

Experiencing the Gospel - Eph 1:15-19

Ephesians: Into the Fullness of Christ

[Read Ephesians 1:11-20 page, ###] - Reading 11-20, focusing on 15-19.

Introduction

Last summer, Hayley and I along with Emma Jo and several members of Hayley's family were able to go to Rome Italy during my summer Sabbatical. The first thing we saw day one was the Roman Colosseum [Slide]. I, Hayley, and Emma Jo along with Hayley's mom Lorry got up early and took the metro to the next stop. Then there we were, right beside the Colosseum, with its shadow looming over us before the morning sun rose to high. Now this picture gives you some sense of the dimensions of the Colosseum. Can see the scale, how massive it is by the people in the lower right of the picture. You can see the layers of the construction, the masonry, and imagine the effort it took to build it. You can grasp for those of you who are more mechanically minded the methods taken to put this massive structure together. You can appreciate the mastery and ingenuity in the arches that would have given Romans who used it a breeze during the heat of the day. But a picture, for all the thousand words it can tell us, can't bring it to life. [End slide]

This picture can't tell you of the late morning heat beating down on my head when I took this picture. It can't tell you the feel of the original stone weathered by thousands of years and millions of footsteps. It can't tell you of the cool of the shade and the relief it gave as we walked among the pillars. It can't tell you of the weeks of preparation by Hayley so that we would have the exact right tickets to enter at the exact time we wanted to go in. This picture can't describe to you my feelings of claustrophobia trying to navigate the crowds of 10,000 tourist groups standing in the way everywhere you looked. It can't tell you the weightiness of being in and walking through something that magnificent and old.

Paul has captured a perfectly framed picture of the gospel in verses vv.3-14 of Ephesians. This masterful exposition of the gospel contains God's will in eternity past, the work of the triune God in the present, and the plans so sum up all of human history under Christ in the future. It's the whole picture perfectly framed. But that isn't enough.

It isn't enough for Paul to say a lot of beautiful things about the gospel. It's not enough for Paul to lay out the whole economy, the whole outworking in human history. It's not enough for Paul to speak of the forgiveness found through Jesus's sacrifice, it's not enough for Paul to speak of the Spirit's sealing as the first fruits of our full coming inheritance. It's not enough for Paul, unless the Ephesians can know personally and deeply the amazing benefits of this gospel. Notice I did not say, be able to articulate or even just understand

abstractly what Paul is saying. Paul wants the Ephesians to know personally the magnitude of this great truth.

So let's breakdown quickly what verses 15-19 say.

Quick Explanation of the Passage:

Following Paul's majestic doxology praising God for his blessing the church in Christ and the Spirit, starting in before creation and ending with God's restoration of all things (vv.3-14), Paul begins a prayer for his audience which was his common practice. But before he prays Paul defines all he has written as the "word of truth, the gospel of salvation (v.13)"

Paul has heard about the faith and love in the Ephesian church (v.15) has continually prayed for them, giving thanks to God for them (v.16), Paul prays that God would give the Ephesians a deeper knowledge of God's wisdom and revelation (v.17), by God himself opening their heart to know the hope of God, community of the saints, and the power of the resurrection (vv.18-19)

The big ideas of verses 15-19, I think, can be summarized with this main idea:

Main Idea: The Gospel is experienced in community!

I want to make sure you're hearing me correctly. I'm not saying that Christianity and our weekly worship is all about experience. If we wanted, we could black out the windows, get some killer lights, and buy some smoke machines, recruit a killer rock band, and - I could get a haircut like Brad's or Hunsucker's (love ya guys!)- and then we would all have an experience.

Paul, in this section of Ephesians, isn't speaking about the layout of a room, or the volume of the music, or the culture of a church. He speaks about the character of God's people.

There are three ways we as Antioch church experience the Gospel together week in and week out. They are:

1. Practice Faith and Love (v.15)
2. Pray for Understanding (v.16-17)
3. Hope in God (vv.18-19)

1. Practice Faith and Love (v.15)

Paul's hearing about the faith and love of the Ephesians shows that when we practice faith and love in community together we grow in our experience of the gospel,

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints

Isn't it interesting that faith (πίστεις) and love (ἀγάπη) begin the main body of the letter here in 1:15 and end the letter in 6:23, "Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

The characteristics of faith and love for Paul are defining virtues or characteristics of the church. The entire church has faith (1:15), has been saved by faith (2:8), has boldness and confidence before God by faith (3:12), has Christ dwelling in their hearts (plural) by their shared faith (3:17), is united by their faith in that there is one faith they all share and grow in maturity together (4:5, 17), has a defense against the evil one through their shared faith (6:16), and is the bond we all share that comes through God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (6:23).

While we as modern Christians may at times define faith as something possessed by the individual, Paul squarely places the concept of faith within the communal bond of the church. The reason that faith is not merely something we each own ourselves is that as Paul says it is not of our own doing (2:8). It is given as a gift to us in order to unite us through the gift. That is why Paul says consistently in Ephesians that the object or direction of our faith is towards Jesus. It is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (1:15; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13). *Faith is not merely knowing in your mind that Jesus exists or what the bible says about him, it is trusting in him.* It is the foundation of a relationship with God given to us in spite of who we are or what we've done! It's what binds us all together.

Faith is also closely associated with love in Ephesians. With faith, love frames the entirety of the letter (1:15; 6:23). If faith is our shared gift given by God that unites us together in Christ, love is imitation of God's love to us towards one another.

God's eternal purpose of creating a people for himself and choosing them is his love (1:4). God's love and mercy are the cause Paul says in Eph 2:4 of his making dead people alive in Christ. This love of God expressed to us in Jesus Christ goes beyond the bounds of our frail mental capacities (3:19). The brightest theologian, the most studious reader of Scripture, the most faithful evangelist, the most gifted teacher, the most merciful and compassionate lover of the unloved cannot fathom fully the dimensions of God's love.

It is God's inexhaustible boundless love that is the pattern for Paul in Ephesians for how Christians should try to love each other. It is the love we express to all the saints (Eph 1:15), gives us grounding we need with the rest of God's people to understand the dimensions of God's love (3:17-18). In other words it is through the love of God that we share with one another that we come to a deeper and fuller understanding of God's love for us! That's why Paul says in chapter 4 that we are to bear with one another in love (4:2), that we are to speak the truth to each other in love (4:15), and is the expression of the body of Christ functioning properly (4:16). That's why Paul commands the church in chapter 5:2 to walk in love, to live a life of love as Christ loved us (5:2).

Faith and love in Ephesians are both from God and the expression of true Christian community! They are the foundation of experiencing the gospel together.

2. Pray for Understanding (vv. 16–17)

Paul's prayer models for us what is the second main way we experience the gospel together, through praying for a deeper understanding of what the gospel is.

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him

Verse 16 in the original contains the main verb of verses 15–16, “I have not ceased giving thanks for you, mentioning you during my prayers.” Ceased is the main verb modified by two other participles, giving thanks, and praying.

The thankfulness that Paul experiences and intertwines his prayer is that he knows that God the Father, Son, and Spirit are at work. Thankfulness that the triune God is at work seems to be key for Paul for consistent prayer. The importance for us this morning is that when we take our eyes off of what God, Father, Son, and Spirit have done for us we lose motivation to pray. But we're strengthened to pray, We're emboldened to be consistent faithful prayer when we remember what God has done for us.

Not only does thankfulness help us to pray, it deepens our thankfulness and prayer for each other.

During days when it's hard and difficult to be thankful for the people in the chair next to you in this room, or your family members at home or your co-workers remember this, “the triune God is at work!” When it's hard to appreciate others in your family group remember, “the triune God is at work!” When your spouse or your kids are testing your patience remember, “the triune God is at work!”

Paul lays out the context of his prayer for the next five verses (17–21). We're just going to look at the first three verses of the prayer this morning. Paul's request in his prayer for the Ephesian church is that God would give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.

Paul's description of who God is in verse 17 is important for his prayer for the Ephesians. Paul calls God the “father of glory” in verse 17. God's glory is mentioned several times in vv.3–14. Paul uses the phrase “to the praise of his glory” referring to God the father in 1:6, 12, and 14. The praise of God's glory marks the themes of the opening section of the letter

Glory appears in the letter here in at the beginning in both Paul's doxology (his praise) to the Father (1:6, 12, 14) and his prayer (1:17, 18) and in prayer and explanation of his ministry in chapter 3 (3:16, 16, 21). The Father's will and choosing of a people through his son it "to the praise of his glory" (v.6). The Son's work of redemption to bring all things under his rule is "to the praise of the father's glory (v.12). The Spirit's work in giving us the first fruits the beginning of our inheritance is to the "praise of the father's glory (v.14).

That God is the "father of glory" means that he is the source of all glory and therefore the rightful recipient of all praise and worship (Theilman, 95). The idea of glory in the ancient world of Paul's day had several nuances. It's important to remember that words don't mean literally one thing and have meanings that are determined by context. It could refer to someone or something's appearance. It could refer to an opinion in ancient philosophy. It could refer to the honor of a person. Paul's uses the word glory here, which can be translated as an equivalent to the Hebrew word "glory" קָבוֹד (kavōd).

In the Old Testament the "glory" of God his *kavōd* refers to the weightiness and majesty of God in his appearing to his people in peals of thunder and fire (Ex 33:18). God's glory however is hidden by the thunderclouds of Sinai, and only Moses ascends the mountain and in the cloud alone encounters the glory of God. Moses descends from the Mountain and has to cover his face because it is shining with the radiance of God's glory (34:29).

We may have the face melting experience of Raiders of the lost ark here, but what does the glory of God entail. It is the radiance of God's nature and character that transcends our humanness. It is God's godness (not a typo). So, what is that? Moses on Mt. Sinai asks God to show him this glory:

¹⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." ²¹ And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.

⁵ The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. ⁶ The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Ex. 33:18-23; 34:5-7)

Glory here in both Exodus and Ephesians refers to the majesty and goodness of God's character. His glory is the shining brilliance of his character and nature.

Glory also factors into Paul's prayer in verses 17–18. God is the father of glory (v.17), and Paul's prayer is that the church would know the riches of their glorious inheritance among the saints (v.18). God has made for himself a people by his grace, made them heirs of his promises, and provided for them a future. For these gentile Ephesians Christians, Paul demonstrates that God has given them a past, present, and future that completely defines the reality of who they are.

Moses response to God's revelation of his glory is interesting because it picks up several themes of our text in Ephesians this morning:

⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. ⁹ And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance." (Exodus 34:8–9)

God's glory is what he shares with his people to communicate they are his possession. The inheritance Paul speaks of in verse 18 "as the glorious inheritance" is glorious because it is the inheritance that is God. The Spirit in verse 14 is the first fruits of the deeper and purer fellowship with God that is ours in Christ Jesus and will be fully realized and possessed when he comes to restore all things under Jesus. The father of Glory, like in the Exodus with Moses, is asked to give to the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.

Paul's prayer is that the Ephesian church would receive the ability from God to deepen their appreciation of his triune work towards them and his character. Paul here is referring to divinely bestowed wisdom and revelation. Again, in this passage there is a strong connection to chapter 3. Wisdom ($\sigma \omicron \phi \acute{\iota} \alpha$) and revelation ($\acute{\alpha} \lambda \omicron \kappa \alpha \lambda \upsilon \pi \sigma \acute{\iota} \varsigma$) are terms that appear when Paul begins to speak of the divine mystery that Gentiles are inheritors along with Israel in the promised inheritance found in Christ Jesus. This is a mystery that is a revelation revealed from God (3:2, 5). It demonstrates God's wisdom to the Spiritual powers and authorities of the earth (3:10).

Paul's prayer then is deeply connected to the insights he will provide the church in 2:11–22 and 3:1–14 that Jews and Gentiles are united together for God in Christ. Paul continues with ideas that relate to the unity of the church in Christ with the description of the purpose of his prayer in verses 18–19.

Paul's prayer that the Ephesians would more deeply understand God's character and work in the Gospel. And that brings us to the third and final application.

3. Hope in God (vv.18–19)

The last half of verse 18 and verse 19 further identify what asks God to make known to the Ephesians. Paul introduces three ideas that are closely interrelated.

having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might

The practice of faith and love and prayer for deeper understanding of who God is in meant to lead us as God's people into further hope.

Paul will also mention hope in this context (1:18), the third part of the triad of Christian virtue (Faith hope and love, 1 Thes 1:3; 1 Cor 13:13). Faith, Hope, and Love are the defining characteristics of those who have believed and experienced the gospel.

Paul isn't content that the Ephesians know the content of his blessing to God in vv.3–14, he wants them to experience it afresh from God himself (Thielman, 98).

That Paul is speaking about the inner experience of the Ephesians is evident for how he continues in verse 18, "Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened." Again it is in chapter 3 that Paul returns to the idea of an inner heart, "that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being (3:16)."

God makes it possible for the Ephesians to understand the benefits of the Spirit that he has already given them. I think this is the sealing of the Spirit and the first fruits of the Spirit Paul talks about in 1:13–14.

The deepened understanding that Paul prays God will give to the Ephesians concerns three things:

1. the hope to which he has called you
2. the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints
3. the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might

These three ideas closely build on each other and the third introduces a new idea in the first chapter which Paul will continue to expand on in verses 20–23.

The idea of hope in Ephesians is closely connected to the unity Paul is presenting of the entire church. The Ephesians before that were united to Christ were, "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (2:12)"

Paul mentions hope and calling later in Ephesians (4:1, 4). In Ephesians 4:4–6 Paul writes,

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Hope in Ephesians is the confidence that we are God’s people. Christians should be people of hope. I think we often associate hope with positivity. By that I mean we often associate hope or being hopeful with putting the most positive spin on what we see in the world. Being a hopeful Christian doesn’t mean always having a cheery disposition or positive attitude towards both our own inner brokenness and sin and the horrors of this world.

Paul doesn’t tell the Ephesians to do that. Paul reminds the Ephesians that before they were in Christ they were in a terrible situation. They were under the power of the Spirit of disobedience, they were without God.

The hope that the Ephesians have been called to means that despite what they have to put death in themselves and whatever they experience from the world that they encounter it all with a quiet confidence that they are God’s.

Paul’s prayer is the deepened appreciation of the gospel brought about by God’s Spirit should make us people of hope! Paul further explains what this hope is with the next phrase, **the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.**

The hope that God has called us to is that we have a glorious inheritance! We have been made his people, that is the hope we are called to. “**We who were once far off,**” Paul says later in chapter two, “**have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**”

This inheritance is not just for each one of individually, but the in the riches of who God is he brings us into the community of his people. The inheritance is found “**in the saints.**” The hope of the Gospel is both that we are now known by God and now have a family we will belong to forever. This should change everything about how we relate to and value not only the members of Antioch church but Christians in general.

Finally, the way that God brings us into his forever family is “**the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.**”

Paul has outlined the entirety of God’s salvation through the Son and Spirit in chapter one, but he now brings up the way in which God brought about his salvation, through **immeasurable greatness of his power.**

That immeasurably great power Paul goes on to state is the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus (vv.20–23).

When we come to the table each week, as Brad said several weeks ago we approach the elements somewhere between a funeral viewing and a conga line.

But imagine with me rather that it's a reminder and presentation of God's power.

[Normal Communion Liturgy]

We practice weekly communion in part because it reminds us all who our hope is. It reminds us as we stand in line and come to the front together that we are all part of the same glorious inheritance, and Christ's body broken for us and blood spilt for us testify to us God's immeasurable power.

Come and experience the gospel.

[Pray]