

# Commentary

15-16 For this reason... looks back to verses 3-14. Paul thanks God for the Ephesian Christians - for their vertical relationship (*faith in the Lord Jesus*) and for their horizontal relationships (*love for all the saints*). These things are the evidence that they truly have been included in God's purpose/plan: they have faith in Christ the head and love for the saints with whom they've been brought together under him. Do we thank God in our prayers when we see these things in others, or just take them for granted? It's worth pausing just to check everyone is clear that 'saints' does not mean special dead Christians (St. Paul, St. Anthony), but *all* Christians: we are all saints (St. Nigel, St. Alex etc)! (Actually, it's slightly more complicated here as 'saints' probably means 'Jewish Christians' with whom 'you' [ie Gentile Christians] have been included [cf 2:19].)

17 Paul begins his prayer by asking for: a spirit of wisdom and revelation or *The Spirit* of wisdom and revelation. That means either a spiritual disposition of openness to what God has revealed, and insight into it; or a specific work of the Holy Spirit giving them insight and revealing things to them. Either way, the desired end result is that that they know God personally in increasing intimacy (see the parallel passage in Colossians 1:10 and the work of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:10-16): the point is that we cannot know God without a work of God enabling us. Note that it is not just to know things about God, but to know *him*. Knowing things about him is part of that (and in fact the whole theme of the Bible is that God makes himself known through the displays of what he does), but what Paul is after is relational not theoretical knowledge, the kind of knowledge we need to pray for God's help to acquire, not just factual Bible knowledge anyone can pick up.

18 Your heart has eyes? A bizarre image ...! We were once-and-for-all enlightened when we became Christians, and we also continue to be enlightened as we grow in our knowledge of God. Paul prays for this in our *hearts*. We tend to read this as a 'heart knowledge' versus 'head knowledge' point. But 'heart' is the Bible word for our intellectual and moral 'control centre', so we're talking here about knowing God in our 'whole being' not our emotions only (emotions in the Bible are more often felt in the stomach - they are 'gut' feelings).

18-19 So now to the specifics. If we know these things, we will know God better (and also, if we know God better, then we will know three things):

- **the hope to which he has called you.** Bible 'hope' is not wishful thinking, but a confident expectation based on the fact that God has *called* us out to be part of his plan. It is to do with being certain that God will indeed bring everything together under Christ as head (1:0), and that the church now is the current microcosm and proof of that which is to come (3:20).

- **the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.** We may assume that this is referring to heaven as our 'inheritance' (which

makes it a repeat of knowing our 'hope' more surely). But here (and in 11, 14 [cf ESV footnote for 14]) there is also the idea that Christians are God's inheritance ... we are his portion. Both ideas are true, but it is more likely here that Paul is praying that we'd understand how important and precious we Christians are to God.

- **the immeasurable greatness of his power.** Finally, knowing God better means grasping how great his power is, and that it is available to us as believers in the gospel (and is at work 'in' us, see 3:20). We will only keep going, standing firm as Christians, if God's able-to-raise-Jesus power works in us as it did in him. We will only be raised to join Jesus by that same power (2:6).

In essence Paul prays that the blessings of 1:3-14 would 'sink in' and make us more confident and assured as Christians, as we stand firm.

20-23 These verses expand on God's power, and illustrate how powerful he is. If asked to give an example of God's power, we might have mentioned creation, or a great OT battle victory, or miracles of healing, or the calming of the storm perhaps. But Paul has a different illustration of God's power: Christ's resurrection, to be seated with God in the heavenly realms as the supreme ruler over everything. It is 'very Ephesians', and reflects a central concern of the letter: since it is God's purpose to bring all things together *under* Christ (1:10), we are first told here that he is already higher than all things, he is exalted as head. The amazing application is that it is the same power which accomplished that exaltation that is at work in *us*! There are lots of details we could get lost in here (eg how is the church Christ's body? how does he fill all things? etc), but stick to the main point: verses 20-23 give us an illustration of God's power at work in and for us.

22 Jesus, whom God had already made head over everything (in fulfillment of Ps 110:1f), is the one whom God 'gave' to the church to be its head too. The head of the church is the one already head of the universe:

23 *The fullness of him* has had much ink split over it. The simplest explanation is that Paul is saying here something similar to 22. Jesus 'fills the whole universe' (cf 4:9-10) and in the same way he also fills the church: they are his, and he is Lord/head over them (cf Col 1:15-20 for the same ideas of 'head' and 'fullness' used in this way).

## Summary of chapter 1

Looking back over the whole of chapter 1, it is very clear that Jesus Christ is a very important person in Paul's mind! Look back at the height (Christ is exalted over all) and breadth (all things are encompassed in his plan to be brought together under Christ) and length (God's centred-on-Jesus plan is from eternity past to eternity future). Paul is certainly trying to raise our spirits by raising our thoughts out of the mundane trivialities of this world. Do we realise we are part of something so big? Has that emphasis in Ephesians so far changed the way we think and act in our daily lives? And are we praying, as he does, to know and experience these great blessings more and more?

## Group Study Outline

### Ephesians 1:15-23 Theme Sentence

Pray that Christians will know God better - his eternal purpose for everything, the value of fellow-Christians in that plan, and God's power to achieve it.

#### Launching Question

What do you normally pray for Christians you don't know?  
(Do you pray for any Christians you don't know?!)

#### Questions

Verse 15 begins *For that reason...*

Summarise 1:1-14 in a sentence! Why does 1:1-14 mean that Paul now prays?  
What is the motive for your praying?

#### READ Ephesians 1:15-23

What's the point of Paul reporting the content of his quiet times?!

In pairs, separate out the sentences in these verses: what is Paul asking for?  
(Cf *Launching Question*) Are you praying the same sorts of things as Paul?

*In v18-19a, he prays that they will know ...*

- ... *the hope to which he has called you*
- What is God's great plan and purpose, and our 'hope' (according to 1:1-14)?  
How do we fit into this plan?  
How does it help us to know God's end point for the universe and everything?  
How will knowing this more confidently affect the mundane of our lives?

- ... *the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints*  
(Explain that the 'inheritance' is us-as-God's-inheritance, rather than 'heaven')  
What does God think of Christians?  
How should this status and privilege affect the way we think about 'church'?  
How will this help us when church (for whatever reason) feels less than we'd like?

- ... *the immeasurable greatness of his power*  
Why does Paul want Christians to know and experience God's power?  
OR: How does it help us to know where Jesus is seated? (*Clue: compare 2:6*)  
It's easy for us to think this world's powerful people are where true power lies:  
why is it important for Christians to know the truth of 19-23?

#### Thinking it through

How do your prayers compare with Paul's?  
'But I'm an ordinary Christian and could never pray the way Paul prays.' Discuss!  
Why is it that we will know God better if we know these things?

Don't forget to pray together at the start of the study that ... (*then précis v17*).  
And don't forget to pray at the end, seeking to use Paul's prayer as an example.  
It'd be ironic if this was the week, of all weeks, when prayer got squeezed out!



# Ephesians 1:15-23

## The story so far

In Ephesians 1:3-14, Paul says that we Christians have got it all ... no spiritual blessing is lacking, no blessing is overlooked, no blessing is held back. In fact, if you're a Christian, you've got the lot! In particular, in choosing, predestining, adopting, redeeming, forgiving us, God has incorporated us into his once-secret-but-now-revealed purpose to bring everything together under Jesus as head.

Christians are incorporated into this eternal plan as they (ie all different types of Christians) are brought together under Jesus as head. And what God has done so far for all Christians, he will one day do for all things (1:10) so that the church gives notice to all the cosmos (3:10) that God will complete what he intends (1:11). The church now is the nearest thing we have to heaven.

What do you pray for the person who has everything?! As we eavesdrop on Paul's prayer, he's teaching us not just how to pray, why to pray, and what to pray for, not just some doctrine in the content of the prayer, but also to reinforce the main themes of the whole letter.

## Ephesians 1:15-23 Theme Sentence

Pray that Christians will know God better - his eternal purpose for everything, the value of fellow-Christians in that plan, and God's power to achieve it.

## Application

It's natural to want to apply the Bible in group studies, week by week. Paul will apply, but not until 4:1. At this stage in the letter, the most important thing is to understand properly what Paul is saying, and then he can wallop us with his application later! But having said that, it's good to see here what he is led to do as he explains God's purpose and how we Christians fit into that.

- **Praise and thanks.** Just as 1:3-14 begins with an exclamation of praise, so his prayer for Christians begins with thanks for them (16). In the light of God's purpose in 1:3-14, of course we are thankful: there are always these things about you that I can be thanking God for! Why is church-life more often characterised by complaining about each other?!
- **Prayer.** 'For this reason ...' Paul prays for Christians, so presumably that should be our response to 1:3-14 too. But how different is his prayer from what more often fills our prayers/prayer meetings! Maybe we could pray for each other for (say) the next month using the requests of 17-23.
- **Knowing God.** Paul's concern is that Christians know God better. How will that happen? What does Eph 1 say to me if I'm a Christian but feel I don't know God very well? I certainly need to pray for these things.