

Few of us have been blessed with perfect eyesight, and so most of you know what it's like when a friend tries to point something out to you but you just can't see it. They describe it in sharp detail, but it's all blurry to you. But maybe you remember the moment when you first got glasses or had laser surgery. The world around you didn't change; but all of a sudden you were able to see it in a whole new light. Your whole perception of the world changed, because your eyes were enlightened!

Ephesians Chapter 1 can be divided up into two halves; vv. 3-12 contain Paul's great blessing list, and vv. 15-23 contain Paul's great prayer report. It's almost as if Paul knows that for many of us, we see his list of blessings through dimmed eyes. Paul has tried his best to *describe* Jesus and all His blessings to you, but what he really wants is for *you to see it for yourself*. "You've been chosen by God," Paul tells you; "I pray that you will know the hope to which He has called you!" "You have an inheritance," Paul tells you; "I pray that you will know what are the riches of this glorious inheritance!" "God's plan is to unite all things in Christ," Paul tells you; "I pray that you will know the immeasurable greatness of His power toward you who believe!"

Paul has painted a wonderful picture right in front of you, but he can't fix your eyes. He can preach to your head all day long, but unless the Spirit enlightens your heart, it won't do you any good. So what does Paul do? *He prays*. He prays that God would illumine the eyes of your heart by the Spirit. This is Paul's prayer for the church: **I pray that God the Father would enable you to see His power working through Jesus Christ by the Spirit**. And in all our prayers for one another, *that's* what we should be asking God for.

And as the first step, when Paul hears that the Ephesians have put their faith in Jesus and are loving the saints, he prays that God would give them the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. This "spiritual sight" is referring to the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination, which, for instance, is what enabled Peter to give his answer when Jesus asked, "Who do people say that I am?" People with ordinary eyes were saying things like "Elijah, John the Baptist, a prophet like that." But what did Peter say? "You are the Christ." Peter saw the truth about Jesus because the eyes of his heart had been enlightened.

Notice also this pairing of wisdom and revelation with knowledge. Paul imparted *knowledge* about Christ to the Ephesians, but it is the work of the Spirit to enlighten the Ephesians with *wisdom* and *revelation* so that they could perceive Christ with spiritual eyes. It's not enough to *preach* to people; we also need to *pray* for the Spirit to work in their hearts.

So consider how growing in Christ involves both knowing God through the preaching and study of His Word, *and* having our hearts illuminated by the Spirit so that we can truly appreciate that knowledge. Bible study without prayer is like giving books to a blind man, and praying to know God apart from reading His Word is like putting your textbook under your pillow at night in order to learn. Scripture and Spirit work together to give you the knowledge of God.

And as we look to vv. 18-19, we see three things in particular that Paul prays that we would know about God: *hope, riches, and power*. The *hope* to which God has called you, the *riches* of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and immeasurable greatness of His *power* for the benefit of believers. He's just described these things to us in vv. 3-14; now he prays that we would know them for ourselves.

Notice though, that Paul doesn't give you the stripped-down version that I put on your outline. Paul *piles up* the adjectives: you don't just have a calling; you have a *hopeful, divine* calling. You don't just have an inheritance; you need to know the *glorious riches* of your *saintly* inheritance. And he pulls out all the stops with this one: God not only has power that He uses for your benefit, but *immeasurably great* power, shown forth in *effectively strong might!*

Now in v. 20, Paul starts to camp out on this idea of power. Why? Look again at the other things that Paul wants us to know: the hope of our calling and the inheritance of the saints. Both of these realities have *begun* in principle: you've been called, and you've obtained an inheritance. But neither of those things has been *realized* yet. Who hopes for what he sees? And the Holy Spirit is just the down payment, not the whole inheritance!

And so it's hard to know and understand and be assured of future realities that aren't here yet. But what *is* here? What can we see about God with spiritual eyes that has already been put on display? We don't see our hope or our inheritance, but we do see what the power of God accomplished in Jesus!

This is why Paul focuses on Ascension power: Christ has already been raised up above all, and that's how you can be confident in the knowledge of the hope of your calling and the riches of your inheritance: God in His great, effective, mighty power has already done for Jesus what He promises to do for you.

And what has God's power done for Jesus? Four things: Jesus has been raised from the dead, seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places, God has subjected everything to Jesus, putting all things under His feet, and He has given Jesus headship over the Church. Those are not future realities, those are things that God has accomplished in Christ by His mighty power. And I want the Spirit to show you, Paul says, that the power that did that for Jesus is at work for you!

And today, on Ascension Sunday, I especially want to note the significance of the Ascension as a display of God's power through Christ. After He raised Jesus from the dead, God seated Christ at His right hand (That's Psalm 110, btw) in the heavenly places, and put all things under His feet (that's Psalm 8) and that's *where* and that's *why* Jesus is currently in charge of everything: because of the Ascension. That's also why any of the blessings that Paul has celebrated are given to you – remember verse 3: God has blessed us *in Christ* with every spiritual blessings *in the heavenly places*, and the Ascension is what enthroned Jesus in the heavenly places with authority to dispense such blessings. That's what the Ascension made possible, and that's why this is a day for rejoicing!

And once again Paul is in the business of piling up words to highlight the *comprehensive sovereignty* of Jesus, Christ above all. He has been raised up far above all *rule* and *authority* and *power* and *dominion*. The important thing here is not to differentiate between rule and authority, but to see the main point that *whatever* power we're talking about, Jesus is above it.

This was borderline treasonous for a Roman citizen to say, because this is how Rome thought of herself. The ancient historian Polybius had written this: "The Romans have brought the whole world into subjection to themselves."¹ Paul said, "No, God has put all things in subjection to Jesus."

¹ Quoted in Baugh, S.M., *Ephesians* (EEC), Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 128.

Despite the rapid growth of the church, though, it was still so small compared to Rome than any response to Paul would have been mockery more than anything: “Look around you, Paul. Rome is running everything. What is Jesus in charge of?” This is why Paul prayed that the believers would be able to see with the eyes of faith. Rome’s rule was obvious; Jesus’ rule was hidden. But by the power of God, Rome is no more, and Jesus is worshipped over far more of the world than Rome ever knew.

Also, Jesus is above every name that is named – and that bit about naming refers to titles, as it does in Philippians where God gave Jesus the name above every name: Lord. It also has special meaning for the Ephesians: their city was dominated by magic, as we learn in Acts 19, and naming played a crucial role in magic: through magic you would act in the name of whatever god or spirit you called upon to access their power. Here in Ephesians 1:21, though, Paul says that Jesus has been raised above every name, which means that no magic, no demon, no spell, no evil forces can harm you if you bear Jesus’ name. They are all under His feet.

So Jesus is above all rule and authority, above all names, *and* this is true in all ages, in the old creation as well as the new creation. God’s power means that Jesus is above all, always!

The culminating act of God’s great power was to give Jesus headship over the Church in v.22, but then in a wonderful piece of good news, vs. 23 draws a key distinction between the church and the world. Everything is under Christ, but where the rest of creation is under Christ’s feet as conquered enemies, the Church is connected to Christ as His body. We are not under His feet; we are His hands and feet, and so in Romans Paul says that Satan will be crushed under the Church’s feet!

In light of this and other passages describing an organic connection between Christ and the Church, the early Church used the Latin phrase “*Totus Christus*” to speak of *the whole Christ*, head and body, Christ together with His Church. We are united to Him, one body with Him, and so we share in all that it is His. Now, Christ is always the head, and the Church makes a terrible mistake whenever she tries to set up *another* head of the Church, but it is just as much a mistake to *separate* Christ’s head from His body!

This is what Paul prays that you'll understand: because Christ is the Ascended Lord above all, He is the *head*, the Church is His *body*, and the world is *underfoot*. Because God's plan is to unite all things in Christ, Christ *fills all*, the Church *is His fullness* (that which is filled with Christ), and the whole of creation is *that which is filled*. Christ above all, so that Christ will fill all in all.

That's the hope of our calling: Christ fills the world through us. That's the riches of our glorious inheritance: the meek shall inherit the earth. And all of this takes place through the power that God worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places. Pray with Paul for one another that the Spirit will enlighten the eyes of our hearts to see this glorious reality.

Because Christ is above all, this power is at work right here, right now in our midst. It's often invisible unless the Spirit enlightens your heart's eyes with spiritual sight, but God's power is really and truly at work in the world, filling your life, your marriage, your home, your community, your state, your nation, and the world with the fullness of Christ. I hope you don't just hear about it, Paul prays, I hope you see it with your own eyes!

Whatever is happening in all those areas, Christ reigns over it, and since you are His body and He is your head, then nothing in your life can triumph over you. So if your life or your marriage or the state of the world or the advance of the gospel in Annapolis or even just in your neighbor's heart seems hopeless, look again with spiritual sight, and you will see how Christ is filling that situation with Himself.

And as Christ's body, Jesus uses *you* to fill the world with Himself! How can you embody Christ in every situation you face this week? God's power is at work through the whole Christ; may the Spirit give you eyes to behold and embody that glorious truth as you walk with Jesus.

- In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, whose blessed Son our Savior Jesus Christ ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things: Mercifully give us faith to perceive that, according to His promise, He abides with His Church on earth, even to the end of the ages; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.*