

Learning the Things of God

--- Ephesians 1:15-23 ---

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Paul's letter to the Ephesians concerns what is real and lasting in our life in this world—(a) God's acceptance of us "in Christ," and (b) what His love accomplishes for us and in us. In this light, all worldliness is vanity, for it passes away with our "perishing" outside of Christ.

We humans have a built-in obsession for idolatry; we *must* worship something or someone. This worship is just as constant as the worship of the ancient Egyptians and Canaanites for their idols. Our idols are our new cars, the limitless contents of our department stores. Our temple is our mall. The *Titanic* was once Europe's idol; look at it now.

Our human idols are our pop stars, our sports heroes, our military and political leaders. They too get old, and die.

Knowing the message of Ephesians will transfer our natural, inborn love of idolatry into the healthy life-giving worship of the one true God—our Creator and Savior. The energy that we have consumed in vain idolatry will now be directed to everlasting life which begins here and now in a new quality of life free from the slavery imposed by sinful idolatry. It will be like walking out of prison!

Ephesians 1:15, 16: "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:"

Again, we remember that these dear people to whom Paul is writing (whether the Ephesians or "saints" everywhere else) are not perfect people. Remember too, Paul is in prison in Rome; prisoners like to get news. Paul seizes upon the news he has received of their "faith." It's not their perfect performance that inspires him, but their heart response to the *objective* gospel of Christ; *they believe!* And that believing, that faith, has produced in their formerly worldly, pagan hearts a "love for all the saints." Transformations enough to make any pastor-evangelist happy!

Paul can't get over his joy at the news of the change they have experienced. He's always thanking God for them, and when he prays to the Father intimately, personally, all alone in his prison, he "mentions" them by name. Prayer is not a mechanical "prayer-wheel" mechanism; you don't record prayers in your computer, and then hit a key to reactivate them as in the morning you hurriedly head off for work or for school. You personally *talk with God* on a one-to-one basis and take the time to understand what He is communicating to you.

Ephesians 1:17: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,"

There are specific items that Paul is asking for. Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you" (Matt. 7:7), and Paul is taking advantage of the offer, naming what he wants the Father to give these people:

1. *The "spirit of wisdom."* It's greater than some specific knowledge for this or that trivial situation

that is of passing interest; it's a *residing* gift of perception and good judgment constantly abiding in the heart.

But it's from "revelation," not something that is original with the "saint." It's never a charged battery that can function on its own; it always has to be connected to the mains where "revelation" is constantly in process, moment by moment.

What Paul is praying the Father to give the Ephesians is that they may become active participants in the plan of God for saving the world. For the humblest believer in Jesus, that's a connection with the Father as real and vital as it has ever been for any ordained prophet. It may not be as intense, but it's real.

2. *Paul's prayer is for us, too.* John describes the process by which in his case this "spirit of wisdom" came in steps. His principle makes sense for us: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which [1] God gave [2] Him to show His servants. ... And He sent and signified it by [3] His angel to [4] His servant John, who [5] bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that he saw" (Rev. 1:1, 2).

If you haven't been conscious of such a vital connection with God, that does not mean that it's not His plan for you, or that it isn't already becoming true in your life. Paul wrote during the first generation of Christians, 2000 years ago, but there are prophetic links that bind his message to us who live in this antitypical Day of Atonement.

Wonderful people as the first century Christians were, they were not spiritually mature in readiness

for the literal second coming of Jesus. They enjoyed the High Priestly ministry of Jesus in His *first* apartment work in the heavenly sanctuary—that prepared them for death and a part in the resurrection that takes place at the second coming of Jesus. Wonderful work!

But we are living under Christ's ministry in the *second* apartment, the time of the *cleansing* of the sanctuary. His goal now is to prepare a people for His second coming, that is, for translation.

Paul's far-sighted writing may have been over the heads of his people then (which is why Peter said there are some things Paul says that were often wrested by "unstable" people, 2 Peter 3:16). Paul's writing is now coming into its own; it's not over our heads now for it makes sense for us today.

3. *Paul is praying that the Lord will give us heavenly intelligence.*

Ephesians 1:18-21: "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."

"Understanding" has "eyes" that must be "enlightened." A key idea that pervades Paul's writings is "comprehension," seeing things, grasping

truth. In chapter 3 he again prays for the Ephesians, bowing his knees “to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... [that you] may be able to comprehend with all saints” the glorious dimensions of the love [*agape*] of Christ (3:14, 18). Often Jesus lamented the dullness of the Twelve to comprehend what He tried to tell them. That dullness may have been forgivable two millennia ago, but is it so for us today? On us “the ends of the ages have come”! (1 Cor. 10:11). Good works that we do can make God happy, but let’s not forget that a teacher is most gratified when his pupils *comprehend* what he communicates to them!

If you go through your life with the vague feeling that you are only another digit responding to a universal invitation like a recipient of Social Security getting something paid to a number, Paul wants you to sense to the full that the Father is calling you as an individual specially and individually. No one else can fulfill as well as you some special mission in life. That’s “the hope” embedded in your “calling.” When at last you meet the Lord face to face, He will give you “a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it” (Rev. 2:17). This will be no cold presentation ceremony like a university president handing out hundreds of diplomas at Commencement; you will have an intimate heart-to-heart conversation with the Father and a knowing glance from Jesus. You will look into His eyes and see a recognition that tells you that He understands all about you and your life and all the mysterious things you’ve never been able to unravel. That

“white stone” will be a little computer memory special to you!

“The exceeding greatness of His power” to us is more than triumph over cancer or over some financial crisis, great as that may be; it’s the power to conquer sin in our “sinful flesh” *through the faith of Jesus*. He Himself “condemned sin” and did it in the likeness of [our] sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3). Paul strains feeble words almost to their bursting point!

This “power” includes all that was in the power that raised up Christ from His tomb. Reverently we can say that nobody in all human history has ever been as “dead” as Jesus was dead! The reason is that He died a death unlike that which any other person has ever died—the second death, the death that is involved in the “curse of God.”

You have never understood what happened on the cross unless you understand Galatians 3:13: “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).” Not one human soul has as yet suffered the full weight of that “curse” except Jesus.

Paul is quoting Moses in Deuteronomy: “If a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, ... for he who is hanged [on a tree] is accursed of God” (21:22, 23). This was a prophecy of Jesus and His cross. Faith has always turned every curse into a blessing (for example, the believing thief crucified with Jesus was not cursed—He died wonderfully blessed). But

the people believed Moses, which is why the Jewish leaders were so determined to get Jesus onto a cross, for the moment the nails put Him there they knew He could not be the Messiah—"Moses said so!"

Now think of the power that was needed to resurrect that one Man who so fully suffered the curse of God! More power was needed to raise Him than all the power that will be exercised in resurrecting the billions in the coming "first resurrection"! *And that is the power that is given to you by which we will overcome sin in our sinful flesh!*

Ephesians 1:22, 23: "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

When Jesus said that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against" His church (Matt. 16:18, KJV), He stirred up the white-hot hatred of Satan and his evil angels. They became determined that the gates of hell *shall* prevail against that church. This explains the mysterious enmity that arises against Christ's church on earth. Attacks from the outside are not as mysterious as those that arise continually from inside. Solid truths that in the past were believed wholeheartedly are now undermined in sly ways within the church.

Although "Babylon is fallen" there is a hankering to import doctrines and worship patterns from popular religion, a modern counterpart of ancient Israel's cry, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5). Much of that apostasy was not due so

much to the depravity of the believers in Israel as to the "mixed multitude" which had always been a hindrance to the work of the Holy Spirit. We must not invite the "mixed multitude" today to dictate the future of the church.

In the days of the Judges, intermarriage with the Canaanites was frequent, as is the accession today into the church of those who have never been converted to Christ. Thus the modern church, like ancient Israel, is often a "mixed multitude."

But there is Good News for sincere people who are perplexed about the integrity of the organized church. Although it has become so worldly and so irreverent in its worship practices that many feel driven to leave and they are tempted to doubt that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against" it, still the Father has given Christ "to be head over all things to the church, which is His body." His will will be done on earth, as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10).

You must believe and claim that word of God. As Jesus walked into the polluted Temple and claimed it as "My Father's house" and expelled the polluters, overturning their tables and scattering their money all over the floor, so there is a sense in which faithful believers in Jesus must claim His headship over the church even today. But this is always by faith and not through force!

It will be a hand-to-hand, fierce battle of faith. But it must be waged by believers themselves; they must claim the church for Christ because the Father in His word has appointed Him to be its Head. There is something that those who believe in Jesus must do themselves and not wait for Jesus to do for

them. The dilatory “Lamb’s wife” must not wait for her Bridegroom-to-be to dress her for the wedding; no bridegroom ever has dressed his bride for the wedding! The Bride of Christ must “make *herself* ready” (Rev. 19:7, 8).

Understanding what’s going on will solve the problem of non-denominational “home churches” that spring up when the true “Lamb’s wife” is tempted to despair of her divinely ordained identity. If all who truly believe in Christ leave the organized church, this will be exactly what the Enemy wants to happen! Don’t let it happen!

“Why must the last generation become totally surrendered in order to be translated? Why can previous generations in the first resurrection enter heaven without the experience of total victory over sin required of those who will be translated?”

“Required” implies something that requires further balance in the thought of preparation. A bridegroom doesn’t *require* the surrender of his bride; he wins it. The marriage of the Lamb does not take place because God rigidly demands a self-sacrificial devotion that is finally forced; overcoming “even as [Christ] overcame” is a joyous character development that takes place as faith grows to a heart-union with the divine Bridegroom. It’s not a point-of-the-gun “requirement.” It is the fruit of justification by faith at last clearly understood.

(1) Why is the last generation the “*first*fruits unto God and to the Lamb” (Rev 14:4)? Sounds backward! It is a generation, a corporate body, not merely a handful of individuals, the some few of every age. Christ must have a Bride, a corporate

body of believers, the first to demonstrate that the overcoming that Christ accomplished in His life, human beings who have a mature faith can “copy” (though never equal). They will “reflect” His character, like so many broken scraps of worthless mirror not shining on their own, but each perfectly reflecting another facet of His righteous character like a huge diamond. This corporate body judges all previous generations.

(2) Satan’s charge for 6000 years has been that it is impossible for human beings with a fallen, sinful nature to overcome sin truly (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 24). He claims he has invented something (sin) that proves that God is wrong. Judged by the dismal record of Laodicea, it *appears* that he has won the argument. The fact that the Son of God overcame and “condemned sin in the flesh” is not the final issue, although popular “Reformationism” would love to consider it so—thus excusing “us” from overcoming truly (Luther can malign the Jews, drink his beer on his death-bed, and still be in God’s kingdom).

But something else is needed. Christ’s victory was indeed a set-back for Satan, and proved him wrong to the heavenly universe; but Satan’s charge still stands so far as *the human race* is concerned: “It’s impossible for us to obey . . .” (*idem*). The reason the 1888 message is so vigorously opposed is because of its teaching of the possibility, yes certainty, that God will have a people who overcome fully. There will be a demonstration of Christ’s righteousness in sinful flesh.

(3) “The honor of God” is involved in the character-perfection of His people. If they at last support Satan’s charge, He will be forever embarrassed.

(4) God loves all the vast hosts of redeemed who still “sleep in Jesus.” He longs to bring them from the tomb. But they must remain there as prisoners until the first resurrection (the Bible does not teach natural immortality; saints do not go to heaven at death). But that in turn cannot take place until the second coming of Jesus (no angel can resurrect the dead). But He dares not come so long as there is cherished or unknown sin still in the characters of His people, else His coming should “consume” them. Hence God’s love for “the dead in Christ” requires that a living last generation overcome totally, for otherwise He is stymied. (Again, popular “Reformationism” denies this, but it does not understand the Day of Atonement cleansing of the sanctuary).

(5) “He that is dead is freed from sin” (Rom 6:7), and no saint will come up in the resurrection still in captivity to it. All such slavery to sin is left in the grave. But apparently the 144,000, the last generation, so appreciate “the blood of the Lamb,” so clearly comprehend the length, breadth, depth, and height of *agape*, that self is truly “crucified with Christ.” They have died to sin, and as a corporate body are the *firstfruits* to demonstrate it.

They do not see the fundamental truth of Scripture—that the church is to become in a corporate sense the Bride of Christ (Rev 19:6, 7), and how the honor and vindication of Christ require her eventual repentance. This is the real truth of

Dan 8:14—repentance. (This does not mean of course that every individual in the church will at last repent—but it does mean that the church will repent in the experience of the shaking; many individuals will be shaken out).

Who hates and denies the truth of repentance? The answer: Satan himself. He is determined that the Seventh-day Adventist Church shall fail and become Babylon. I refuse to stand on his side!

Thus I dedicate, my life to work for revival, repentance, reformation, within the church, for this alone can bring honor to the One who gave His blood for this church.

May the Lord give you grace to dedicate your all to cooperation with our great High Priest in His closing work of atonement.

Please remember that an offshoot needs to convince only a few faithful Seventh-day Adventists to follow them, and their tithes and offerings provide a good living. May the Holy Spirit bring you conviction and anoint your eyes. So; stay in the church. Claim it for Jesus!