that Paul was in prison while writing this letter, it enhances his concern that he can be so positive about others while he was so restricted.

As Christians we may well pray about our own circumstances and that of our family; Christians in the fellowship which we attend may also be the object of our prayers; and this may widen out to various missions in which we have an interest. Additionally, there may be Christian friends who become the object of special prayers because of the circumstances through which they are going - ill health and sorrows, to mention but two issues. But what we see here is Paul's extensive prayer interests regarding others and their spiritual welfare. Do we limit our prayers to the day to day matters of life? Maybe we should imitate Paul and expand the scope and quality of our prayers.

Therefore, in our prayers we must guard against only praying about problems and difficulties, important though they may be. We must have rejoicing, thankful prayers. By nature people tend to focus easily and quickly on negative things. It needs effort to look for the positive, and Paul found it in the Ephesians concerning their "faith" and the corresponding result of "love" to all the saints.

Before leaving t Ephesians 1:15-16 let us think for a little on the two words "cease not". As we pray for one another, let it not be a "one off" or just for a week or two. Let us have fellow believers in our thoughts for the long term.

2. Paul desires their blessing from the Father of Glory (Ephesians 1:17-19)

Let us read Ephesians 1:17-19, *"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power."*

Paul, in using the expression "*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ*" reminds the Ephesians, and ourselves, that the Son of God became man in order to bring the riches of salvation to all believers. As a man, the Lord Jesus Christ was the perfect obedient One who made salvation possible by His death on the cross. The scriptures remind us of the uniqueness of the Lord being man and, as such, His obedience to God:

- Psalm 22:10: From birth, "*I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.*"
- Psalm 22:1: On the cross, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*"
- John 20:17: In resurrection, "*Jesus saith unto her, 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.'*"

We will consider a little later what God has done for Christ in resurrection.

Next, Paul brings to our attention this unique expression concerning God, "*the Father of glory*" (Ephesians 1:17). This expression informs us that the source of all glory is in and with the Father. In Ephesians 1, the Son as man is presented to us as the object of glory when set at the right hand of the Father. The full impact of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ will not be fully appreciated until He is seen ruling over this world in His Kingdom for a thousand years.

Now Paul has a specific blessing in mind. Paul desires that the "Father of glory" gives to believers: "*the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened*". This is a spiritual blessing in order that believers may grow intelligently. There is so much that we need to know to enhance our appreciation of the rich salvation that is now ours. It is not just to be an intellectual exercise but for our practical benefit as we live in a world which is opposed to God. This practical aspect will be seen in Ephesians 4-6.

Therefore, Paul desires that believers may have the "*spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him*". This, I believe, refers to the Spirit of God in His capacity as the indwelling Spirit, enabling believers to have a wisdom and knowledge of what God has done in and for the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 16:13, we are reminded of the Spirit's role in our lives, "*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*" The Spirit of God living in each believer enables the believer to understand spiritual things. God desires that we know His purpose and understand what He has done for Christ. There are two prerequisites in order to have "*the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him [God].*" We need to let the Spirit of God control our lives and we need to read and study the Scriptures. The Spirit will guide us as we are occupied with God's Word. God desires that we understand His purposes for Christ His Son and all things connected to Him.

Ephesians 1:18 continues with Paul's desire, "*the eyes of your understanding being enlightened*". This is not cold head knowledge but a knowledge that illuminates the whole person so that it might have a practical consequence upon our lives. The more we are focused upon Christ day by day the more useful we will be for God.

The first purpose of this enlightening is to understand "*the hope of God's calling*". God is the source, His intention is His pleasure and those who are called are to be the display of that pleasure for all eternity. The hope has been already mentioned in the early part of this chapter. Ephesians 1:4 states that we are holy, blameless and the love of God the Father has made it possible.

The second purpose identified in Paul's prayer is, "*and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints*" (Ephesians 1:18). This thought is not so much what believers receive, but in the day of Christ's display in majestic glory the saints will be seen as part of that glorious display - an integral part of God's inheritance. There is a similar thought in 2 Thessalonians 1:10, "*he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*"

The third purpose is in Ephesians 1:19, "*what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power*". We understand something of the mighty power as demonstrated when God raised Christ from the dead, Ephesians 1:20. But, our verse states that this mighty power is for believers now. Nothing in all of creation can exceed this great power. The power is greater than anything that can come against us in this world. This is of immense comfort as we go through the difficult issues of life. This power was seen in believers as they were liberated from the clutch of Satan. As stated in Colossians 1:13, "*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*" This power will be further demonstrated at the rapture of believers as stated in 1 Thessalonians 4. This power had already been demonstrated in the world as we see when considering the next few verses.

Before moving to my next point let me quote from H Sattler's translation of a German hymn:

*Father of glory, our songs we are raising;
Such is Thy love, and so blessedly shown!
We are united in heart and in praising;
High we extol Thee, Thy glory we own.*

*Him Thou hast given – unspeakable giving,
Father of glory – the Son of Thy love!
Glorious answer – response of the living –
Sons ever with Thee, O Father, above.*

*Yea, He has told us the wonderful secrets,
Father of glory, once hidden from man;
Fully revealed now to us by Thy Spirit,
All Thou desiredst – eternity's plan!*

3. What has the Father of Glory done for Christ? (Ephesians 1:20-22)

Let us read Ephesians 1:20-22, *“which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.”*

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest demonstration of God's mighty power. The Lord Jesus when He moved through the land of Palestine demonstrated His power on a number of occasions. It was one of the confirming signs that showed that He was indeed God and the promised Messiah. Let us read from Matthew 11:2-5, *“Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, ‘Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?’ Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”* The many things accomplished by the Lord Jesus included the raising up of the dead. This we see clearly demonstrated in the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:41-42, 49-56), the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-18) and Lazarus (John 11:1-46). This is besides the powerful acts of healing all accomplished by either a touch or word from the Lord Jesus.

In Ephesians 1:20 we see the same power in the hands of God the Father raising Christ from the dead. But the power did not stop at liberating the Lord Jesus Christ from death and the tomb - it went on to have Christ set down at the Father's own right hand in heavenly places. We read in Acts 1:3 that there was a forty day period when the Lord Jesus appeared to many after His resurrection from the dead before finally going into heaven. But the whole event in Paul's prayer is considered as one seamless action and credited to the Father of Glory. We surely gain the impression of the Father lovingly wanting His Son back in those realms of glory, not just as He was before as Son but with the additional glory of the Son of Man.

As both God and Man, the Son has not become inferior but has resumed His place as superior to all as Ephesians 1:21-22 indicate. There is no one, whether angels or men, who occupy any place of authority, who are not superseded and become inferior to Christ. It is in Philippians 2:10 that we are informed that Christ has a name which is above every name, *“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.”* The glorious name of Jesus means 'Jehovah is Saviour'. Christ is God's anointed for the highest of all positions and authority, in this world and in the world to come. This world to come is the millennium kingdom of Christ. In Hebrews 2:8 we find further details concerning Christ - everything is put under His feet in the purpose of God but as yet that has not been seen in the world.

Ephesians 1:22 strengthens what has already been said as Paul quotes from Psalm 8:6, *“And hath put all things under his feet.”* Psalm 8 is a wonderful Psalm and worth reading. It commences with worship, mentions the Creator and His acts of creation and then speaks of man. Initially the reference is to Adam, the first man, as head of God's creation (see Genesis 2:15), but prophetically this statement is fulfilled perfectly in Christ the second Man, the Lord from heaven. Finally, Ephesians 1:22 closes with the wonderful statement that Christ is *“head over all to the church”*. God has granted Him this position. No one else has this position and anyone who claims to be head of the church seeks to usurp Christ's place. It is also important to realise that the church is not under the feet of Christ. There is a union between Christ and the church which forbids such a thought. In this we see the wonderful privilege that the church has and Ephesians 1:23 tells us why.

4. The impact on the Church (Ephesians 1:23)

Let us read Ephesians 1:23, *“Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”*

Paul develops further the teaching concerning the church by saying "*which is His body*" As the church (or assembly), we consider believers as gathered together functioning in various ways in Christian worship and testimony. As Christ's body, we recognise the closeness and the unique relationship that exists between Christ and those who are His. Israel does not have this unique relationship.

Remember the words that Saul of Tarsus heard on the Damascus road, "*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*", Acts 9:5. Saul had only been attacking Christians, but this was an attack on the body and the Head in heaven felt every blow. Naturally our head directs the functions of our body. So it should be for every Christian: I should live as directed by Christ. That is why prayer and the study of Scripture are important. As Christians we are not to do as we please. Remember, the Apostle Peter had to learn that you cannot say "Not so, Lord", Acts 10:14. 'Not so' and 'Lord' are mutually exclusive.

As we end Ephesians 1, we do so with this amazing phrase that Paul writes concerning the church, Christ's body, "*the fulness of him that filleth all in all*" (Ephesians 1:23). In what way is the church the fulness of Him? Christ is the Head and the body cannot be greater or as great as the head. The head controls and directs. If we think of Christ's body in this way we see how essential it is for the church to have a unique place with Christ in glory. Remember Adam and Eve. Adam said of Eve when God brought her to him, "*this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*", Genesis 2:23. In other words, Eve was someone just like Adam even though different.

We then have two thoughts on this point. First, we who compose this wonderful body should show the Lord Jesus Christ to this unbelieving world by how we live, collectively and individually. The other thought, which should cause wonder in our hearts, is the perfection that will be seen in us as His body when we are with Him in glory and seen by this world in Christ's kingdom when we reign with Him.

To Conclude

As we conclude our talk this morning let us remind ourselves of some of the challenges that have been mentioned. These are summarised as follows:

1. Look for the positive things in fellow believers.
2. Deep concern for and continuous prayer for believers.
3. If the Lord Jesus Christ depended upon God day by day, then so should we.
4. Let the Spirit of God control our lives.
5. Do we know that we have been delivered from the power of darkness?
6. We are now in the kingdom of God's dear Son.
7. Are the lives we live honouring to Christ? We are His church, His body.

Let me close by quoting G Gilpin's hymn:

*Head of the Church, Thy body,
O Christ, the great salvation,
Sweet to the saints it is to think
Of all Thine exaltation;
All power's to Thee committed,
All power on earth, in heaven;
To Thee a name of widest fame
Above all glory's given.*

*With Thee believers raised
In Thee on high are seated;
All guilty once, but cleared by Thee;
Redemption-toil completed.
And when Thou, Lord and Saviour,
Shalt come again in glory,
There by Thy side Thy spotless bride
Shall crown the wondrous story.*

*At length, the final kingdom
No bound, no end possessing,
When heaven and earth God all in all,
Shall fill with largest blessing:
All root of evil banished;
No breath of sin to wither;
On earth, on high, nought else but joy
And blissful peace for ever.*

Thank you for listening and the Lord bless you this Lord's Day.

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