6-24-18

Ephesians 1:15-19a (2)

Even though the Ephesian Christians have faith in Jesus Christ and love their brothers and sisters in Christ, Paul still prays for them. He prays that what they have might increase. This is a good prayer for us to copy and pray for ourselves and others. God has so much for us, that we can never hope to experience it all in this lifetime; but the wonder is that it is all given to us the moment we accept Jesus as Saviour. The prayer is, then, to experience what God has already given us more fully. This increase is continuous in those who actively participate in the Christian life; it is part of our sanctification.

In this vein, Paul prays that the eyes of their hearts may be opened. He wants the very center of their being to have an increasingly better understanding of the blessings that God has for them and to increasingly use them for God’s glory. This involves bringing all things under Jesus, as Paul points out in verse 10. It is so very important, for the Christian, to understand that these blessings do not have their ultimate purpose in our own self-centered uses and benefits. Their ultimate purpose is to be used according to God’s will to bring all things into subjection to Christ.

This can be hard for us; we are carnal, worldly creatures and our thoughts and actions tend toward selfish motives. But, we are new creations in Christ Jesus; with the help of the Holy Spirit we start to look at things differently. When we contemplate how very close we all came to spending eternity in hell; when we think about everything that Jesus suffered for our sake; we must conclude that everything we have and are belongs to God for His good pleasure. Therefore, the prayers for ourselves and others, that we may be more under the sway of the Holy Spirit, and that God’s blessings become more manifest in us, are all that we may be more fully used by God to accomplish His will.

In the prayer to have the eyes of our hearts opened more, three specific points are mentioned. First, that we will know what is the hope of His calling. Second, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. Third, what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. Last week, we looked at the first of these, the hope of His calling.

There was a time when each of us called upon God through our Lord, Jesus Christ, to save us. But that calling of ours was a response to His calling us. God has always taken the initiative in bringing His people to Himself. When we cling to Jesus, that is our response to the Gospel that God used to bring us to Him; and we cling to Him in hope, in the hope that the Gospel offers us.

God’s calling involves fellowship with Jesus and through Him, fellowship with the Father. It is a call to love for, and tolerance of, our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a call to an eternity of peace and joy. It is a call to suffering, because we are to be like our Saviour and our Saviour suffered. But that endurance of suffering will end in a short time. The hope of our calling is so sure, that it becomes our expectation; we are simply waiting for it to happen, but while we wait, we also work. Now let’s consider the second part of Paul’s prayer.

Paul’s second specific part of his prayer is to know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance. The first question that comes to mind is whether this means an inheritance that God receives or is it the inheritance that we receive from God? In both the Greek and the English, both are possible. Commentators seem to be about equally divided as to which is meant here. In cases like this, I tend to think that probably both are meant, so we can look at each.

We, as Christians, will receive an inheritance from God. Back in verse 5, Paul mentions that we are adopted as sons through Jesus Christ. (Keep in mind that everything God does for us, He does through His Son, Jesus. This is part of His plan to have everything eventually summed up in Him.) We become adopted children of God. Children receive an inheritance from their Fathers. Additionally, we are told in verse 11, that we have obtained an inheritance in Jesus. Back in verse 18, Paul uses the words “riches” and “glory” when describing this inheritance. Now, a while back, we considered some of the inheritance we look forward to: peace, joy, eternal fellowship with our Saviour. The Bible doesn’t give us a list of everything we look forward to, but there is a wonderful description of it.

1 Corinthians 2:9

but just as it is written,

“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,  
And *which* have not entered the heart of man,  
All that God has prepared for those who love Him.”

Try as we might, we cannot begin to comprehend what an inheritance we have coming. This is another reason to not let your hearts be troubled. We will not keep any possessions we have in this life, and they will pale in comparison to what we have coming. What is coming is from the treasuries of God Himself and will never fade and will never wear away.

Now, let’s consider the other alternative; that the inheritance is what God will receive. And what will He receive? Us. If we truly consider ourselves, it seems that God is receiving a miserable inheritance. Indeed, as we are, we are not worth receiving and God would not accept us. Sinful people that we are cannot be in the presence of the holy God. The good news is, that once we have accepted Jesus, God fixes us. During this life, God sees us through Jesus, and He sees all His perfection in us. When we die, then we are transformed into the likeness of Christ and are presentable to God. It is all because of Jesus that Paul is able to call the readers of this letter saints, and because of Jesus that we also have that title.

It is well worth our time on occasion, to consider the God who has done this for us. Even in prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to give you a better understanding of what God has done on our behalf. He has gone to a lot of trouble for us by not bringing swift judgement on us for our rebellion. Think about how God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, set aside His majesty and became one of us. Consider the suffering He endured, at our hands, to make a path for our salvation. His love for us is so far beyond what we can comprehend. His mercy shows in all the things He forgives us for and how often He will take us back when we stray. Grace is part of His very being, He showers us with good that we don’t deserve.

It is important to dwell on these things, but we must be careful to keep balanced. Part of the reason these elements of God’s character are so amazing is because of the other parts of His character. Don’t let yourself think of God as being soft and simply letting things slide. Yahweh is also a God of holiness, justice, and of wrath. Just ask the people of the earth who ignored Him at the time of Noah, ask the people of Sodom; ask the people of Egypt who endured the plagues; ask the people of Israel who have been subdued by other nations time and again for their unfaithfulness. God does not simply let our sins slide; the price was paid for them by Jesus. He bore God’s wrath on our behalf. So yes, it is more than fair that belief in Christ is the only way to salvation.

Ultimately, God does the work in preparing us, but the Bible clearly teaches that we are not to simply coast until Jesus comes back. God has work for us to do, things He decided for us long before He even began creation. Paul makes this point in Ephesians 2:10. In the Gospel of John, in chapters 14 and 15, Jesus talks about following His commandments. Jesus’ commandments involve doing things, holding certain beliefs, and treating other people in certain ways. In addition, we don’t get to pick the ones we like, we are responsible for following all of His commands.

By the blood of Christ, we are cleansed, we receive His righteousness, and in time we are transformed so that we are like Him. Then we are presentable to God, then we are an inheritance acceptable and pleasing to God. What a day that will be, when we are truly as God intended us and He is pleased to have fellowship with us forever.

Either way of looking at this inheritance, whether it is God’s or ours, it is immensely for our good. Sin and sadness and death will be gone. John tells us in Revelation 22:3-4:

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads.

The curse will be gone; nothing will be left except the blessings God has for us. One of those blessings is to be in God’s presence. To simply look upon God would be enough to hold our attention for eternity, but He has more for us. We will serve Him. The Bible doesn’t tell us exactly how we will do that or what we will do, but it will be our delight to do so. In this, we have a little bit of heaven here on earth because we do get to serve Him; and by the help of the Holy Spirit it is our delight now.

Notice that thinking about the joys that are coming is something we should be doing. Paul is actually praying that we “know it”; he prays that we may “know the riches of its glory”. While we are not to despise our life now because God has work for us to do, it is fine to look forward to what He has for us. Just be sure to look forward with gratitude.

Prayer

Lord God, we look forward to all that You have waiting for us when we join You in eternity. Your word tells us that it is “imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away” and that it is “reserved in heaven” for us. We believe these things and so thank You for them.

How gracious You are, O God, for You have made us co-heirs with Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus, who is the Christ. Only by Your love and by Your actions can it be possible for us to be Your adopted children.

Holy Spirit, guide us now; may our hearts delight in doing the Father’s will. May our desire be, that in all we do, we are used to bring all things into subjection to Christ. With Your help, we might be profitable servants to our Lord and Master.

We pray this in Jesus’ name

Amen