

Remembered

God helps believers understand the riches and greatness of His calling on their lives.

Ephesians 1:15-23



How do effects point to a cause in this world? In a person's spiritual life? Can a cause exist without producing an effect? Explain.

Insight comes from understanding the relationship of cause and effect. Scientists propose theories based on cycles and predictable observed patterns. Sir Isaac Newton posed the theory of gravity based on an apple falling perpendicularly to the ground. The effect revealed the cause. In our Christian lives, we see the realities of cause and effect. Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers would realize the effect salvation through Christ had in their daily lives.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

It is generally understood by Bible commentators that Paul wrote Ephesians to both the church in that city as well as to other churches within its vicinity and influence. Thus, when he referenced a report he heard about their faith (Eph. 1:15), this applied to both those believers with whom he was familiar (Acts 20:17-38) but also more specifically to others whom he did not know personally. So with a pastoral concern for some of his audience with whom he was not familiar, it was entirely appropriate for Paul to pray that they would be enlightened in their faith.

In writing this letter, Paul followed a fairly standard approach to letter writing in the Greek-speaking world. The writer would begin with some type of thanksgiving and then follow with a prayer. However, the content of Paul's thanksgiving was not typical but amazingly expansive as he enumerated the great blessings of God in 1:3-14, a single sentence made up of 203 Greek words. Following his anthem of praise to God for His spiritual blessings, Paul shared his prayer for those to whom he wrote. This was a logical spiritual progression. The apostle prayed for his hearers that God might grant them the capacity to realize His great work on their behalf.

Paul never got over the amazing grace of God that was revealed to him. He marveled at God's greatness as well as at the riches of His goodness. In Ephesians 1:1-14, Paul piled phrase on top of phrase to describe the blessings that are found in Christ Jesus. It reminds us of a person who is so captivated by a subject or an experience that he seemingly can never discuss anything else.

EPHESIANS 1:15-34

15 This is why, since I **heard** **A** about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the **saints** **B**, **16** I never stop **giving thanks** **C** for you as I remember you in my prayers. **17** I **pray** **D** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. **18** I pray that the **eyes of your heart** **E** may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, **19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength. **20** He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens — **21** far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. **22** And he subjected everything **under his feet** **F** and appointed him as head over everything for the church, **23** which is **his body** **G**, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

Passage Outline

Knowledge of God
(Eph. 1:15-17)

Hope of God
(Eph. 1:18-19)

Power of God
(Eph. 1:20-23)

Keywords

- A. News had made it to Paul in prison about the status of the church in Asia Minor.
- B. Christ has made those who are in Him holy and set apart for God (1 Pet. 1:15-16).
- C. Paul had genuine gratefulness for their faith in Christ (see 1 Cor. 1:4).
- D. Paul's prayer reflected a deep understanding of how the Trinity works in the lives of believers.
- E. Paul's prayer was for God to open our hearts—the center of our spiritual lives (Ezek. 11:19)—to know God and what He has done for us.
- F. An Old Testament promise (Ps. 8:4-6; 110:1)
- G. This was a metaphor for the church that Paul used often (Eph. 5:30; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:24).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul addressed God in verses 3-14 then turned his focus on the recipients of this letter. Two things characterized these believers in Ephesus: *faith in the Lord Jesus* and *love for all the saints*. The apostle's prayer for the Ephesian church was characterized by two important qualities: persistence and gratitude.

What practical steps could believers take in their daily routines that would help them increase their focus on others for the purpose of praying for them?

Paul asked God to give the Ephesians a deeper knowledge of Himself. After enumerating all of God's blessings to them in Christ (1:3-14), the apostle asked God to open the eyes of his hearers so that they might grasp His greatness.

How does Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers compare to most prayers voiced today? How might prayer habits change if the main focus were on spiritual growth?

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be enlightened and that illumination might occur in the eyes of their heart. The goal is not just intellectual stimulation but rather an awakening of insight at the core of a believer's being. Our minds are expanded, our emotions are awakened, and our wills are engaged in praise and obedience.

God's power that is operative in the believer's life was brought about in Christ Jesus. Because of His resurrection, Christ ascended to the right hand of God and rules over every evil power. As the extension and fulfillment of David's line of kingship, Jesus sits forever on the throne next to His Father, putting all His enemies, including death, under His feet.

How does Christ's being at the right hand of God give a believer security and confidence?

Paul encouraged the Ephesians by assuring them that all of this great work of God was for the church. The church is the *body* of Christ and the fullness of Christ. As Christ's body, we are His instruments through which He brings salvation to the world and thus *fills all things*.

How does Christ's "filling" of our lives help us become part of the fulfillment of His purpose?

BIBLE SKILL: Observe when and for what purpose a New Testament passage includes an Old Testament quotation. – Most commentators believe Ephesians 1:20 is a strong allusion to Psalm 110:1. Read Psalm 110. Search for answers to the following questions: Why might this psalm be the most cited psalm in the New Testament? (See Acts 2:24-35; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 7:17,21; 1 Pet. 3:22.) What references to the messiah do you find in the psalm? How does this psalm help you better understand the power of God?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers do well to pray for themselves and others to grow in relationship with God.
- Believers can grow in hope and power as they more fully understand their calling in Christ.
- Believers can live with confidence in the power of the resurrection of Jesus.

Discuss as a group how the prayers of the group can reflect Paul's prayer for the Ephesians to a greater degree. What changes need to be made to how the group prays for one another?

List challenging situations you currently face. Reflect on Ephesians 1:18-19 and voice this passage as a prayer for yourself. How does this passage give you hope to face the challenges you listed?

How can you use this passage to encourage others who may have doubts about their salvation? Identify one person with whom you will share these truths this week.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Believers should commit to a consistent practice of prayer.

Read Ephesians 1:15-16, noting the frequency of Paul's prayers.

The consistent practice of prayer will never result solely from a sense of obligation but out of a deep sense of thankfulness for all that God has done. The same is true of a regular ministry of intercessory prayer. While we are commanded to pray for one another (Eph. 6:18), obedience to this mandate will not flow out of a begrudging spirit. It isn't so much that we have to pray for others but rather that we get to do so. To pray for others is to remember them. To remember someone in prayer involves specific prayer. Paul's prayer was both persistent and specific. As we keep others in mind, rather than just thinking about ourselves, we will be more faithful in intercessory praying.

What practical steps can you take in your daily routine that would help you increase your focus on others for the purpose of praying for them?

Day 2: Believers should pray for knowledge.

Read Ephesians 1:17, considering what you ask for in prayer.

Paul asked God to give the Ephesians a deeper knowledge of Himself. How does such knowledge come to us? Is it merely a function of intelligence or diligent study? While God can use both of these, the secret of knowing Him is found elsewhere. We know God only because He chooses to reveal Himself to us. This revelation is the work of the Holy Spirit. (See John 14:26.) Interpreters differ on whether the reference to the Spirit in Ephesians 1:17 is to the Holy Spirit or more along the lines of attitude or human spirit. The former seems more likely because we are dependent on divine revelation in knowing Christ.

This prayer for the Spirit is not for His indwelling—that takes place at the point of conversion when a believer is “sealed” with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). Rather, we are to ask God to illuminate us through the ministry of the Spirit. Just as Paul prayed for his Ephesian friends, we should pray on behalf of one another and ourselves for a deeper knowledge of God.

How does Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers compare to prayers you have voiced? How might your prayer habits change if the main focus of your prayers were on spiritual growth?

Day 3: Believers grow in understanding of their salvation.

Read Ephesians 1:18-19, identifying the three things Paul prayed for.

Paul mentioned three truths that were the goals of his prayer. The first was knowledge of the *hope of his calling*. God called us to this great salvation we possess. We call on the name of the Lord to be saved, but it is a response to His call of us. As we grow in our understanding of the Lord's calling, our hope is increased and deepened.

Secondly, Paul prayed that the eyes of the Ephesians would be opened to the wealth of *his glorious inheritance in the saints*. Grammatically, this statement could mean the inheritance God receives (we are His inheritance) or the inheritance that we receive from God. The former would emphasize the value God places on those who are in Christ, but the context seems to fit the latter.

Finally, Paul's prayer was directed toward an awareness of *the immeasurable greatness of his power*. The Ephesian believers lived in the midst of a pervasive and aggressive paganism, which made boastful claims of power on behalf of the idols of their culture. (See Acts 19:34.) To know the great power available in Christ was a needful corrective in the hearts of the Ephesian believers.

How are the three requests of Paul related to each other? How does growing in each area lead you to greater understanding and praise of God for His salvation?

Day 4: Believers have confidence in the power of Christ.

Read Ephesians 1:20-21, noticing the breadth of God's power.

The power of God was displayed in Christ's ascension. This crucial Christian doctrine is often ignored, perhaps lost in the shadow of the resurrection. It is important for many reasons, one of which is the assurance that Christ is our Advocate (1 John 2:1), interceding for us at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34). He who now possesses a resurrected body—just as we will someday—is the same One who dwells in God's presence. This speaks to the state of our existence in heaven as resurrected beings. Christ's dominion in verse 21 is generally understood as not simply over the angels but over the evil and demonic forces described in Ephesians 6:12. Simply put, in His resurrection Christ defeated all the cosmic forces of evil in this age and in the age to come. This provides us with confidence that the power of Christ's resurrection is sufficient for life—now and forever.

KEY DOCTRINE: God the Son – Christ ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man (1 Tim 2:5-6).

How does Christ's being at the right hand of God give you security and confidence?

Day 5: Believers are the means by which Christ is fulfilling His purpose.

Read Ephesians 1:22-23, underlining for the church.

Why did God make Jesus *head over everything*? Paul encouraged the Ephesians by assuring them that all of this great work of God was for the church. Our tendency might be to read these verses only in an individualistic sense. But we need to remember that God’s work of salvation was to bring together His church. As part of His church, we can personally experience the power of Christ at work within us. We must not forget, however, that we are part of a larger body.

There is great diversity of understanding concerning how the church is the fullness of Christ. At the very least we can say that the church is the means by which Christ is fulfilling His purpose—the transformation of the world. Our bodies are the means by which we accomplish things.

How does Christ’s “filling” of your life help you become part of the fulfillment of His purpose?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Ephesians 1, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

Why is it vital that Christians grow in their knowledge of God? How can we grow in that knowledge?

How can understanding the hope we have in Christ, the value of our inheritance, and the scope of God’s power impact the way we live?

How is Paul’s prayer urgently needed in today’s church?



For additional context, read “Metaphors for the Church in Ephesians,” available digitally in the Fall 2019 *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.