

# Sermon Ephesians 1:15-23

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## Introduction

Paul starts off this section with “for this reason”, pointing back to all the wonderful things that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit have done in our salvation. The Ephesians, by their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints, are showing that God has worked in their lives and so giving proof to what Paul has been saying in the first 14 verses. And because God has been doing this Paul wants to give thanks to God for them and all he has been doing in them and to remember them in his prayers. Do we do this? Do we remember our fellow believers and the member of our congregation in our prayers, giving thanks to God for them and for the things that he is doing in their lives. As the story goes John Bunyan was converted by three washerwomen talking about the things that God had done in their lives. Do we talk about what God has done in our lives? Do we encourage one another?

And we also have what Paul prays for them. He asks the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, that He may give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation that they might know God better. It's not that they don't have the Spirit or that they don't know God, but Paul prays that they would continue to grow and have yet more blessings from God. We should always be growing as Christians. Notice that Paul does not pray for them that they would be freed from persecution, that they would have more riches, honour or the things of this world, but rather that they would know God more and more. Solomon prayed for wisdom and the riches and everything else followed. Although for us the riches may not necessarily follow (though they may) the critical point is where our priorities lie. Solomon's were the right way around. And so were Pauls. What about ours? Is the kingdom of God our first priority?

He also prays that the eyes of their heart (or understanding as some other translations have it) have be enlightened so that they may know the hope to which they are called and the riches of this glorious inheritance in the saints. Matthew Henry put it like this - “*For grace is glory begun, and holiness is happiness in the bud*”. Not to mention the incomparable great power for us who believe.

## So What's Wrong With Our Understanding?

But why do we need these things. We can read. Many of us here have tertiary degrees. There is nothing wrong with our understanding. So why exactly do we need the Holy Spirit to help us understand the bible? Well, lets step back a bit and have a look at where we are spiritually in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Let's start with the TV guide, a magazine that a large number of NZ homes will have in it. Apart from the obvious there are two pages devoted to horoscopes, astrology and psychics. Then we have people with their good luck charms and dragons and crystals and healing stones. All of which would have made you fit in very well with society 5000 years ago. So despite all those years of “progress” these ancient ideas are still very much with us, despite many of the foundations on which they rest having long “disproved” - scientifically at any rate. We still have people believing in black cats and ladders and other weird and wonderful superstitions. And we probably have to include ourselves in that lot I'm afraid. Most of have particular ways of doing things because we think that by doing them that way they will somehow turn out better. Then we have the full range of more traditional ancient religions. And not to mention some of the more controversial modern ones – like scientology – which despites it name – isn't, scientific that is. Yet John Travolta, Tom Cruise, Kirsty Alley and



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Isaac Hayes, if my research is correct, are ardent followers.

So in summary – there is a wide range of beliefs out there – from the obscure to the weird – so the one thing I think we can say is that mankind is not very discerning when it comes to spiritual things. And that's in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And we of course are well educated scientific people.

So what if we go back in history a bit. Well, let's have a look at the Israelites and their departure from Egypt. In Exodus we have the writings of God demonstrating his power through the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the water from the rock etc. Surely that would be enough to prove to anyone that God exists and is who he says he is. But did the Israelites believe? No. They went after other gods. But why we may ask? Well, we have two choices. The first is easy. We could say that actually the writings we have not actually true. Rather they are the written down stories that the Israelites use to tell, probably having some basis in fact, and in the telling they sort of got enlarged. Actually that then goes for the whole of the Bible. Some of it is more accurate than other bits but it's difficult to be sure which is which. So then the reason for them not believing is really simple – there wasn't really anything to believe in. Now before I have Tim Bulkeley jumping up and down – yes, there is one aspect of biblical studies which requires to ask the sort of questions I have been parading. What are the basis of the stories, what other literature genres affected the writing of them, are they accurate as defined by our current understanding, etc. But in our pride in being able to correlate and critique and compare the question becomes – what is the bible? Is it just a book with stories of people's experiences of what they thought were their dealings with God, or is it a book shaped and formed by God through people's experiences of Him. The former means that it's pretty much worthless giving the fact that as we have already seen, people are pretty much happy to believe just about anything providing it does something for them. The latter means that what it tells us about God is true. If we go for this (which I do, in case you're at all interested) then, where does that leave us?

Well, the other alternative is that they were just like us. Perfectly capable of believing just about anything and also of ignoring the blinding obvious. If there was someone in this congregation who had cancer and we prayed for them and they were cured immediately we would all thank God would we not? Yet, and answer this honestly, how many of you would have that niggling feeling in the back of your mind that it wasn't actually a miracle but rather a misdiagnosis, or a regression in the cancer, or something else? We don't like the unexplained. What if it was a shrivelled arm that was made well? Now that is more difficult to explain away but some part of us would still try to do it. That's probably why most faith healers stick to the more ambiguous things.

Kurt Godel – Incompleteness theory (1931). Georg Cantor – set theory. Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell – Principia Mathematica ~ 360 pages to prove that  $1+1=2$ .

From the position of hindsight we might say that were a particularly dumb lot and anyway, they weren't sophisticated 21<sup>st</sup> century people. But I would suggest that makes it even worse for us. Despite science and the great strides we have made in understanding the world around us, superstition is still very much part of our society. Even the TV guide has adverts for horoscopes and astrology and tarot readings. The reality is that we aren't any better than the Israelites were back all that time ago in terms of spirituality. You would think after 6000 odd years things like horoscopes, astrology and tarot readings would have gone the way of the dodo. But no, they are still very much with us. If what happened to the Israelites all that time ago was to happen today, there would I'm sure be lots of scientific enquires and theories, but for most of us it would just be yet another thing to talk about then ignore. This is one of the issues with miracles, particularly in the modern age. Unless you happen to know the person personally who is, for example, miraculously cured, you will normally put it down to anything rather than the working of God. This is one of the issues with modern faith healers. This is what Paul means by us being spiritually dead until the Holy



Spirit comes in to our lives. And why we need the Spirit of wisdom and revelation and a heart that understands. Without it we will not be changed, we will not grow as Christians, we will not be any different to those around us.

This is especially an issue at places like Universities where there is a high level of pride in what intellectually man has accomplished.

That is why I would suggest that we are in fact, despite being sophisticated 21<sup>st</sup> century people, so desperately in need of wisdom and revelation and a heart of understanding – something which only the Holy Spirit can do for us. Otherwise all the spiritual things that do happen around us we will simply fail to see. And why also we fail to see the significance of much of the bible.

### **You've Got The Power**

That power that has worked with in us is like the mighty strength that God exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead. And not only raised him, but seated him at His right hand in the heavenly realms. Even more, He set Him far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only at that time, but for all time to come.

### **Who We Are in Christ**

If people really understood what exactly we have as Christians there would be queues at the door to get in and we would be the most honoured of people. Do you want wealth? Well the whole Universe is ours through Christ. Do you want power? The one who we worship is Lord over all and we can talk to him like a friend. He is head over everything for the church, which is his body and the church is that which makes Christ complete. Not that he needs us, but rather that he has chosen us – we are his pearl of great price that he in a sense sold everything he had and came down to earth to purchase us. We are his great concern, his great joy. That's our standing in Christ, no matter who we are.

### **Something To Think About:**

What does Paul mean by the first part of verse 19 - “*and his incomparable great power for us who believe*”?

