

p 17 WEEK 3: PRAYER FOR REVELATION

Ephesians 1:15–23

The Place of the Passage

Paul states that all that the Lord has done for the church in Christ is a mystery now being revealed (Eph. 1:9). However, without the working of the Lord to reveal his will, much of the significance of these spiritual blessings will remain hidden and ineffective in the life of a local assembly. Paul therefore prays for illumination.

The Big Picture

In Ephesians 1:15–23, Paul’s prayer moves from the mode and objects of prayer to a request for revelation. The prayer has as its focus the fullness of Christ in the church.

p 18 Reflection and Discussion

Read through the entire text for this study, Ephesians 1:15–23. Then interact with the following questions and record your notes on them concerning this section of Ephesians. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2263–2264; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Reason, Manner, and Object of Paul’s Prayer for Revelation (1:15–17)

The spiritual blessings granted in Christ and the report of the believers’ faith in Christ and love for all believers give Paul reason to pray. If the Lord has provided every spiritual blessing in Christ in the heavenly places, and many in Ephesus have believed on Christ, why does knowledge of these two truths move Paul to pray?

If the Ephesians already show love like Christ, what does Paul’s ongoing prayer for them tell us about demonstrating Christ’s love?

The believers at Ephesus were included in Paul’s prayers for more than 10 years (from AD 55 until his death in about 68). What does this say about Paul’s priorities for the church and for his own life? What does this necessity of continual prayer for revelation indicate about the spiritual blessings in the lives of believers?

p 19 One finds the phrase “God of our Lord Jesus Christ” elsewhere in Paul’s writings (Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 11:31; Col. 1:3). “Father of glory” harkens back to the glory of God in Ephesians 1:6, 12, and 14. What part does each member of the Trinity play in Paul’s request for the Ephesians? How do these parts relate to their roles in salvation seen in 1:1–14?

2. The Focus on Power in Paul’s Prayer for Revelation (1:18–20)

Paul asks God to reveal more of himself in wisdom—to give knowledge that will change believers through the power of what the Trinity has done for us in Christ. What is the significance of the figure of speech used in asking for “eyes of the heart” to be “enlightened”?

The prayer itself seeks three outcomes. What are the three formerly mysterious things Paul is asking the Trinity to illuminate for the people in Ephesus? What does a prayer for enlightenment indicate about the knowledge of the will of God in members of this congregation?

Much of the remainder of the prayer asks for enlightenment with respect to greatness and strength, the “immeasurable greatness of his power.” What type of strength is Paul praying that the church will grasp with the eyes of the heart?

p 20 In 1:20 Paul makes reference to Christ’s ascension, including Christ’s position at the “right hand” of God, a symbol of sovereign rule (Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:33; 1 Pet. 3:22). What, then, is Paul expecting the Spirit to reveal about the power available to believers?

3. Praying to See the Headship of Christ (1:21–23)

Christ’s exaltation establishes his rule “far above” all governing powers. How should the Ephesians’ position in Christ color our thoughts on the church’s relationship to earthly ruling powers?

Two additional aspects of Christ’s rule relate to names and eras (v. 21). What names of authority on earth might Paul be referencing? What does the scope of “this age” and the “one to come” indicate about the authority of Christ in the history of the church’s dealings on earth? What is the future of earthly and spiritual powers?

The placing of “all things” under the feet of Christ makes his power exclusive, as do “all rule,” “every name,” “this age [and] ... the age to come,” and “all things to the church” (1:22). Yet one does not now see the full expression of this p 21 rule. What does the believers’ identity as “his body” indicate about how Christ intends to express his headship on earth?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

HOPE. Prior to our salvation, we were doomed to perish. Many attempt to cover such hopelessness with temporal joys and achievements that seek to avoid the inevitability of their own demise. The gospel brings hope—assurance of resurrection and inheritance. Because Christ canceled sin and defeated death, those in him have the certain hope of eternity. Peter describes our hope in Christ as a “living” hope (1 Pet. 1:3).

RESURRECTION. Related to the concept of hope is the resurrection of Christ. Without the resurrection, believers have no more hope than anyone else (1 Cor. 15:14, 17–18). John indicates that the “second death” has no power over those who believe in Christ (John 11:25–26; Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). Life after death, including a bodily resurrection, is promised to all believers.

Whole-Bible Connections

SANCTIFIED BY PRAYER. In the story of redemption, one sees many of God’s leaders praying for his people. Some of these prayers were simple intercessions (Exodus 32). Other prayers displayed a particularly sanctifying tone (1 Kings 8; Daniel 9). The Lord Jesus prayed for the church to be sanctified (John 17). Paul’s prayer here in Ephesians 1:15–23 seeks the maturity of the church, as Christians increase in their understanding of their Lord. Prayer is essential to accomplishing the will of God.

GOD AS VICTOR. Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of God places him above earthly and cosmic powers in the age that has dawned and in the age to come. As prophesied in the Old Testament, every knee will bow in submission to [p 22](#) Christ (Isa. 45:23), he will be the victorious King of glory in battle (Ps. 24:7–10), and he will crush the rebellious nations (Ps. 2:9). These victories will bring an end to the ongoing conflict between the Enemy and the people of God (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 110:1). Christ’s rule as head provides for the present and final victory of believers in all conflicts (Rom. 8:37–39).

Theological Soundings

HEADSHIP. Christ’s head-body relationship to the church reflects the relationship the Lord had with Israel. The head is the authority, determining the direction and actions of the body. The body willingly submits itself to the head rather than working autonomously or rebelliously. The differing roles are not competitive, nor do they represent advantage or inequality. All spiritual blessings of believers are preplanned works of grace. Paul’s return to the metaphor in Ephesians 4:15 and 5:23 suggests that the head-body relationship is implicit throughout the letter.

AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH. Throughout the history of Christianity, church and earthly authorities have existed largely in conflict with one another. This is true whether we speak of

governing authorities that separate church and state jurisdictions or general secular authorities that promote worldviews rejecting the message and morality the church proclaims. Nevertheless, Scripture demonstrates that Christ calls the church to be an expression of his rule in the present world. Yet this means of expression combines moral courage with humble citizenship, unity with love, and holiness with wisdom, so that transformed lives give evidence of the power of the gospel.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Ephesians 1:15–23 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

p 23 2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Ephesians 1:15–23

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Ephesians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.