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**The Truth About Our Life in Christ**  
*A Study in the Book of Ephesians*  
**A Prayer for Enlightenment**  
**Ephesians 1:15-23**  
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Let's imagine that I own a high-rise condominium somewhere on the West Coast, and I decide to give you an all-expense-paid month's vacation there. I give you the keys and send you on your way, and you arrive there and find it right by the ocean. You get into the elevator and go up to the floor where you've been assigned. When you go inside, you discover it's a nice place with a kitchenette, living space, and a couple of bedrooms. But you are a little disappointed because it seems kind of small to stay there for a month. You are also disappointed because you thought, since it is on the ocean, that it would have windows overlooking the ocean, but that's not the case. There aren't any windows at all because it's on the inland side. But you think, "Hey, it's free—we can't complain too much." So you decide to make the best of it and have a good vacation with your family.

About two weeks into your vacation, I give you a call to check in and see how you are enjoying it. In the course of our conversation you say, "Everything's OK. It's small, but we're making it work." When you say that, I begin to think that is kind of odd. So we talk further and I say, "What do you think about that breathtaking view of the ocean?" You respond, "Well, when you go outside and look at the ocean—yes, it's breathtaking." I'm trying to figure out what's going on, when suddenly it dawns on me, and I say, "Go clear to the back of that condo. Do you see those two large wooden doors?" You say, "Yeah, they're in the back." "*Have you opened those doors?*" "No, we just thought they were storage, or maybe stairs going down or whatever." "*Well, stick your key in there and open those doors.*" So you throw open these two wooden doors, and it opens up into a very large, beautiful living space that is nothing but windows overlooking the ocean. When you open the windows, in comes this cool fresh ocean breeze that replaces all the stale air from everyone piled into the little space. Suddenly it's become a whole new place for you. It was always there and you had access to it. It always belonged to you, but you just didn't know it was there. What a radical difference it made when finally your eyes were opened to what you really had in that condominium.

That's the intent of Paul's heart as he writes the latter part of Ephesians 1. It's as if Paul is saying, "I know that you've moved in. I see the marks of that. I know you've discovered the 'kitchenette, the living space and a couple of bedrooms.' But what I'd really like you to do is 'stick the key in the lock and unlock the door.' I want to open the eyes of your heart to the full extent of what you have in Christ, so that you will be overwhelmed with this incredible salvation that we have been given in Christ."

That's what we would like to accomplish as we look into the book of Ephesians. Take your theological key and put it into the lock, which means turning to Ephesians 1. Let's see if we can understand how Paul wants to enlighten the eyes of our hearts that we might see what we truly have in Christ. Beginning in verse 15: "For this reason I, too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints."

As you read through Paul's epistles in the New Testament, you find that there is a couplet he often uses to identify the marks of a believer. That couplet is what we find here: "faith and love." He very consistently says that what marks someone who's truly a believer is faith and love. When Paul says that he has heard of their faith and love, he is saying, "I know that you've moved in. I know that you are a believer and that you have received this salvation, and that's the starting point."

Let's talk about those two marks of a true believer: faith and love. When Paul talks about faith, he is talking about belief. We said in verse 1 that when Paul described the saints in Ephesus as those who were faithful in Christ Jesus, we could translate that as "those who believe in Christ Jesus." This is that same word; faith means to believe. But we are believing something by faith. We talked about this from Acts, that when Paul was in Ephesus he taught the people hour after hour the truths of God, their salvation, and all that they needed to know in terms of doctrine and theology. But the reality is they had to make a choice whether to believe that or not. When we go through these truths in Ephesians 1, I can't prove any of this to you. I can't put it under a microscope; I can't take a poll; I can't hire a scientist to somehow prove it to you. We do have to choose to believe it by faith.

If this information were just a product of an overactive imagination on my part, then I could understand why you'd be pretty hesitant to believe. But these are the very words of God. We're going through these words, line by line, verse by verse. This is what God has said, so we're wrestling with the question: Do we believe that God tells the truth? And if we do, then we make a choice to believe what we can't prove—what we can't put under a microscope. We talked last week about this spiritual dimension, where if we could dial it in, we'd see what's really true. But we can't. So we believe by faith that it's there and that what we're being told is true.

Our tendency is to say, "Prove it, then I'll believe it." If you read Hebrews 11:6, it's the other way around. God says, "You choose to believe it by faith, then I'll confirm it to you." When God says He is a rewarder of those who seek Him, it means that if we seek Him by faith and believe, then He comes along and confirms that belief. If you were to ask me if I believe that Ephesians 1 is true, I would say, "Absolutely." The reason is because I first take a step of faith, and I believe that God tells the truth. But then God comes along and confirms that faith and reminds me that what He has said is really true. And that just makes it all the stronger. The difference between believers who truly believe and those who struggle with doubt is the difference between crawling through our Christian life and dancing through our Christian life.

I read a story this week about a man who, years ago, was walking in the wintertime when he came to a river. He was going to have to cross this river, and it looked like it was frozen—there was ice on it. He wasn't quite sure if the ice was thick enough to hold his weight, so he stepped out just a little onto the ice. It didn't crack or break, so he thought it might be OK. But he really wasn't sure, so he got down on his hands and knees. He began to cross the river slowly and cautiously on his hands and knees, working his way out, not sure if the ice would hold or not. He was about halfway out on the river when he said he heard this sound of thunder and looked behind him. Coming down the road was a team of horses pulling a buggy, going as fast as they could go, coming right toward the river. When they got to the river, he said they slowed down just a little, and then they went out onto the ice, thundering across the river right next to him, and thundered up the road onto the other side.

The man said all he could do was sit there in total embarrassment on his hands and knees, since he had been crawling across this frozen ice.

When I read that story I thought about how that is similar to what Paul is talking about here. There are a lot of Christians who will go through their Christian life, not being sure, so they will just kind of crawl. They are not sure if the “ice is going to break” or not. But then there are those of faith who choose to believe and who say, “God does tell the truth, and I can ‘take this to the bank’ ” Those are the people who just thunder their way through life, confident that what God has said is true.

When Paul is referring back to these saints in Ephesus, it’s interesting that he says, “I have *heard* of your faith.” What did he mean by that? He means that what we believe translates out into how we live. Paul is saying, “I hear how you’re living, and that tells me what you’re believing. Because I can’t see your faith but I can see your life.” The reality is that we can say we believe all kinds of things. But what we truly believe is evidenced by how we live. Paul is encouraged here and he says, “There’s every evidence that you’ve ‘moved in’—that you’ve truly trusted Christ as your Savior.” So the first thing he talks about is their faith—their belief.

The second thing he talks about is their love. Notice that he says their “love for all the saints.” It’s a love not for just a few handpicked saints—but for all the saints. It’s interesting to me that when you read through the New Testament there is such an emphasis on the fact that it is love which identifies us as a follower of Christ. That intrigues me, because if you were to go to the mall today and randomly ask people, “What would you say most characterizes a follower of Jesus?” how many of them do you think would say “love”? I don’t know that many of them would, because I’m not sure that love is really an identifying mark of the church today, but it should be. Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” Let’s face it, churches are notorious for fighting with each other. But Jesus said what should mark us is our love for one another. And the reason we love one another is because we believe Ephesians chapter 1—that we’re fellow beggars who were simply called by God to be recipients of His blessing. We all come on equal terms. We’ve received His blessing, and we together are His inheritance. Therefore, we have a mutual commitment to one another as family. We love one another. If love is the identifying mark of a follower of Christ, then it should be the type of love that somehow sets us apart from the rest of the world.

In my reading this week I came across a description of a painting. I’ve never heard of this painting before, but it was a painting that was trying to capture the imagery of hell. The author said that this was a painting of a large table, and on the table was a feast. There were people seated around this table to eat the feast, but they could only eat with the utensil that was given to them. What was given to them was a very long spoon which was so long that they could not feed themselves. The only way they could use this spoon was to reach across the table and feed someone else. Therefore, the only way you could eat of this feast was to allow yourself to be served by someone else. But the problem is that hell is an environment of total selfishness, so no one was willing to serve or be served. So while the feast was in front of them, they all starved. I thought that was a clever imagery, and of course, that’s an accurate imagery of the church. The difference should be that, rather than starving, we feast because we serve and allow ourselves to be served together in the body of Christ. That’s what marks us as a follower of Jesus.

Paul is saying in verse 15 that he is very encouraged because these people in Ephesus have believed and they show the marks of true believers. He is saying, “I know that you’re in—that you’ve discovered the ‘kitchenette and the living space and these bedrooms.’ But what I want to do now is kick open these doors and show you how much more there is to your faith in Christ.” He goes on in verse 16 to say: “I do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom {*discernment*} and of revelation {*this unveiling or opening of these doors we’re talking about*} in the knowledge of Him.”

When Paul says “in the knowledge of Him” it is very important to understand what he is saying. In fact, you will not fully appreciate Ephesians 1, 2 & 3 unless you understand this specific point. We have a tendency to just want to know what to do: “What does God want me to do? Give me a rule to follow. Tell me something to *do* and I’ll go out and do it.” The problem is that often we’re more interested in the doing than we are in this relationship with God. Ultimately God didn’t save us so that we would do. God saved us so that we would enter into relationship with Him. That’s the whole point of this life in Christ—that we know Him—that we become intimate with Him. Here when it says “the knowledge of Him” it is a term of intimacy. It’s not saying that we should fill our minds with facts about God. But rather, it’s the same word that’s used to describe the sexual relations between a husband and a wife. It’s a term of great intimacy. Paul is saying, “I want you to become more intimate with God. I want this discernment, this unveiling, to cause you to fall deeper in love with God.”

That’s what Ephesians 1, 2 & 3 are all about—that we would know God and understand what He’s done for us. Because when we understand who He is and what our relationship is to Him, it will then *affect* our doing. But oftentimes we want to skip right to the doing and we don’t pay enough attention to the relationship. So Ephesians 1, 2 & 3 are about the relationship with God. Then chapters 4, 5 & 6 are about what we do—our obedience—our response to that. So if you walk away today thinking, “I don’t know what to *do* with this,” you’ve missed the point. I want you to walk away more deeply in love with God and be drawn into more intimacy with Him. I want you to long to spend more time with Him because you realize more fully who He is and what He has done for us. Paul says that is what he is talking about here. He wants us to grow in our knowledge or intimacy of God.

Verse 18: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...” Not my physical eyes, but the eyes of my heart, in my mind, with my will, with my emotions—that the inner core person would be enlightened to this truth that he’s going to talk about. Let’s summarize what Paul has said so far. He’s said: “I see the marks of a genuine faith. There is faith and there is love. I want, with wisdom and revelation, to cause you to draw into a more deeper, intimate relationship with God. To do that I want to open the eyes of your heart and enlighten you.” Now he is going to tell us the three specific things we are to be enlightened to.

Verse 18 gives us the first of the three: “... so that you may know what is the hope of His calling.” The first thing he wants is to open up the eyes of our heart to the hope of our calling. The meaning of the word “hope” here is not like we use the word “hope” in English. It’s not the same as when we say, “I hope it gets warmer tomorrow.” Hope in the Bible is a sure thing. It is something future, but it is absolute—an assurance of something. When he says “the hope of His calling” he is referring to what he’s already discussed in chapter 1. It’s the fact that we have been called out to receive the bounty of God’s lesson and that is what gives us hope.

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*—a word that means “called out ones.” It means that, out of all of mankind, we have been called out to be His church. We have been called out to be the recipients of His blessing. Paul is obviously referring here to what he’s already told us when he says, “Remember this incredible message—this assurance of your salvation—because you are called. You were chosen before the foundation of the world. You’ve been adopted as a child of God. You’re a legal heir to the family fortune. You have been redeemed—you’ve been purchased and set free. Your sins have been forgiven and the Holy Spirit has been given to you as a mark or a seal that you are God’s possession. The Holy Spirit was a down payment, assuring you that God is going to ultimately fulfill your salvation in this glorious day when everything comes together in Christ. All of that is a sure thing and that is the hope of your calling.” In other words, that is a reminder that what we have in Christ is sure and it can’t be lost. It’s far more glorious than anything this world has to offer.

This past week I had lunch with someone I had never met before, and I had a very encouraging time as this person shared with me his story—and it has been a very difficult story. He currently has a disease and is just going to start chemo treatment again this week. It looks like the days ahead are not going to be easy for him, along with lots of other things on top of that. Yet, in the midst of that, he has a really significant faith, where he obviously is trusting God with these things in his life. In the course of that conversation we started talking about this very truth: How would we survive these difficulties in life if it wasn’t for the understanding that there’s a better life to come? If this life was all there is, how would we endure those kinds of circumstances? He looked me right in the eye and he simply said, “If this life was all there is, I would not survive.” What he understands is that day by day he lives in victory because he knows there’s a better place coming. And that’s the “hope of His calling.” He realizes that no matter what life throws our way, there is a hope for a life that is better than this, and that life is guaranteed. We long for that day and that is what allows us to live with whatever life throws at us now.

I would say that in the last few years I have really started to understand what that means and, more days than not, I have this growing homesickness, where I just am ready to go home. You might think that sounds kind of morbid. No, it isn’t morbid at all. In fact, it’s liberating. The more we long for the eternal, the more it sets us free from the temporal—the more we’re able to live in this world. Because there is nothing this world can throw at me that can take away my hope. My hope is sure!

Think about the different things in life that we experience which come and go. Take athletics, for example. No matter how good you are as an athlete, it comes and it goes. You age and you peak and you go down. Teams have their moments and then they go down. That’s just the way it is—it comes and it goes. Maybe you’re involved in a business and you understand that today business may be OK, but tomorrow it may not be. So you’re relentlessly pursuing to somehow stay on top. There’s an insecurity in all of that. Or maybe some get their esteem from how they look—from their beauty. But we understand that there’s this aging process and that it comes and it goes, and that creates a real insecurity. Whatever you look to in life creates insecurity, because there is only one thing which is sure, and that is the hope of our calling that we have in Christ. So Paul says he wants to open up these doors so we can see how sure and how glorious this is. He wants us to live every day filled with the hope of our calling and to celebrate that wonderful truth.

The second thing that Paul wants our eyes enlightened to is really an amazing concept, so you have to just sit and think about it for a minute. He says, “what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” That’s not saying that we get an inheritance (which we do, but that’s not what he’s referring to here). He’s referring to the fact that we, as God’s people, are *God’s* inheritance. We said last week that verse 11 probably should be translated “having *become* an inheritance” when it talks about how the Jews were God’s inheritance. The Old Testament uses that language a lot. Then he says the mystery of God’s will is that the Gentiles are brought into that, so together we have become God’s inheritance. But now he’s filling that out all the more, and what he is saying is hard to grasp. He is saying that, out of everything in the universe that exists, we are God’s treasure. Just stop and think about that—that’s really an amazing thought! It dramatically affects our view of God to think that, out of everything in the universe that is so spectacular, *we* are God’s inheritance. *We* are God’s treasure.

Many people have warped views of God. They may see God as a task-master who’s constantly demanding, or they have a view of God as someone just waiting for people to fail, or constantly disgusted by our behavior. But this is telling us that when God looks at us, we are His treasure—we are His trophies of His grace. You look in the mirror and you say, “Boy, I don’t see a treasure.” And you look at your life and say, “I don’t feel like I’m really much of a treasure.” Therein lies the problem—we should not be looking in the mirror, because that’s how we get ourselves in trouble. We should be looking in the Word—that is the mirror. One of the reasons we often struggle in our Christian life is because our eyes are far too much on ourselves and not nearly enough on God. Paul is saying that the basis of this inheritance is not because we are something special or we’re living so well or doing so much. The basis is the fact that we are *in Christ*. And we are merely the recipients of this outpouring of His grace. But because that is true, and we are trophies of His grace, we are His treasures. He looks at us and He smiles. When I understand that God treasures me because I’m a trophy of His grace, that causes me to want to be all the more intimate with Him—to come into His presence all the more. It causes me to fall in love with Him more deeply when I realize how He looks at me. Of all the people in the universe, the One who should really matter to you is God, and He says that He treasures you. That ought to put a smile on your face, because that is an amazing thing.

Paul says, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.” Imagine the small condo that we talked about earlier. It’s filled with the stale air and stale breath of everybody living on top of each other, because we’ve been focused just on ourselves. The doors are then flung open and that stale air is replaced by the cool ocean breezes—the very breath of God—as our eyes are shifted from ourselves to God and we realize who we really are to God.

The third thing Paul wants us to understand is the power of God. He says he wants our eyes to be enlightened concerning the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and: “what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might.”

Paul really stacks up the terms to try and communicate this power in verse 19. There are four terms used here which have to do with the power of God. He says “what is the surpassing greatness of His **power** {*the word from which we get our English word dynamite—it means an explosive power*} toward us who believe...in accordance with the **working** {*the Greek word from which we get our English word energy—meaning this is an energizing type of power*} of the **strength** {*the word that means this dynamic force or power*} of His **might**

*{a term that means the power to conquer—the Greek word from which we get the word autocrat, meaning someone who has conquered}*. So Paul is using four terms to make the point that this is a tremendous, energetic, conquering power from God.

He is then going to give us three examples of how this power has manifested itself. Verse 20: “which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead.” He’s saying that one of the ways His great power was manifested was when He raised Christ from the dead. But the text literally reads, “when He raised Christ from the dead ones.” That is important, because Lazarus was raised from the dead, but Lazarus died again. There were other people in the New Testament who were raised from the dead, but they died again. In other words, death for them was merely postponed. Several of us have had death postponed because of the wonders of modern medicine, the skills of surgeons, and the grace of God. But the reality is death wasn’t prevented for us—it was just postponed. We will still die. What was unique about Jesus wasn’t just that He rose from the dead, but that He rose to a whole new level—He conquered death. Lazarus rose again, but he would die again. Jesus is the first group of those who have conquered death—meaning He no longer would ever again be subject to death. And because of that great power, that means one day when I die it will not be the end of my story, because I will rise again. I will rise again, not to experience death again, but I will rise to a whole new level of life where I’ll never again be subject to death. Jesus conquered death once and for all, so God says it is the power of that conquered death.

The second illustration of this power is also in verse 20: “and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, *{which could be translated every title that is titled}* not only in this age, but also in the one to come.” This is the power that seated Christ at the right hand of God, which is not a statement of location, but a statement of position. It means He was put in a position of authority, and He says that authority is over every power (over every person, over every title, over every spirit, over every being) in this age and in the age to come. He is the top power—the ultimate power. He has power over evil, power over the demonic, and power over every other power.

When you listen to people talk about Jesus today you hear all kinds of opinions. Some say he wasn’t really God, and others say He didn’t do this and didn’t do that, and there are all kinds of blasphemous films made. But if we could just dial into that spiritual dimension, we would suddenly realize that Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, and that is what’s true. I mentioned last week that the spiritual dimension is actually more true than this physical dimension in which we live. People need to know what is really true: that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, and that He’s the ultimate power and sits in supreme reign over the universe. One day everyone will know this dynamic, energetic, conquering power of God. It’s the power that not only conquered death, but conquered evil and every other power and every other title. They will know that He sits and reigns supreme.

The third exercise of this power is seen in verses 22-23: “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” I have to tell you that verse 23 is one of the most debated verses in all of the New Testament concerning what it means. We could spend a lot of time trying to sort it out and we’d all walk away confused, so instead I’m going to tell you what I think it means. But first, looking at verse 22, you have to stop and ask yourself a question. If He put all things in subjection under His feet, then certainly the church would be included in the “all things.” So why would he say He is put in as head “over all things” and

then go back and say he's also put Him as head over the church. That seems redundant. It is saying that Jesus is put in a position where all things are subject to Him, so this same God who reigns over the universe has committed Himself to becoming the head of the church. In other words, He's incredibly over-qualified for that position, because He is head over the universe. But He chooses, in a very real and intimate way, to become the personal head of His church, in order to fill that church with the fullness. That fullness is so vast that it fills the universe, and He specifically is going to use that power to fill His church.

To understand that concept, let's imagine that I coached a Little League baseball team. It's the level that would go to the Little League World Series like you see on television. But somehow I manage to recruit Sammy Sosa from the Chicago Cubs to play for my Little League team. He's going to play 100% all-out for my team. Now he's way overqualified for this—he would even beat Mark McGuire in the Home Run Derby if he played the whole season at the Little League level. But somehow I'm able to make this work, so he *should* be playing in that league, but he *chooses* to play in this league. But it goes farther than that. Not only does he choose to play in this league, for which he is way overqualified, but he also chooses to crawl into the skin of every one of those Little League players so that they can play at his level. Now he has filled them with the fullness of all that he is. Suddenly this Little League team is going to play at a level far beyond what they could even imagine.

That's what's being said in those verses. This One who rules the universe has humbled Himself to become the head, to rule and reign in a very personal and intimate way His church—His body on earth—in such a way that He crawls into our skin and fills us with the fullness of all that He is, so that we might operate at a level far beyond our own ability to be His church.

Look at what Paul says about this power in verse 19: “what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” He doesn't just say this is God's power generically—He says this is God's power toward the church. This power that conquered death and evil and this power that rules and reigns over the universe is the power that is given to us, the church, that we might live in light of who we are as His treasures.

That should radically change the way we view our lives, when we understand that these doors have opened and what an incredible view we have of our salvation. We understand this hope of our calling, that no matter what happens in this life, it cannot take away my hope, because I'm headed to a far better place. That is sure—it's guaranteed—it is bought and paid for. I understand this amazing truth that out of all the universe, for some reason God chose me to be His treasure, not because I'm anything, but because I'm clearly a recipient of His grace. I'm a trophy of that grace and He celebrates. That makes me want to be intimate with Him.

Then He says, “I've given you this incredible power that conquers death and evil, that reigns over the universe, but very personally and intimately I fill you with My power that you might live in light of this truth about who you are in Christ.”

I would pray with the apostle Paul that the eyes of our hearts might be enlightened to the truth of who we really are in Christ.