

Explore the Bible: Remembered

August 19, 2019

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Sept. 8 focuses on Ephesians 1:15-23.*

On occasion, I will receive a note, card or email from a former student of mine. Often, they will relate something they learned or discovered in my class and how they are writing to thank me and to tell me that they think often of me and pray for me when they do. It is good to be remembered in such a way!

The connections we make in life with fellow believers are among the most important we ever make. For, in connecting with brothers and sisters in Christ, we not only gain a friendship, we gain a partner in our journey of faith. These partners pray for us to grow in our understanding of God, to rest in our hope in God and to experience the power of God in our everyday life. Such prayers are anything but trivial and are a key source of not simply getting through life, but flourishing in the abundance that God provides.

Knowledge of God (1:15-17)

The wonder and glory of God's work in salvation that Paul outlined in verses 3-14 gives rise to his prayer for his fellow believers ("For this reason..."). He desires that they come to appreciate personally the truths that he outlined concerning the Triune God's impact on the individual believers. He once again alludes to the three Persons of the Trinity; this time referring to them as "glorious Father," "Lord Jesus Christ" and "Spirit of wisdom." Though there is some questions about whether "spirit" refers to our spirit or the Holy Spirit, the structured listing of the three in one

place and the commonality of this phrase in early Christian literature suggests that the latter is to be favored here.

This desire for their understanding compels Paul to pray without stopping. Paul's identification of their "faith in the Lord," coupled with his prayer for their growing in knowledge of him, helps us to see that the journey of knowing God is never one we can count as "accomplished." It is important that we recognize it as a continuous process of development, never a destination.

What are some aspects of God that you would like to grow in your knowledge of?

Hope of God (1:18-19)

The knowledge of who God is inevitably leads to a knowledge of what we have in God. As Paul transitions into verse 18, he does so with an awkward construction. Literally, he writes, "having the eyes of the heart enlightened." The NIV renders this as an additional prayer, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." While this is a possible reading, if it is correct, Paul chose a strange way to say this. Instead, it is probably better understood as a further explanation of the knowledge of God given by the Spirit in wisdom and revelation. Regardless, the intent seems to be that Paul prays for an internalization of the knowledge of God that results in an enlightened perspective and course of life.

Paul suggests that the enlightened believer will enjoy three aspects of our relationship with God: knowing the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and his incomparable power. The calling of God outlined in the first part of chapter 1 has at least one significant benefit: It changes our trajectory of life from despair to hope. Instead of focusing on the past and its regrets, the believer can lean into the future, expectant of what God will bring.

The construction of the second benefit suggests it is not our inheritance that is the focus but the Father's. That is, God is abundantly glorified in the acquisition of his own people. We are therefore acknowledged as trophies of grace, prized possessions in the treasury of the one who owns all things (cf. Exodus 19:5). This standing is a benefit to us on multiple levels as a people set apart and guarded by him who has called us.

What blessings are ours because God views us as his special possessions/trophies? What responsibilities accompany those blessings?

Power of God (1:20-23)

All of these blessings culminate in the final benefit of walking in the power of God. Paul wants believers to understand that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to us in our walk and life. In fact, Paul's terminology concerning the Jesus' resurrection makes the connection between what happened to him and what we can enjoy explicit. The phrase "raised him from the dead" in verse 20, literally reads "raised from the dead ones." Therefore, it suggests that his resurrection is the first among many. It is both the initial resurrection and the impetus for future ones as well. He has secured our standing before God.

Paul closes this section by highlighting Christ's authority of all things. He lists categories of powers in verse 1:21, designed to outline Jesus' total authority over both spiritual and human realms. This authority is further expressed in Christ's connection to the church (in this context a universal, not local term), as its leader and benefactor.

The final phrase, "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (1:23) is somewhat ambiguous, and charity must be expressed to differing views on how to handle it. Although some would interpret this as a reference to the church, either who fills all things as God's representative or is filled in every respect by God, it seems best to apply the phrase to

Christ himself who is the fullness of God and from whom the church draws its power.

In what ways has the power of God impacted you as a believer, both in who you are and what you do?

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