

THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION

Ephesians 1:15–23

Key Verses: 1:18–19a

“...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened...”

Are you aware of spiritual things? Many of us would answer, “Hopefully.” In our culture today, being “spiritual” has become fashionable. But if we’re being honest, in many situations we’re not so spiritually keen. With our human eyes we get impressed with outward appearances. We might notice what people are doing, but not their motives. A lack of spiritual discernment is especially serious when we’re unaware of God, unaware of his goals for us and of what he’s actually done for us in Christ. In today’s passage Apostle Paul addresses this issue. Even if we’ve been Christians for many years, we may have not grown very much in spiritual discernment, or may even become spiritually blinded by our culture or the things of the world. As we meditate on this opening prayer of Paul for the Ephesians, we want to discover how our spiritual eyes can be opened. We want to grasp what it is that God really wants us to see, and why seeing these things is so important. And we want to learn from Paul a better way to pray for others. May God help us humble our minds and hearts to truly listen to and accept his words.

In verses 3–14 Paul began the letter with a long sentence of praise to God for every spiritual blessing he’s given us in Christ. Now he continues with a prayer. Look at verses 15–16. It begins, “For this reason...” Because God has given these Ephesian believers all these blessings, Paul is praying for them. Still, it’s a little hard to understand. If they’re so blessed, why keep praying for them? Paul says, “...because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints...” He was in Ephesus for three years, going from house to house. He knew all of them so well. But here it seems he’s only heard of them. What’s going on?

Well, it’s been at least five years since Paul was there, and the church has been growing. New believers have joined the Christian community, and Paul has heard about them. He really had a heart for new believers. He says in 3:1 that he’s in prison “on behalf of you Gentiles.” In 3:8 he says God gave him his grace “to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” In his missionary life Paul focused on building up the Gentiles. In Romans 11:13 he calls himself “an apostle to the Gentiles.” In Romans 15:15–16 he says he’s “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God.” Now in this letter to the Ephesians, his goal is again to help new Gentile

believers find their place in the Christian community. God still wants us as a church of our Lord Jesus to focus on helping new believers be built up and find their place among us. But how?

Before teaching, Paul has been praying a lot. He says here in verse 16, "...I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers..." Out of his fervent prayer life for them, he's found the best way to pray. Read verse 17. When Paul says "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ," he means the God who sent Jesus to adopt us as sons, to redeem us through his blood, to forgive all our trespasses, to lavish the riches of his grace on us, and help us know the mystery of his will, which is to unite us all in Christ (1:5–10). All this helps us understand what it means to call him "our Lord Jesus Christ." We all can be one only in this grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Next Paul calls God "the Father of glory." It's the only time this description is used in the New Testament. And by putting it after the words "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ," Paul is emphasizing it. "The Father of glory." What does it mean? In this case, "glory" means God's splendor, his power, and the brightness of his presence. The word "glory" also means to reveal the reality of God and his nature. Later Paul explains that when we live in sin, our understanding is "darkened" (4:18a), we ourselves become "darkness" (5:8) and what we do is "dark" (5:11). We're "without hope," "without God in the world" and "far off" from him (2:12b–13). But when the Father of glory shines his light on us, the eyes of our hearts are "enlightened" to know him (1:18a); we become "light" and we "walk in the light," doing what is good and right and true (5:8–9). Paul has confidence to pray for these Gentiles because God is the Father of glory. God eagerly wants to reveal his glory to us, even as we live in "this present darkness" (6:12).

So Paul prays that God may give them "the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him." What does it mean? They'd already heard the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation and received the promised Holy Spirit (1:13). But Paul prays for God to give them "the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him." Here, the word "knowledge" is important. Paul is not talking about head knowledge. The Greek word he uses for "knowledge" is more intense than the usual one. It literally means "full and definite knowledge through experience." So in verse 18a Paul adds, "...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened." Paul is talking about having our spiritual eyes opened. It doesn't mean just knowing the correct theology about God; it means knowing him deeply, and especially, *personally*. As we all know, there's a big difference between hearing about somebody and actually meeting and coming to know that person through experience. There's so much second-hand Christian knowledge out there. We can't expect people to live an authentic Christian life with such second-hand knowledge. Paul is praying for these new Gentile believers, first and foremost, to know God in such a full

and personal way. We gain this knowledge when we're made spiritually "alive" together with Christ, by his wonderful grace (2:5). But it's a knowledge of God we also need to keep praying for. So elsewhere Paul prays for new Gentile believers to keep "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col1:10b).

How can our personal knowledge of God keep increasing? Paul says in verse 17 that this happens only through "the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation." He's talking about the Holy Spirit. Worldly people think they know a lot. They may have studied many things and had many life experiences. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2: "But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory...these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God..." (1Co2:7,10). Then he says strongly: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1Co2:12). This is why Paul is asking God to give these new Gentile believers "the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation." Only through the Spirit can we fully experience that we have all these spiritual blessings in Christ. Studying the Bible is good. But we all need to be asking God for the Holy Spirit to help us understand what we're studying, especially to show us the depths of God.

The Spirit shows us who our Father of glory is. He enlightens us to understand God's words (1Co2:13-14). And what happens when we do? Paul says here that the Spirit also helps us come to know three specific things. Look at verses 18-19. The Spirit shows us "what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe..." Hope, riches and power. Wow, who wouldn't want *that*? But to understand what Paul is saying, we've got to look more carefully.

What is this "hope"? We probably have many common sense ideas about it, or try to quickly borrow from other places in the Bible we already know. But Paul specifically says here: "the hope to which he has *called* you." He repeats this expression in 4:4: "you were *called* to the one *hope* that belongs to your *call*." Of course God calls us to the hope of heaven, which is what we may first think. But in Ephesians Paul is saying that God is calling us to something else, right now. He's calling us to a life worthy of his call (4:1). He's calling us out of a life of sin and spiritual deadness (2:1). He's calling us to be imitators of God (5:1). Paul writes in 1:3: "...even as he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless before him..." What a hope: to be holy and blameless before God! Our sins make us fatalistic, but God is calling us to this beautiful hope. Paul doesn't shoot us down for our sins; he wants us, through the Spirit's help, to know God and his great hope for us to live a holy life. In Christ, and through the Spirit's help, this hope becomes real for anybody today.

Next is the “riches.” Paul says, “...the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...” Earlier he called it “the riches of his grace” (1:7). Later he calls it “the immeasurable riches of his grace” (2:7) and “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (3:8). “Riches” means “abundance,” and God’s grace in Jesus is indeed that. But here in verse 18, the abundance is about “his glorious inheritance in the saints.” What an expression! But what does it mean? First notice that it’s not “ours” but “his.” It’s *God’s* “inheritance in the saints”? Yes! But what *is* that? God redeems us to be his own. And this is what happens to all believers who accept the gospel of Jesus. We are now God’s inheritance. It’s partly true now, and will be fully true someday in his eternal kingdom. So basically, Paul is praying for Gentile believers to see what a great blessing they have in being among God’s holy people. He wants them, through knowing God deeper, to see what a great privilege and blessing the community of his saints is. It’s not a burden, but such a blessing!

Finally, what’s this “power”? It’s not worldly power, or the power to control others. Read verses 19–20. Paul is talking about God’s power to raise Christ and exalt him to his own right hand in the heavenly places. It’s the place of ultimate victory. He says in verse 19 that this power is “toward us.” What does this mean? It means that God’s power which he exerted in Christ is for us. It’s to raise us up with Christ and seat us with him in the heavenly places. It’s true in the future, but it’s also true even now. It means this power works mightily in us to change us. This power enables even sinners like us to become more like Jesus. So in verses 22–23 Paul explains that this power makes us part of Christ’s body and fills us with his “fullness.” His power enables us to know God’s love and fills us with “the fullness of God” (3:19). His power enables us to grow to maturity and to “the fullness of Christ” (4:13). Simply speaking, this hope, these riches and this power all point to this ultimate outcome, to make us more like Jesus.

Without the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, we can’t see any of this. All we see is our present realities, and we depend on ourselves. Francis Chan wrote a children’s book called *The Big Red Tractor*. In it, all these villagers are trying to pull and push this tractor on their own to grow enough food. It’s kind of miserable. But Farmer Dave finds a long lost book in an attic and realizes what they need to do. It’s an allegory of trying to live Christian life without the Spirit, just pushing and pulling a tractor on our own, unable to grasp what great things can really happen with the Spirit’s help. It’s good to pray for people’s practical needs. But we especially should be praying for people to receive the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, to know God personally and his hope, his riches and his power toward us.

Before I believed in Jesus and received the Spirit, I was dark, full of wounds and sins, and crooked toward God. I thought I wanted the hope, riches and power of this world. But at the same time, I was fatalistic and expected that my life would self-destruct someday. Then, through UBF ministry I repented, met Jesus personally and received the gift of the Spirit. I realized God has such a great hope for me to live as his servant. I realized the riches of being in a community of his precious people. And I experienced his power to change. My whole mindset changed. I had heard about God my whole life through my parents. But now I came to know him very personally. Today I still need the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation, more than ever. I need the Spirit to pray rightly. I desperately need the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to serve his words and to help people spiritually. I need the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to see his church from God's point of view, and to see what God wants me to do.

Let's read our key verses, verses 17–18a again. May God help us grow in personal knowledge of him through the Spirit. May God help us know the hope, the riches and the power he has for us. And may God help us learn to pray these things like Paul did, especially for those we love and serve.