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WHAT GOD WANTS YOU TO KNOW

Ephesians 1:18-19

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Ephesians Lesson 10

What God Wants You to Know Ephesians 1:18-19

When you buy a new gadget, it comes with an owner's manual that tells you how to operate it. Many of us skim the manual quickly (at best), or never bother to read it at all. That's too tedious, and besides, we think that we're smart enough to figure this out without reading the directions. But then we can't figure out why this stupid product doesn't work right! Maybe we need to go back and read the manual!

God has given us His Word as the manual for our salvation. It tells us all we need to know to walk with God and live wisely in light of eternity. But, as we do with so many owner's manuals, we read it superficially or hardly at all and then wonder why the Christian life isn't working the way it's supposed to! We need to go back and read the manual carefully, asking God to give us His wisdom and understanding.

In Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul is praying that God would give the saints a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the true knowledge of Him. In 1:18-19, he elaborates on what that means, namely, that God wants us to know three essentials about our salvation that will give us assurance about our high calling as God's people. They will give us the hope and eternal perspective that we need to endure trials. They will give us the strength to persevere in godliness.

God wants you to know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of His power toward believers.

1. To know these important truths, you must ask God to enlighten the eyes of your heart.

The first phrase of verse 18 is literally, "the eyes of your heart having been enlightened." I understand it to be explaining in more specific detail Paul's words in verse 17, that God would give us "a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the true knowledge of Him." To know these spiritual truths, God must open our eyes.

Paul describes unbelievers as (Eph. 4:18), "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." In other words, sin blinds the minds of unbelievers and renders them incapable of understanding the truth of the gospel, unless God opens their blind eyes (2 Cor. 4:4, 6).

But here, Paul is writing to believers ("saints," "us who believe," 1:18, 19). Even though God has opened our eyes to see and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we still must seek Him to enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we will come to a deeper understanding of these crucial truths. "The eyes of our hearts" refers to our total inner person, which includes the intellect, the emotions, and the will. In other words, this is not just an intellectual ability to understand or teach these truths. There are seminary professors who can exegete the Greek text here, but these glorious truths do not thrill their hearts. The knowledge that Paul is praying for includes an intellectual grasp of the truth, but it also grips our emotions and brings our will into greater submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Here is how this applies: As a believer, you are always in need of the Holy Spirit to enlighten the eyes of your heart to the great truths of the Bible. Many Christians have a "stick your head in the sand" attitude when it comes to grappling with the difficult doctrines of the Bible. They say, "I don't bother with theology. I just love Jesus." Some even think that studying theology is spiritually dangerous. But they are being intellectually lazy and exposing themselves to spiritual danger! Paul saw fit to teach simple believers, many of whom were slaves, the great doctrines of Romans and Ephesians and his other letters.

Certainly, there is always the danger of spiritual pride that comes from thinking that you know more than others know. There is the danger of stopping at knowing doctrine, rather than allowing the doctrines to give you greater personal knowledge of the God of whom the doctrines speak. But the antidote to these dangers is not to remain ignorant. Rather, it is constantly to be praying as you study the Word, "Lord, enlighten the eyes of my heart so that I may know, love, and obey You better!"

Having prayed then that God would enlighten the eyes of our hearts, Paul specifies three things that God wants you to know:

2. God wants you to know what is the hope of His calling.

Paul later (4:4) will talk about “the hope of *your* calling,” but here he refers to “the hope of *His* calling.” Why does he do that?

A. The hope of His calling means that He took the initiative in our salvation.

“Call” or “calling” is used with reference to salvation in two senses. There is the general call of the gospel that goes out to all people. Jesus used the word in this sense when He said, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). The invitation goes out to everyone: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” But many ignore the invitation or make up excuses for why they cannot respond.

But there is also the effectual call that always accomplishes God’s purpose of saving His chosen people. Paul writes (Rom. 8:30), “And these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” That sequence is certain! Spurgeon compared the general call of the gospel to the sheet lightning that you see on a summer night. It gives off light, but it doesn’t strike anything in particular. But the effectual call is the lightning bolt that connects. Paul always uses the word “call” to refer to this effectual call of God that actually saves the one called (Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans], p. 75).

The practical application of this is that your salvation does not rest on your choosing Christ, but rather on His choosing you. As Paul puts it (2 Tim. 1:9), God “has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” Knowing that you are saved because in eternity God purposed to save you and that His purpose is certain, will give you assurance you when you’re struggling with doubt or failure. It will encourage you to go on. It will fill you with thanksgiving, joy, and hope. It is “hope” that Paul here links with God’s effectual call:

- B. The hope of His calling is the certainty of increasing blessing and joy in Christ, beginning now and lasting through all eternity.

Scholars are divided over whether “hope” refers to the subjective emotion or to the objective content of our promised blessings in Christ. In my opinion, you can’t separate the two, because when your eyes are enlightened to know objectively all that God has promised to give you in Christ, it fills you with hope subjectively in your heart. Paul describes people who do not know Christ (Eph. 2:12) as, “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

But, as we’ve seen (1:13), believers have been “sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.” Since God’s promises are as certain as He is faithful, the hope of our calling is not some vague, wishful thinking that everything will work out for our good. Rather, if we are the called according to God’s purpose, then we know that He is actively working all things together for our good, both in time and in eternity (Rom. 8:28)! So even in the most difficult trials, we can be filled with hope (see Rom. 15:13).

Thus as Christians, we should be filled with hope because we know that God has called us to salvation. Our faith in Christ did not originate with our feeble will, but with the sovereign, eternal will of God. Thus we know that He will fulfill all of His promises to us. We will be with Him forever in heaven, where there will be no suffering or tears or death. We will be perfect in righteousness and in love for God and one another. We will enjoy perfect happiness in a perfect environment where nothing will be spoiled by sin. Even more, we will be in the presence of the One who loved us and redeemed us with His blood.

Thus as 1 John 3:2-3 puts it, “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. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” So pray for others and for yourself, that God will enlighten the eyes of your heart through His Word so that you will know what is the hope of His calling.

3. God wants you to know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

It would have been a tall prayer if Paul had prayed that we would know God's inheritance in the saints. It grows even taller when he prays that we would know the glory of God's inheritance in the saints. But it is mind-boggling when he prays that we will know "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"! How can we begin to fathom a prayer like that?

The Greek text may be interpreted in either of two ways. Some take it to mean, "the riches of the glory of the inheritance that comes from God and is enjoyed among the saints." In other words, they take it to be a prayer that we would come to know all of the spiritual blessings that God has given to us. In favor of this view is the context of Ephesians 1 (verses 3, 11, & 14). Also, the parallel passage (Col. 1:12) refers to our sharing "in the inheritance of the saints in Light." Other Scriptures also refer to the inheritance that is stored up for those who are God's children through faith in Christ (Acts 20:32; 26:18; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4). One argument against taking it this way is that it becomes almost a repetition of the first part of the prayer, to know the hope of His calling. But there are many good reasons to interpret the text this way.

A second way to interpret it is that it refers to the inheritance that God has in His people. In other words, we are God's possession, purchased by the blood of Christ. Thus we are His portion or inheritance which He will finally and ultimately possess throughout eternity. Many Old Testament texts speak of Israel as God's chosen portion or inheritance. For example, Deuteronomy 32:9 says, "For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance." Psalm 33:12 proclaims, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance." (See, also, Deut. 4:20; 7:6; 9:26, 29; 1 Kings 8:51, 53 Ps. 28:9; 33:12; 78:62, 71; 106:5, 40; Isa. 19:25; 47:6; 63:17; Jer. 10:16; 51:19; etc.).

In Ephesians 1-3, Paul is emphasizing that although the Gentiles were formerly alienated from God and strangers to His promises to Israel, now in Christ they are equal members of God's covenant people. Just as the Jews were formerly God's chosen in-

heritance, now His inheritance is in the saints, the church, made up of Jewish and Gentile believers on equal footing.

New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce writes (*The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans], p. 270), "That God should set such high value on a community of sinners, rescued from perdition and still bearing too many traces of their former state, might well seem incredible were it not made clear that he sees them in Christ, as from the beginning he chose them in Christ."

Why did God do this? Bruce adds (p. 271), "Paul prays here that his readers may appreciate the value which God places on them, his plan to accomplish his eternal purpose through them as the first fruits of the reconciled universe of the future, in order that their lives may be in keeping with this high calling and that they may accept in grateful humility the grace and glory thus lavished on them."

Our future is that throughout eternity we will actually share in Christ's glory! In Ephesians 5:27, Paul says that God's aim is "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." In Colossians 1:27, Paul says that to the saints, "God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

While I can't begin to explain this adequately (I need more enlightenment from God!), Paul wants us to get a glimpse of our glorious future so that we will live in light of it right now. Either way you interpret this phrase, whether we are heirs to a vast fortune in heaven or whether we are God's special inheritance (both are true), the application is the same. We must live as citizens of heaven who belong to God. We must live as saints, God's holy ones, separate from this evil world.

Warren Wiersbe (*Be Rich* [Victor Books], pp. 13-14) writes, "When she was young, Victoria was shielded from the fact that she would be the next ruling monarch of England lest this knowledge spoil her. When her teacher finally did let her discover for herself that she would one day be Queen of England, Victoria's response was, 'Then I will be good!' Her life would be controlled by her po-

sition. No matter where she was, Victoria was governed by the fact that she sat on the throne of England." Even so, we will reign with Christ! Knowing that, we should live as His special people.

So Paul asks God to enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we will know what is the hope of His calling and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. Finally,

4. God wants you to know what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

Again, Paul piles up words to describe God's power. It would seemingly be enough to mention the power of God, who is omnipotent. But, Paul adds, "the surpassing greatness of His power," and then goes on to say (1:19b-21) that this power is "in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." Wow!

John Calvin helpfully explained why Paul throws in just about every word that he can to describe God's power towards us who believe. He said that godly people who are engaged in daily struggles with inward corruption realize that it requires nothing less than the surpassing greatness of God's power to save us. He said that we never form adequate conceptions of the treasure of the gospel, or if we do, we can't persuade ourselves that these things pertain to us, because they are so far from what we experience. Then he adds (*Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker reprint], on Eph. 1:19, p. 214):

Paul's object, therefore, was not only to impress the Ephesians with a deep sense of the value of Divine grace, but also to give them exalted views of the glory of Christ's kingdom. That they might not be cast down by a view of their own unworthiness, he exhorts them to consider the power of God; as if he had said, that their regeneration was no ordinary work of God, but was an astonishing exhibition of his power.

There are at least six ways that God wants us as believers to know the surpassing greatness of His power toward us:

- A. God wants us to know the surpassing greatness of His power that saved us.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*God's Ultimate Purpose* [Baker], pp. 391-422) argues at length that Paul is referring here to the power of God in raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life when He saved us. He argues (p. 391) that Paul's object in this section is to give the saints assurance and certainty in their faith. Thus here Paul is emphasizing God's power that *already saved us* rather than the power that He gives to sustain us. In other words, if we now have come to believe in Christ, we can know that it took nothing less than God's mighty power to bring us to that point. Salvation is not a joint project, where we teamed up with God to bring it about. Rather, as Paul will go on to say, we were dead in our sins, but God raised us up. Paul wants to encourage us as we realize that our salvation is evidence of God's surpassingly great power at work in us.

I agree that this is Paul's main aim. But, also...

- B. God wants us to know the surpassing greatness of His power that enables us to persevere through trials.

In the parallel prayer in Colossians 1:11-12, Paul prays that we would be "strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light." In other words, God's glorious, mighty power enables us to endure trials steadfastly, patiently, and joyously, with a thankful heart to the Father.

- C. God wants us to know the surpassing greatness of His power to overcome temptation and live in holiness.

God's mighty power has granted us all that we need for life and godliness, so that we can escape the corruption that is in the world by lust (2 Pet. 1:3-4). His power provides the way of escape from every temptation that we face (1 Cor. 10:13; Eph. 6:10-13).

- D. God wants us to know the surpassing greatness of His power to serve Him faithfully.

Paul explained (Col. 1:29), "For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Laboring in His power is the antidote to burnout.

- E. God wants us to know the surpassing greatness of His power for everything that He has called us to do.

Paul wrote (Phil. 4:13), "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." He meant that he was able to face and accomplish whatever God called him to do (see also, Eph. 3:20).

- F. God wants us to know the surpassing greatness of His power to keep us to the end.

The fact that God exerted such mighty power to save us implies that His same mighty power will keep us. 1 Peter 1:5 says that we "are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Jude 24-25 proclaims, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." As Paul shows (Rom. 8:30), the God who predestined you and called you will also glorify you. Our salvation from start to finish is due to the surpassing greatness of His power!

Conclusion

So if you're having problems in your Christian life, if things don't seem to be working as they should, maybe it's time to go back and read the owner's manual! But you can't understand this manual by mere human insight or wisdom. To understand it, you must continually ask God to enlighten the eyes of your heart. He wants you to know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of His power toward you. To the extent that you understand these vast spiritual resources, you will enjoy God and glorify Him forever.

Application 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?

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