

The knowledge of him and the hope of his calling

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Ephesians

By Rev. David Silversides

Bible Text: Ephesians 1:17b-18
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Loughbrickland Reformed Presbyterian

22 Main Street
Loughbrickland, Co. Down
Northern Ireland
BT32 3NQ
UK

Website: www.loughbrickland.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/ldrpc

And to God's eternal purpose of redemption in Christ Jesus, and he has, in so doing, elaborated on all the spiritual blessings bestowed on God's people in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he prays for the Ephesian believers in verse 15, "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." And we look then at the title by which God is spoken of, or the Father is spoken of, in verse 17, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." The Father is here called the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, because Christ as mediator had become a man and so he said to Mary, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father and my God and your God," that the people of God are his people in Christ Jesus, that he is the God of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of those who are his, so that those who are Christ's are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. And then we briefly noted, without going into any detail, the content of the apostles' prayer. First of all, that they would increase in the knowledge of the truth, that's in the second half of verse 17, then that they would increase in the knowledge of the future blessedness of the saints in verse 18, and then thirdly, that they would have a greater grasp of what had happened to them and of their present blessed position in verse 19 to 23. And we take in just the first two of these this evening.

So first of all, the knowledge of him. The knowledge of him, that he may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. First of all under this heading the knowledge of him, we have this reference to the spirit, the spirit of wisdom and revelation. Now to what does this refer, the spirit? You'll notice in our English text that the word spirit has a small "s," but the general practice of our Authorized Version translators seems to have been that since the Greek makes no distinction, it doesn't use a capital, Greek doesn't use capitals in all the same ways that English does, and so in any given instance the translators have to decide whether to give it a capital because in English the Holy Spirit as a person would have a capital "S" or leave it as a small "s." But it seems that the policy they adopted was that they used a small "s" when it referred to the human spirit. They also used a small "s" when it could refer to the Holy Spirit but where this was a matter of interpretation rather than translation. In other words, they only used a capital "S" where it indisputably referred to the Holy Spirit, for example in verse 13, with

that Holy Spirit of promise, and there they give the Greek word a capital "S" because it is beyond doubt referring to the Holy Spirit. The general approach of our translators was that of seeking to give translation rather than interpretation, so except where it was obvious and beyond doubt they left it a small "s."

So the fact that it's a small "s" in our English Bible simply means that they didn't try and make the interpretation for us. That's one of the great qualities of our Authorized Version, that they don't build in an interpretation, not even a right one, into the text. They simply translate it. However in view of the reference to wisdom and revelation in verse 17, and the enlightening of the eyes of your understanding in verse 18, it seems clear that the reference is to the Holy Spirit for if it were to the human spirit, no wisdom, revelation or enlightenment would be needed. To be given wisdom and revelation and enlightenment suggests an inability and a need of these things from outside of ourselves. In other words, the passage would make no sense really if it referred to the human spirit. And just as the Holy Spirit is referred to as the spirit of adoption and the spirit of truth and so on, so also he is the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Then we have this phrase, the knowledge of him. Now the reference is to God, or God the Father. You see in verse 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory and the "him" refers to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father and the Father of glory. And the Lord Jesus said, John 14:9, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." And so there is no conflict in the apostles praying that they will have an increase in the knowledge of the Father because we know the Father through the Son.

And then the word knowledge, the normal word knowledge is gnosis, from which we have several words. For example, agnostic is someone who doesn't know. Gnosis is knowledge. But the word here is a word epignosis which means the idea is of clear and full and experimental knowledge, not a mere academic knowledge, but an understanding which entails a loving and adoring of God's glory. In other words, it's not just a knowing about God, but it is a knowing of God which is full of and which therefore entails the affections going out towards God. We get some idea of the word, for example, Romans 3:20, by the law is the knowledge of sin. The word knowledge there, it's not just the idea of a passive theoretical academic awareness that we are sinners, it means conviction of sin. So it involves more than simply the intellect. 1 Timothy 2:4, the knowledge of the truth, who will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, and we regard that as referring to all kinds of men. But the point is the knowledge of the truth there is not just the knowledge of the truth in the sense that the devils have a knowledge of the truth but they still hate it, it's the idea of the love of the truth, of a full-orbed appreciation not only of what the truth is but of the excellency of the truth. And in chapter 4 and verse 13, "till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man." This is not a mere theoretical knowledge, but it's that knowledge which leads on to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. It's the idea of a building up in that knowledge which leads to godliness of practice.

So then this knowledge is a knowledge that bears upon the affections, and so not merely a seeing in the sense of being able to give an accurate definition of God's being and

attributes, but a loving, adoring view of the beauty of the Lord and of his glory and of his greatness. You see, we need this because all our sins are traceable to the lack of this. All our sins are traceable to the lack of this knowledge of God, this full-orbed knowledge of God, this beholding of the beauty of the Lord and of his excellency and glory. And this knowledge is the great need for us and for the church, the professing church of God today, that we should have more of this true knowledge of God not only that we should understand the facts concerning him, though that is essential, but that we should, in the light of the knowledge of these facts, that our hearts might be drawn out after him, that we should see the beauty of him. You see, that's what devils don't see. They are aware of the facts, but there's no love for the truth in them. And that's the difference between a mere notional knowledge and an experimental knowledge, that it is not a mere awareness of information, but the heart is directed towards this God and the truth is seen in its grandeur.

And then the phrase wisdom and revelation, that he would give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. Wisdom here is that ability not only to understand, but to distinguish and love the truth and see its beauty. There is a difference between information and wisdom. Some people have only an informational kind of knowledge of the truth. They can give the right answers, but that's all there is. They have not been made wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. And revelation, we tend to use the word in the technical sense of the actual infallible word of God, the scriptures but here it's used of the spiritual understanding of the word, and so it's the idea of understanding the word of God both mentally and with our heart in line and in tune with it.

We learn then two things from this point. First of all, we are naturally in darkness without the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2 which we read earlier on, verse 10, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." And verse 13, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

The one who knows about God is God and it is the Holy Spirit of God who searches the deep things of God, who is able to make known God in his true character and being, and no one instructs the Lord, but the Lord instructs his people by his Spirit. But left to ourselves we do not understand, and we do not love the truth, so left to ourselves we do not understand the truth, and when the Spirit of God gives enlightenment, we don't love the truth. And the world by wisdom knew not God, but the Holy Spirit is able to enlighten us, not only to understand the facts of the truth, but to see the beauty of it. And the world by its own wisdom knew not God, but the Holy Spirit can give that wisdom to both grasp and love the truth of God.

Only the Holy Spirit can bring us to the true knowledge of God but then also we must learn that this is true not only of the beginning, but also of growth in the knowledge of God. The apostle regards these Ephesians as already having received the blessing of the Spirit in verse 8, "Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself." But he desires that they will progress further and increase in this knowledge.

You have the same thing, for example, in Colossians 1. Colossians 1:4, "Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." But then verse 9, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." There you see the apostle is saying you have received of the Lord, but he desires that they should be given more. And the strange thing is, and this is a strange fact, that some who would most vehemently uphold the biblical and Reformed doctrine of man's dependence on God at conversion seem to forget that this is also true for every inch of progress in the real spiritual understanding of the truth. And so you get people who are most vociferously Reformed in their doctrine of election, predestination, effectual calling, and yet who give themselves but little to prayer as if they could manage well and get along well as Christians with their natural intellectual ability to progress in the truth. But having begun in the Spirit, shall we be made perfect in the flesh? And it is a most disturbing feature of some who make much of professing to be Reformed that their consciousness of man's dependence at regeneration and being brought, being willing to believe on Christ, is not matched by a life of prayerful dependence on God in the study of the word and the result is that they profess much concerning the Reformed faith and yet they can be found with an intellectual pride and arrogance showing that they have not truly advanced in this spiritual wisdom and understanding because the truth properly embraced always brings us down. It doesn't puff up. There is a superficial knowledge that puffs up but this true knowledge brings humility before God and meekness before men.

So we are as dependent now as we ever were upon the Spirit of God in order to progress in the truth. That is why we must not only be studious of the scriptures and of good men who have written on the scriptures, but we must be men and women of prayer expressing our dependence upon the Spirit of God to increasingly lead us into a right and full-orbed knowledge of the truth. Secondly then, our second half, the hope of his calling. The hope of his calling. Verse 18, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened. We are naturally in the dark externally and internally. We do not have the truth unless God sends it to us and we do not believe the truth unless he renews our hearts. So Isaiah 9:2, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath

the light shined." We need the light of the truth, but the truth shining outside of us, as it were, does not on its own bring about the change. 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." So the shining forth of the truth outwardly is necessary, but it must shine into our hearts by the effectual working of the Spirit of truth. So verse 3 of that 2 Corinthians 4, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

So then we are naturally in darkness both externally and internally. When the truth comes to us, the external light, we do not receive it unless the Spirit of God works in our hearts and gives us enlightenment and understanding and that's why when we talk to people about the truth of God and we think we've explained it so very clearly that they couldn't miss it, yet they still do. And sometimes Christians, especially younger Christians, are puzzled and bewildered by this, that they can explain the truth to someone and they think that the way they've explained it, the arguments they've put forward, it must be that the person they're speaking to will firstly understand it and then surely receive it, and yet sometimes they do neither. And the reason is that we are naturally in darkness, that we do not naturally understand and when we're given understanding, we don't naturally receive. So Ephesians 5:8, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light."

So then, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened that ye may know what is the hope of his calling. The hope of his calling. Calling here refers to effectual calling. So in chapter 4 verse 1, "I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." Verse 4, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." It's the same calling as when the apostle says, "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

And so it's referring to the effectual call, that effectual call that comes about because of God's eternal predestination which results in faith in Christ and therefore justification in this world and then glorification in the world to come. And this effectual summons by the word and Spirit of God results in hope, and the biblical usage of the word hope is not something forlorn and uncertain, it is a sure expectation and there is a hope of glory. And 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 14, we've looked at these verses many times very recently, but here again, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is an effectual call which results in the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The effectual call then brings us into the hope, the expectation of glory now and the enjoyment of glory hereafter. So Colossians 1 and verse 5, "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel."

So the belief of the gospel by the effectual call of God results in a hope of glory now and glory itself in heaven and the apostle means that he desires that they should increase in grasp of the grounds and therefore the certainty of their hope of glory, that they would increase in their grasp of the grounds and thus the certainty of their hope of glory. And then he uses another phrase and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. The riches of the glory. Here the apostle is struggling for vocabulary to describe the blessedness that is to come. The riches of glory of his inheritance, that is, of that inheritance of which God is the author and bestower. The reason for taking it that way, verse 11, "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance," verse 14, "Which is the earnest of our inheritance."

And so the inheritance in the context is the inheritance given to us but it is his inheritance in that he is the author and the bestower of it, and it is the inheritance in the saints or among the saints. The scriptures often emphasize the corporate, the perfected fellowship of the saints in their enjoyment of their inheritance in God. So Acts 20 and verse 32, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Chapter 26 and verse 18, the Lord Jesus, the risen Savior speaking to Paul, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith which is in me. Then 2 Timothy 4:8, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

So the apostle is saying that he desires that their understanding should be enlightened and that they may know more clearly that the ground and certainty of that hope that their effectual calling has brought them into, and that they should understand more of the riches of the glory of that inheritance which God has appointed for them among all the saints. So the apostle desires then that they would increase in the knowledge of both the grounds and the glorious end of their hope. We now see the folly and nonsense of that attitude that speaks of being too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. It really is nonsense. How can we be holy and we can only be useful in this world if we are holy, how can we be holy without being heavenly minded? Colossians 3:1, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection," and so on. The two go together, the setting of the affections on things which are above where Christ sits on the right hand of God, and the mortification of the sins of the deeds of the flesh.

The more that many of us go on in the Christian life, I'm sure we learn and the scriptures confirm this and bear this out or rather our experience is in line with what scripture infallibly teaches, that we become increasingly aware that only heavenly joys will rid us of the love of sin and the attraction of its desires. Only heavenly joys and nothing else

will do it, only the excellency of Christ, only the knowledge of God, the knowledge of him in his glory and his greatness and the certainty of our hope and the glory to be revealed. These are the things which cause us to find sin distasteful and that's why assurance of salvation does matter because the joy of the Lord is our strength. The joy of the Lord causes us to not seek blessedness in sin. We all seek happiness if not in God then in something else, and if we settle for a low level of assurance, if we settle for that, then the temptation to seek joy in sin will be much the stronger so we must seek to have that joy and peace in believing so that our souls are satisfied with the goodness of his house so that we then are disinclined to seek blessedness in that which is but the creature and that which is sinful, and we are less open to the lie that you shall be as gods, and that we should find our true happiness in sin. So then let us seek heavenly-mindedness so that we might be holy and therefore serve the Lord Jesus Christ with all our hearts in this world. Amen.