

A Series on Ephesians
Knowing God: “the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation” (Ephesians 1:15-23)
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

We are in the middle of a series on the Letter to Ephesians. We have been studying Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians.

Let’s read Ephesians 1:15-17.

¹⁵For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^[f] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

As we talked about a couple of weeks ago, Paul’s focus has been on explaining the gospel of Jesus Christ and praying for people. These were the two main foci of Paul’s ministry. In fact, we saw that these were two foci of the Apostle’s ministry. Prayer was not supplementary. It is primary. We are not called make prayer supplementary. That has been the mistake of the modern church and our church. We are called to make it primary alongside the ministry of the word. It was interesting that God convicted Jason last Sunday to call him to confess and call us to confess in prayer. And we had the most usual but refreshing worship gathering where we spent a significant part of our worship gathering praying and confessing together.

Today, I want to start looking at what Paul prays for.

He does not pray for persecution to stop. He does not pray for material blessings. He does not pray for people’s troubles to go away. He does not pray for change in life circumstances. He says, “I keeping asking that God ... may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” He prays that they may know God better.

So, today, we are going to start a short sub-series called Knowing God.

Now, what does it mean to know God?

To know in the Scriptures means more than just know about something. It means we know someone. You can know about Obama but we don't know him. You and I don't have a personal relationship with him. We don't know him like Michelle knows him. We know a lot about him. Actually, the Scripture, the word "know" sometimes means to engage in sex. That's why the Bible says, so and so knew so and so and they had a son. To know is to be in a deep relationship.

If you look at John 3:16, it says: **"For God so loved the world, he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** Did you ever wonder what eternal life meant? You might say that it is everlasting life. But, an everlasting life as we live it now might be the miserable life. Eternal life that Jesus promised is more than that. In John 17:3, Jesus says, "Now, this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Eternal, heaven starts now (not when we die), and this heaven is about knowing God and Jesus Christ. Knowing here means to be in a deep, intimate, and personal knowledge.

When you think about any relationship, knowing each other is the foundation of the relationship. You want the relationship to reflect mutual knowledge. Have you ever been in a relationship where one party does not reveal him or herself to the other? After a while, the relationship is just weird. The Scripture says that God knows us. He knows the number of hair on your head. He knows your thoughts, your motives, your pains, your dreams, even your darkness. He knows everything about you and loves you. But, the Scripture also says that God wants us to know him. Is that how we approach Him?

How does that relationship come about? How do we come to know God? And how do we get to know God better?

We don't get to know God better just by trying really hard to figure him. If we do that, we'll just end up making up a god. We can get to know God somewhat from what he has created. We know he must be powerful and creative, maybe even good since he put a conscience inside of us that tell us what is good and bad, but beyond that there is really no way to really know God intimately. God is infinite. We are finite. There is no way a finite being can ever know the infinite. There is no way a dot who lives in a one dimensional world to understand what a cube looks like. If you think of a dot in a line, all he knows about the world is that he sees a dot to his right and a dot to his left. There

is no way for a dot to understand what a cube, a three dimensional world looks like unless it is revealed to him.

Paul therefore prays that we would be given the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know him better. Paul prays for *the spirit of wisdom and revelation*.

Let me talk about revelation first. Then, I'll talk about the Spirit of wisdom.

II. The Revelation

Where has God revealed himself? He has done so primarily through the Scriptures in the person of Jesus Christ.

So where shall we go if we want to grow in the knowledge of God? The answer is to the Scriptures! God has not given us the word to just teach us the dos and the don'ts, although he does teach us that; he didn't give us the word just to help survive another day, although it gives us grace to do that. The primary reason that God has given us his Word is that we might come to know him, his ways, and understand his purposes, and identify ourselves with him. This is the great reason for the Word of God.

But, what do we do? We often go to God for what we can get out of God. What he can do for US. How would you feel if people were only interested in you for the things they could get out of you? Wouldn't you call that insincere love? Yet isn't that what we do?

But the great reason for Holy Scripture is that we may come to know God, understand the glory of his purposes, and identify ourselves with him. **He made us to know him.** The great tragedy of the world is expressed in Jesus' heart cry in John 17:25, "**Oh, righteous Father, the world has not known thee**" (v. 25 RSV). This is the ultimate tragedy, because the knowing God is what life is all about.

I said earlier that knowing God is different than knowing about God. A person can know a great deal about God and be a renown theologian and not know God personally at all. But I want to balance that by saying it is a very strange love relationship if you didn't want to get to know absolutely everything you can about the person you love. When you love someone, you always want to know everything about your love. The lover constantly says to the beloved, "Tell me about yourself." I knew I

loved Grace when I was so hungry for her. I wanted to know everything about her. We need to have this same attitude about getting to know God.

You can't just experientially get to know God without getting to know him through the Scriptures. You have to study the Scriptures carefully and deeply. Initially, I went to seminary simply because I wanted to know everything I can about God. But, I remember when I was studying Greek, the original language of the Bible, I was wondering whether this was really necessary. And I remember one of my New Testament professor say, if you love God, don't you want to know everything about him? Even Greek, the language that the original sayings of Jesus.

I think many of us seek experiential knowledge of God but ignore the study of the Scriptures. Now, that's wrong. We can pray and hear the voice of God, but if that is not within the context of the revealed word of God, we are going to be off. Even if we have prophetic gifts, we have to practice that gift in the context of the Word of God. What we hear is far from perfect. This is why we have to careful when we practice the gift of prophecy. We have to have the humility to acknowledge that we can be wrong. There is no doctrine of infallibility of human prophesy. Only the Bible is infallible! Now, this is not to say that we should ignore prophesy. No! No! The Scripture specifically encourages it for the edification of the Body. It specially tells us to use it in love, for if it is not in love, it is like a gong, completely useless. But, it tells us to test all prophecies. How do we test it? We test it according to the Scriptures.

Even Jesus was a man steeped in Scripture. When he was tempted by the devil, in Matthew 4:4, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3.

⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

This pattern repeats itself over and over again.

When he was crucified and the sins of the world was put on his shoulders and he was separated from His father, he cried out in Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When he was about the breath his last breath, he quoted Psalm 31:5, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

When they stabbed him, Jesus literally bled Scripture.

Jesus was a man who was constantly memorizing, studying, and mediating on the Scriptures. The Word of God was completely part of who he was. He was completely soaked in the Word.

When the church moves away from deep study of Scriptures, the church has always gone into trouble. They become moralistic, judgmental, focused on political agenda instead of the Kingdom agenda, and sometimes even create heresy. Throughout history, people of God studied the Scripture carefully and methodically. Think about people like Augustine, think about reformers like Jean Calvin, Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards. If you read their sermons and materials, it is amazingly deep. But, now, people don't even talk about the Bible in its depth anymore. In fact, sometime people make fun of people who are deeply serious about understanding the Word. When we undermine biblical knowledge, we get shallow; and we begin to focus more on stuff people want to hear rather than what the Scripture says. The sermons end up becoming what people want to hear rather than what the Scripture says. The church ends up being a how to fix yourself seminar rather than a place where we get to know and worship God!! You know, you can't fix yourself unless you know God and are empowered by God!!

III. The Spirit of Wisdom.

Now, I want to look at what Paul means by the Spirit of wisdom. At first, I thought Paul was talking about being wise, using practical common sense and stuff like that. But, as I researched how Paul uses the term "wisdom," I came to see that I was completely wrong. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:22-24, 2:2:

²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. . . . (skipping to chapter 2:2) ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

So, the Spirit of wisdom or the wisdom of God has to do with Jesus Christ and him crucified. It is not the wisdom of this world. This is not the passage that tells you to be wise and serpents and innocent as doves. That's not the right context. In this context, Paul is praying that we would have the Spirit of Wisdom as we dig into the revealed Word. That Spirit of wisdom has to do with God has been doing; it has to do with

understanding God's plan, his will, the movement of God. It's about understanding God's overall plan. It's about understanding God's overall plan of redemption. It's about understanding **the gospel of Jesus Christ**. It's about understanding that the Scripture must be understood as the gospel from beginning to the end. The whole Bible must be understood as the gospel.

If we don't get this, we will end up distorting the revelation, the Word. If you don't understand the gospel, for example, you don't understand how to read the book of Leviticus. I just heard a Christian beauty contestant quote Leviticus in support of a moral standard. What are you going to do with all the rules about what we are suppose to eat and what we are not suppose to eat, what they can't touch or what happens when a woman has her period. If you don't understand the gospel of Jesus Christ, you will not understand the revealed Scripture. You have to read the book of Leviticus with the Spirit of wisdom, in accordance with God's plan—the gospel. When you begin to see the book in the light of God's love and grace, the book helps you know God better.

I used to have problems with the parts of the Bible that seems to discriminate against certain people, like against the second born for the first. But, when the Spirit of wisdom, the gospel of Jesus Christ, was applied, and I started to read a story of the revelation of the gospel, I started to see that there was a pattern in the way God works. God always picks the loser. He chose Jacob, instead of Esau, even though Esau was the elder son. He chose Leah, instead of Rachel, even though Rachel was the pretty one that Jacob loved. If you look at the genealogy of Jesus, and study who those people are, you start to realize that God has a pattern of choosing the weaker. Then, Jesus comes, he chooses the lowly. He chooses the prostitutes. He chooses the tax collectors. God has a way of delivering the gospel, that it is not the good and the strong that make it, it is the weak and the humble that does. That's the gospel. I am telling you that if you start applying the wisdom of God to the Scriptures, the eyes of your heart will open, and you will see things you have not seen.

Only of my favorite stories in the NT is the story after Jesus resurrects.

When Jesus was walking with a couple of disciples on the Road to Emmaus, what did he do with them when he sat down with them? In Luke 24:25-27:

²⁵ He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ^b have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

I love the story when he comes back to the disciples. They are freaked out in the beginning. But, after they realize that it is really Jesus, they rejoice. They get really excited. You know what Jesus did with them afterwards but before he ascended? Luke 24:44-47:

⁴⁴ He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Jesus taught his disciples that the Bible is about him. He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. That is the Spirit of wisdom. The OT is about Jesus as well. The OT is about the gospel as well. When we begin to see that, we get the whole picture of what God has revealed to us.

Remember, it is not just the law, the dos and the don'ts. It is the person of Jesus Christ, revealed throughout the Scriptures.

At New City, we are a gospel-centered church. One of the things that means is that we refuse to read the OT or even the NT as moralistic lesson or biblical principles to live by. No! The Spirit of wisdom and revelation reveals to us God through the person of Jesus Christ so that we would know him better.

1. We resolve to read the Bible as the Gospel.

Since the central theme of the Bible is—the sufferings and glory of Christ, we resolve to read the Bible as the story of salvation, not moralistic lessons. We resolve to see how the law, the ceremonies, and the history all point us to their fulfillment in the coming of the Deliverer promised in Genesis 3:15 and throughout the Bible.

2. We resolve to preach and teach the Gospel to believers, not just unbelievers.

^b Or *Messiah*; also in verse 46

We become Christians and we grow as Christians by grace through faith in Jesus. Therefore, we resolve to preach the Gospel as the means to grow, not 'biblical principles for living' (which means 'the law') to believers.

3. We resolve to preach and teach the Gospel in every sermon and every lesson.

The most desperate need of both unbelievers and believers is to hear and appropriate the Gospel to their lives each and every day. Therefore, we resolve to point people to the Gospel in every sermon, lesson, small group meeting, etc.

4. We resolve to receive the Gospel as the "milk" and the "meat" of God's Word.

Since the whole Bible is the Gospel and Christ crucified is the wisdom and power of God (1Cor.1:22-24), then we never move beyond the Gospel to something deeper. There is nothing deeper than the Gospel. Therefore, we resolve to view the Gospel as both the A-B-C's and the A-to-Z of Christianity.

5. We resolve to view the world and the church through the lens of the Gospel.

Since the Bible is our ultimate authority and the Bible is the Gospel, we resolve to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1Cor.2:2). This means our understanding of the world and church and how to address its needs and problems will be based on the Gospel.

Invite people to pray the prayers of Paul: that God would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know God better.