



Lesson 3: Why Can't You See It?

Teacher's Edition

Overview: Paul thanks God for the Ephesian saints and prays that they would have spiritual understanding so that they could truly grasp all it is that God has done for them in Christ.

Purpose: Believers need God's help to be able to fully grasp what he has done for them. For this reason, they should pray and ask God to help them really get what they have in Christ.

Special Note: *If you find that you normally take more time on the earlier parts of the lesson and have to rush through the end, I would encourage you for this lesson to reverse that. The last subpoint (III. C.) takes up almost half of this passage! Typically, the outline should be more even than that, but with this lesson that just seemed to be the best way to outline the passage.*

Introduction

"You just don't get it." Have you ever had someone say that to you about something you thought you understood well? Have you ever said that to someone who had a surface knowledge of a very difficult situation? Sometimes, especially in regards to spiritual matters, we can understand something without really getting it.

Can you think of any examples of things people understand on a shallow level but don't really see how it important and impactful it is?

Paul spent the whole first half of this chapter laying out the blessings that we have in Christ.

Those of you who were here last week, can you remember the blessings God gave us “in Christ”? (Election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, revelation, inheritance, sealing, guarantee).

Now Paul goes on to pray for something rather odd, he prays that believers would understand what it is they have been given, that they would understand what it is that God has done for them. But he just told them what God has done for them! Paul recognizes, and we should as well, that the blessings of God are something we can know on a basic, factual level without really understanding on a deep level.

This text of Scripture teaches on what we call the doctrine of illumination. Illumination means “to light up, to put a light on something.” God wants to turn the lights on in our hearts so that we truly understand what it is that he is trying to teach us about himself. He wants us to not only know what he has done, but to be deeply impacted by it.

I. The Prerequisites for Illumination (vv 15-17)

Before God can help us understand his Word better, at least three things must be in our lives.

A. Growth in faith and love

Explanation: Paul begins this prayer with a “because.” In order to have God’s Spirit open our eyes to the wonderful truths of in his Word, certain things must be true in our lives. Specifically, Paul mentions faith and love. These two elements sum up the entire Christian walk. We are to believe God’s Word and to love both God and others. The New Testament often includes these two together as a summary for right living (1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:16; Colossians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:14; 2 Timothy 1:13; Philemon 5; Revelation 2:19). The insight that the Holy Spirit provides he provides to those who are living a life of obedience to him.

Application: Those who want a deeper understanding of God's plan must be growing in their faith and love for others. Often, we divorce love for others and belief from understanding, but Scripture teaches us that 1) faith is necessary for understanding and 2) knowledge that doesn't result in love creates pride. Knowledge without faith or love can be spiritually destructive.

Why do you think it is that spiritual knowledge without faith or love is dangerous? What happens when knowledge increases without a growth in love or faith?

B. Prayer

Explanation: This section is part of a prayer that Paul made on behalf of this church he had planted and poured himself into. Paul didn't take it for granted that God would help Christians understand what Paul was trying to get them to see about God, so he prayed specifically that God that would open their eyes.

Application: Do you ever pray that God would help you to see the truth of his Word? Do you ever ask that he would help others to see the truth of his Word? When you prepare your heart for Sunday, or for your own personal Bible reading, do you begin with prays asking God to help you truly grasp what he wants to teach you?

C. Spirit of God

Explanation: Paul has already detailed for the church at Corinth that only through the help of the Spirit can they understand the truth of God's Word (1 Corinthians 2:13-14). Only God himself can open our eyes to see the truth of his Word. Sometimes this has to do with understanding, but often it has more to do with realizing that what God has said he said to *you*!

If the role of the Spirit is to open the eyes of believers to God's Word, why would Paul ask that the Spirit do what he has already promised to do?

II. The Nature of Illumination (vv 17-18)

Explanation: Paul uses five different words to describe God’s desire that a believer understand what he has been given in Christ. Five!¹ This is actually the second time Paul has heavily emphasized the importance of what we know in order to grow spiritually (1:8-9), and it won’t be his last! As believers, God wants us to be thinking people! This does not mean that everyone will be an academic, but it does mean that we should all be seeking to learn God’s Word better.

- A. Wisdom** Wisdom in the Bible involves taking knowledge and applying it to life. It’s taking theory and making it practical.
- B. Revelation** Revelation is that which God has revealed, that which he has told us. The only way we know anything is because he has revealed it to us, either through nature or through his Word.
- C. Knowledge** Knowledge here refers to more than just knowing facts, but knowing a person – God himself.
- D. Enlightenment** means “to lighten up” just as it sounds. We often joke about “the lightbulb coming on” when people get something. God wants the lightbulb to come on for us spiritually.

Application: Believers should be a thinking people. As the NIV Application Commentary states: “Unfortunately, much of modern Christianity is guilty of a drippy sentimentality, or worse, of sensationalism. . . We seem more interested in trying to create emotional feeling than in providing an understanding of God and wisdom for living.”² While Christianity should definitely involve the

¹ In Greek, the word for knowledge in verse 17 (*epignosis*) and the word for know in verse 18 (*oida*) are different, though they are translated similarly in English. While some have argued that there is a difference between the two, they are probably used interchangeably and are simply Paul heaping together synonyms to emphasize the importance of knowing what God has revealed.

² Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 89.

emotions, our emotional experience should be a response to truth (John 4:23).

Why do believers not want to go deeper in their understanding of Christ? What can be done to adjust such an attitude?

III. The Content of Illumination (vv 18-23)

A. The hope of your calling

Explanation: The two key words here are “hope” and “calling.” “Hope” in the Bible refers to a firm and confident expectation of something in the future. “Calling” is a word that refers to God’s calling us to be saved. This call included not just forgiveness from sins, but all the benefits laid out in the first half of chapter one as well. So Paul wants us to have confidence because we know what God has done and will do for us because of our salvation.

Application: Reading the first half of chapter one should fill us with hope. In times of discouragement, failure, and heartache we have to remember the most important thing about us: we have been redeemed. No matter how bad things are now, we have the confident belief that we have been redeemed and are destined for glory. That hope can give us all the help we need to live a life that pleases God.

Illustration: Warren Wiersbe begins his commentary on Ephesians “Be Rich” with the following illustration:

An undernourished boy was found on the city street and taken to a hospital. After the nurses had bathed and dressed him, they put him to bed and brought him his dinner tray. Conspicuous on that tray was a large glass of milk. The boy’s eyes lit up as he reached for the glass, but then he paused and, looking at the nurses, asked a question that broke their hearts:

“Can I drink all of it?”

It was obvious that back home there was never enough of anything. It makes me think of the woman who stood watching

the Atlantic Ocean and said, "It sure is good to see something that there's plenty of!"

Too many Christians are living like paupers when Christ has made us rich! It's it time we stopped living on substitutes (even religious substitutes) and stated drawing on the riches we have in Christ?

My friend – BE RICH!

How often do people look to their salvation during difficult times of life? Why don't they more? What profit would that be to them?

B. The riches of his inheritance

Explanation: Ephesus was an incredibly wealthy city. Ancient records tell us the city had a strong economy, unfortunately built in large part around the famous Temple of Diana. Describing the wealth of Ephesus, the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible relates "The multi-storied residences of its upper-middle-class society rested on the north terraces of Mt Koressos. Some homes had mosaic floors and marble walls. Two were found with heated bathrooms. Many had running water."³ Ephesus was the main hub of activity for the entire province of Asia (modern day Turkey). As an important port city it functioned as a center of commerce for the whole area, much like New York City would today. This crowd knew what wealth was.

Paul mentions riches several times in the book of Ephesians (1:7, 18; 2:4, 7; 3:8, 16). God is rich in grace, glory, and mercy, and God's rich inheritance is believers. Yes, you read that right, Ephesians pictures God's inheritance as being the saints, (you and me if we are saved!). This is a theme started in the Old Testament used to describe Israel that is later applied to the

³ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "[Ephesus](#)," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 710.

church as well (Deuteronomy 9:29; Isaiah 47:6). That God would desire to have our loyalty and obedience reflecting his character so intensely that he refers to us as his inheritance is a shocking and supremely humbling truth.

How does viewing ourselves as God's inheritance change our thinking about life?

Why would the God who owns everything want us to be his inheritance?

C. The power at work within you.

Explanation: Paul takes the most amount of time with this section. He wants Christians to know just how powerful the Spirit at work within them is. In fact, to make his point Paul takes four verses at the end of this chapter (vv 20-23) and piles synonym after synonym on top of each other to describe God's power (verse 19 could be translated "*And what is the **surpassing greatness** of his **power**. . . according to the **working** of the **power** of his **strength**, which he **worked** in Christ*). How powerful exactly is God? Powerful enough to do the unthinkable: powerful enough to raise Christ from the dead and seat him at his own right hand. Not only that, but God put all the demonic powers of the world under the feet of Jesus, giving him all authority (remember Ephesus was deeply entrenched in sorcery and witchcraft, explaining Paul's repeated emphasis on spiritual powers).

The gospel is the center of God's self-revelation. If you want to know how powerful God is, look to the gospel. If you want to know how wise God is, look to the gospel. If you want to know the love, justice, mercy, anger, and patience of God, look to the gospel. Paul here demonstrates for his readers how powerful the God at work in us is by showing us the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

If God's Spirit truly is so powerful, and if he dwells within us, why do believers ever sin? Why does sinning seem so easy and obedience seem so hard?

Do you have the power right now to defeat any and every sin in your life? How does that square with the doctrine of progressive sanctification (that our spiritual growth is just that, growth that happens over time)?

Illustration: We always have the mighty power of God at our disposal. The question is, how well are we at tapping into it? When preparing sermons, I use Logos Bible software, a powerful tool to study God’s Word in depth. However, I don’t use all the power that there is, because I don’t even understand how all the functions work! When I first got the program, it was overwhelming and I used just a small fraction of the potential options because I didn’t know how to use it. That doesn’t mean there was anything wrong with the program, just with my ability to use the program. Over time, I learned more and more, bit by bit, piece by piece how to use the program, and I got better at harnessing the its power.⁴

We always have the almighty power of the Holy Spirit available to help us, but unfortunately we aren’t very good at using him. Growth in Christian life is about learning to rely more and more on the Spirit and less and less on my own will power. This does not mean we don’t work, rather it means we learn what it looks like to trust God in our daily walk and to turn to him for help and grace.

In what ways have you personally grown in your understanding of how to “walk by the Spirit” in your everyday life?

Apparently, Paul thought this last point was important, because he uses over a third of the prayer to describe how powerful the God is who is at work within us. So often we become discouraged

⁴ Perhaps in your field there is a similar illustration of something powerful that took time

in our battle with sin and don't really believe the audacious promise that God can and will help us.

Conclusion

You can know what God has done for you and yet remain unaffected by it. As we saw last week, glorious, beautiful gospel realities can become cold and boring. What is the solution to this problem? Paul argues it is for the Holy Spirit of God to turn the lights on and help us realize the incredible gift that our salvation is. He prays that God's Spirit would open the eyes of the believers he worked with so that they could fully understand what their hope, calling, and power in Christ were, so that they would be able to live worthy of that hope and calling in the power of God.

Challenge: Ask God as you come to your devotions to open your eyes and show you what you have in Christ. Specifically ask him to show you the hope you should have, the riches you now possess, and the power you have to help you live your life for God.