

Main Idea: As we examine Paul’s first prayer for the Ephesians recorded in Ephesians 1:15-23, we discover two vital God-focused prayer requests that we ought to be praying for the people we love and for ourselves.

- I. Let’s ask God to help us know Him better (15-17).
 - A. Paul’s prayer was for people who knew Christ (15).
 - B. Paul’s prayer was ongoing (16-17a).
 1. In order to know God better, we must first know Him.
 2. If we do know God, we need to know Him better.
 - C. Paul’s prayer recognized the triune nature of God (17b).
 1. We address the Father.
 2. We plead the merit of the Son.
 3. We request the help of the Spirit.
- II. Let’s ask God to help us know His gifts better (18-23).
 - A. If we are in Christ, we have hope (18a).
 - B. If we are in Christ, we are an inheritance (18b).
 - C. If we are in Christ, we have power (19-23).
 1. It’s the same power that raised Christ from the dead (20a).
 2. It’s the same power that seated Christ on His throne in heaven (20b-21).
 3. It’s the same power that made Christ head over everything (22-23).

Make It Personal: Two resolves are in order

1. Let’s make sure our prayers are God-focused.
2. Let’s make sure our lives are God-focused.

We are a blessed people in so many ways. Two hundred fifty years ago this nation came into existence and we are blessed beyond measure to live in it.

I’ve been privileged to spend time in many nations around this globe and in every nation I’ve been, I continually meet people who know what we tend to forget. America is a blessed nation. It’s why the nations have flocked to America. This is our story. For two hundred and fifty years, the nations have been coming to America.

My great-great grandfather came from Hanover, Germany to America in the 1850s. He heard about the blessings and desired to become a participant in those blessings. Your family likely has a similar story.

But blessed people have a problem and we need to talk about it. *Blessed people do not respond rightly to their blessings.* Blessed people are prone to think that they are responsible for the blessings, that they created them and therefore own them. And when that thought takes root, blessed people begin to misuse the blessings, to hoard the blessings, to trust in the blessings, to live for the accumulation of the blessings. In short, blessed people ignore the Blessor.

It’s true. *Blessed people do not respond rightly to their blessings.* Blessed people need more than blessings. And what is that? They need what Paul provided for the blessed people he addressed when he wrote his letter to the church in Ephesus.

Notice how Paul begins his letter in Ephesians 1:3. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” We have been blessed, says Paul. God is the Blessor. He has blessed

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the messages preached at WBC in 2008 and on 10/4/15.

us with every spiritual blessing. Who has received these blessings? Those who are *in Christ*.

But blessed people do not respond rightly to their blessings. This is true of a nation, whether that nation is Israel (just read the Old Testament), or England, France, and Spain (just read the history books, for each of these nations were once incredibly blessed power-houses on planet earth), or the United States of America.

It's also true of the church of Jesus Christ. It's true of us, Christ-followers, every one of us. As sinners, we by nature respond wrongly to divine blessings. We take them for granted. Or we think we deserve them (and others do not). Or we hoard them. Or live as though we had not received them.

Blessed people need more than blessings. They/we need two God-prescribed activities that Paul demonstrates in Ephesians 1. They need *teaching about God*. And they need *prayer to God*. They need to be taught what they have. And they need prayer so that God will open their eyes to what they have.

This is what blessed people need, and Paul knows it. Paul teaches blessed people what they have in verses 3-14. And Paul prays that blessed people will grasp what they have in verses 15-23.

Parents, I know you want your children to experience blessings. So you give them things. Good things. Food. Toys. Experiences. You sign them up for athletic teams. You enroll them in the best schools you can. You want them to experience blessings.

But know this. If you do not provide them with these two activities they will not respond rightly to the blessings. They need the *teaching of God's Word* and they need *prayer*, and so do you, and so do all of us.

I love Ephesians and have turned to it consistently in my life. We're going to turn to it again to learn about this vital subject, *prayer*, and specifically, *how to pray for blessed people*. There are three important prayer texts in Ephesians, one in chapter one, the second in chapter three, and the third in chapter six. We looked at Paul's prayer in Ephesians 6 back in January. We will allow the other two to be our prayer tutors this week and next.

Our text today is Paul's first prayer for the church in Ephesus which is recorded in Ephesians 1. If there's one thing this prayer teaches us, it's that blessed people need more than blessings. They need to know the Blesser.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23

We refer to Ephesians as a "prison" epistle because Paul wrote it while incarcerated, probably in Rome. He's talking about blessings from prison. Let that sink in. We don't have to have what the world insists we have in order to see ourselves as blessed.

As we saw last time in his prayer recorded in the book of Romans, Paul prayed for God to open a door so he could go to Rome and minister. And God did open the door, but not as Paul envisioned. He was arrested in Jerusalem. What crime had he committed? The crime of telling people about Jesus. And that action infuriated some zealous Jews and irritated some powerful Romans. Consequently, Paul spent the next four years of his life essentially in chains.

William Cowper, the 18th century hymnwriter, said it well. "*God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform. He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.*"

It's true, isn't it? The ways of the Infinite God are often mysterious to finite creatures, and His answers to our prayers can come in the strangest of packages.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn shared this personal testimony, “It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually, it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes, not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart, and through all human hearts. So, bless you, prison, for having been in my life.”²

Paul wrote Ephesians in AD 60. That was three years after he expressed his prayer request in Romans for an open door of ministry to Rome and then to Spain. This man wanted to serve God. And now he’s in prison. Think about it. The apostle Paul, whose calling and great delight in life was to make Christ known to the peoples who had never heard of Him, was incarcerated. He couldn’t travel to cities to preach the gospel. He couldn’t even leave the dwelling where he lived under house arrest, chained to a soldier.

Yet still he could participate in the ministry of gospel advancement. How? By using his *pen* and his *prayers*. Through his writing and his intercession. We’re prone to say, “Well, I don’t have this and I don’t have that. If I did, I could really serve the Lord.” Let’s learn from Paul. What *has* He given us? Where *has* He placed us? How *can* we use what He has entrusted to us to advance His mission?

There are two vital God-focused prayer requests that we ought to be praying for the blessed people in our lives. Paul models them both for us in Ephesians 1. First, let’s ask God to help us *know Him better* (15-17), and secondly, to *know His gifts better* (18-23).

I. Ask God to help us know Him better (15-17).

Listen again to verses 15-17, “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.”

I like how the NIV84 puts it. “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, *so that you may know him better.*” In that final phrase Paul captures what matters most. He says he is praying that his friends in Ephesus will know God better.

Why did Paul bring that particular request to God in behalf of the Ephesians? To answer that question, we must go back and ponder the first words in verse 15, “For this reason.” What reason does Paul say motivated him to pray for the Ephesians? Is he referring merely to the fact that he had heard about the Ephesians’ faith and love? It is likely that Paul had in mind that and much more, namely what he just wrote about in the preceding section of verses 3-14.

Let’s look back and we’ll see the reason Paul prayed as he did. In verses 3-14 Paul blessed God for His sovereign and gracious work in providing salvation for sinners. He praises the God the Father for designing redemption in verses 3-6, then praises God the Son for His work to accomplish redemption in verses 7-12, and then praises God the Holy Spirit for His work in applying redemption in verses 13-14. It’s with *this* in mind that Paul prayed.³ It’s with the knowledge that the Almighty God has chosen from eternity past to save sinners, that He sent His Son into the world to provide that salvation by means of His perfect life, death as a substitute, and victorious resurrection, and that the Holy Spirit is working through the proclamation of this gospel to save and seal

² *The Gulag Archipelago*, taken from Charles Swindoll, *Leadership*.

³ I’m indebted to D. A. Carson’s helpful observations concerning this; p. 169.

sinner. It's what God has done, is doing, and will do that moved Paul to pray as he did for the Ephesians.

There are three specifics in Paul's first prayer request.

A. Paul's prayer was for people who knew Christ (15). He says in verse 15, "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints..." In order to know God better, a person must first know God. And these are people who indeed knew Him.

We first learn about Paul's relationship with the people of Ephesus in Acts 18, for Paul made an initial stop there during his second missionary journey. But it during his third missionary journey that he invested at least two years of his life there, first preaching in the synagogues and then later beginning a daily Bible study in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. The result? A church was established and from that church the gospel began to have a regional impact. As Acts 19:10 indicates, "This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."

Then several years passed. It was during this time that Paul was arrested and eventually shipped to Rome. But as he begins this letter, he says he's "heard" things about these readers in Ephesus. He's heard about their *faith* and *love*. Those are two marks of a Christian: *faith* in the Lord Jesus, and *love* for the saints.

Apparently, the church has grown for Paul says he *heard* about their faith and love. He *saw* firsthand the initial believers' faith and love, but has now *heard* about the more recent converts. *Faith in the Lord*—that speaks of a proper vertical relationship. And *love for all the saints*—that speaks of proper horizontal relationships. Those are two necessary evidences of a genuine Christian. Such a person bears fruit that demonstrates a proper relationship with God and people.

This is key. The request we're considering was offered for people who knew Christ.

B. Paul's prayer was ongoing (16-17a). He says in verse 16, "I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." And then in verse 17, "I keep asking." Note Paul's persistence in praying, his consistency. He did a lot of ministerial tasks. He preached. He did personal evangelism. He wrote letters to encourage, instruct, and address problems. He organized ministry trips, and much more. But here's something he did day and night. He *prayed*. He says he prayed continually for the believers in Ephesus, asking God again and again for the same thing.

And what was that request? Don't miss it. It's the most important request we could ever bring to the throne of grace. *I keep asking God to help you know Him better.* We learn two vital realities from this.

First, in order to know God better, we must first know Him. If I said, "This year I'd like to get to know Elon Musk better," that word "*better*" suggests there's a relationship in place but I'd like to see it go beyond what it is. The reason that Paul asked God to help the Ephesians to know Him *better* was because they did know Him.

This is basic, yet essential. If we want to know God *better*, we must first come to know Him. You say, "Well, doesn't everybody know God?" No, they don't. In fact, according to the Bible, at birth *no one* knows God. We all enter the world blind to Him in darkness, ignorant of Him, all because of sin, inherited sin and our own sin. In order to know God, we must accept the One He sent into the world to rescue us from our dark prisons. We must accept the Light of the world, God's own Son, Jesus the Christ, as our Savior and Lord. It's true. In order to know God *better*, we must first know Him.

This also is true. *If we do know God, we need to know Him better.* None of us know Him as well as we should and the longer I live the more convinced I am of that. This is why Paul kept bringing this request to God again and again. As must we.

As we continue to examine this request, we discover something else.

C. Paul's prayer recognized the triune nature of God (17b). God is one eternal being yet He exists, has existed, and will always exist as three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each of the three persons of the Godhead is equal in terms of essence and worth, yet each possesses a distinct role and function.

It's called the doctrine of the Trinity, but for Paul this was no abstract, ivory tower concept. Indeed, the triune nature of God affected the way he prayed, as it should us.

Paul says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." How will recognizing the triune nature of God affect our prayers? If we follow Paul's example here, we'll learn that in prayer there's a natural sequence.

We address the Father, plead the merit of the Son, and request the help of the Spirit.

Let's unpack that important sentence. Paul says he addressed his prayer to *God, the glorious Father*. But since Paul knew that this God is holy and cannot allow sinners to enter His presence, Paul pleaded the merit of God's Son as the basis for approaching Him, affirming that he was asking the *God of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Only those who are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ can call on God, and those who do know Christ can call on God boldly. And so, on the merit of the Son, Paul addressed the Father and requested the help of the Spirit, of God the Holy Spirit, that He would help the Ephesian Christians know the Living God better.

My friends, Jesus said that eternal life is *knowing God* (John 17:3). But God is not merely some "higher power" or some "fill in the blank" or some "use whatever name you want to call him, it doesn't matter." No. God is who He is, and the God who is has revealed Himself in His Word. When we pray, we must line up our thoughts and words with the reality of His self-disclosure.

Again, that's what Paul is doing here. This Trinitarian structure of Paul's prayer grows right out of the truths he just taught in verses 3-14. It's because of who God the Father is and what He has done that we address our prayer to Him (the Father chose us, verse 4; the Father predestined us and adopted us, verse 5). Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven." And it's because of who God the Son is and what He has done for us that we plead His merit when we pray (the Son provided us with redemption and forgiveness through His shed blood, verse 7). And it's because of who God the Holy Spirit is and what He does that we request His help in prayer (He is the One whom the Son sent to convict sinners, says John 16:8, and seal believers, says Ephesians 1:13).

Now do you see why we need to be asking God to help us know Him better? He is the infinite Creator and the Matchless Redeemer, and we will never plumb the depths of His greatness and grace. When it comes to God, there's always more to learn! And if we truly know Him, this should be our desire and our continual prayer request, both for ourselves and each other. *Help us to know You better!*

J. I. Packer said, "A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about God."⁴ That comes from Packer's classic, *Knowing God*.

John Stott said it well, "There is no higher knowledge than the knowledge of God Himself."⁵

⁴ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 21.

How important is knowing God better for you, my friend? Is it important enough to set aside time every day to study the Book He has given us, the Book He gave us for the very purpose that we might know Him. Is it important enough to carve out daily quiet-time to meditate on what He is like and what He has done for us, specifically to ponder the cross-work His Son accomplished for us? Is knowing Him important enough that you'll make every effort possible to be present when His people gather to learn about Him and worship Him? Is knowing Him so significant to you that you will give sacrificially so that others might come to know Him?

One of the ways God answers this request is through the use of trials. Billy Sunday once said, "I've thanked God a thousand times for the roses but never for the thorns, but now I have learned to thank Him for the thorns."⁶ How can a person thank God for thorns? It's not the thorns per se, but the understanding that God's intent is to use the thorns and everything else in our lives to *help us know Him better*.

There's a second request that Paul brought to God, and so should we. Knowing *Him* better. That's first and foremost. Knowing *His gifts* better. That's what follows.

II. Ask God to help us know His gifts better (18-23).

Listen to verses 18-19 (ESV), "Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might."

If you are in Christ, then God has given you three valuable possessions. You have them. It's a fact. But you may not know that you have them, or you may know it yet not be living like it. Paul prayed that God would do something for the Ephesian believers so that they would know better the gifts that they possessed.

Before we look at the gifts, notice what Paul said needed to happen in order to appreciate the gifts. In the NIV, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know..." Something needs to happen in your *heart*, and Paul prayed that it would. In the Bible the "heart" refers to the part of us that no one can see. It's the place where we think, process information, make value judgments, and then make decisions. In our day we associate the term "heart" with emotion, and while the biblical term encompasses emotion, it refers primarily to our *mind*.

Notice that Paul says he's asking God to "enlighten" the heart, and specifically "the eyes of your heart." In other words, he wants God to help the Ephesians see something (that's what eyes are for), to see something more clearly (that's what light is for), and to see it not merely in some external sense that won't affect their lives, but to see it in the place where they process information, make value judgments, and make decisions, that is, in their *hearts*.

Now let's look at these three possessions. They are ours if we are in Christ.

A. If we are in Christ, we have hope (18a). In the ESV, "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is *the hope to which he has called you*."⁷ Consider those words carefully. They indicate that we who are in Christ have hope. Again, we may not fully grasp what that hope is (which is why it's Paul's prayer request), but we have it. And what we have in Christ is not a generic hope, but a very specific

⁵ John Stott, p. 54.

⁶ Taken from his sermon on "Heaven," Dorsett, p. 175.

⁷ In the NIV, "That you may know the hope to which he has called you."

hope. Paul refers to it as the hope *to which God has called us*. Our hope, then, is linked to our God-initiated calling.

Just what is our calling? Paul identified our calling clearly back in verses 4-5, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.” This is our calling. In eternity past, God the Father chose us in Christ. His intent? He purposed to form a people that would be holy and blameless, a people that would resemble His dear Son.

God always finishes what He starts. That’s what gives us hope. We may not yet resemble Christ as we ought, but we will. God won’t stop until we do. D. A. Carson explains, “If you are a Christian, the hope of your calling is the component of your salvation that you look forward to in the future.”⁸

So often what grabs our attention is the *unfinished* business. We’re plagued by the glaring reality that we do *not* resemble Christ in so many ways. I’m very aware of my impatience when standing in lines—that’s not like Christ. And my fear of man—that’s not like Christ. And sometimes I see your shortcomings, too.

But know this. The day is coming when we will not only *see* Christ, but we will be *like* Him. That is our calling and that calling gives us hope in the present. And a very powerful incentive, too. We *will* change—that’s a future certainty. We *can* change—that’s a present guarantee. And that’s why Paul prayed that the people entrusted to his care in Ephesus would know better the hope of His calling.

B. If we are in Christ, we are an inheritance (18b). Notice the middle of verse 18, “What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” While it’s true that we are joint-heirs with Christ and as such have a tremendous inheritance coming, that is not what Paul has in mind here.

Notice the terms Paul uses. He refers to “His glorious inheritance in the saints.” The pronoun “His” refers to God. So “His glorious inheritance” refers to God’s inheritance. God has an inheritance? Yes, He does. His inheritance is *in the saints*, says Paul.

Let that sink in. We who are *saints* are *God’s* inheritance. By definition, an inheritance is “the practice of passing on property upon the death of individuals.” An inheritance is something that a person receives in the future. God has an inheritance and it is us.

How can that be? In what sense are *we* (the ‘saints’) God’s inheritance? Once again, Paul has in mind the Trinitarian mystery we pondered moments ago. To put it succinctly, we (the saints) are the inheritance of God the Son. We are a gift given to Him by God the Father, a people for His eternal praise and pleasure.

Paul just praised God for this wonderful reality in Ephesians 1:11. He said, “In him [the Son] we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

Jesus talked about this same reality in John 6:39, “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of *all that he has given me*, but raise them up at the last day.” Jesus there affirmed that God the Father had given Him a love gift, a people for whom He would die and then raise up at the last day.

Later Jesus prayed about this love gift in John 17:24, saying, “Father, I want *those you have given me* to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

⁸ D. A. Carson, p. 176.

Did you catch that? On the night before He was crucified, Jesus indicated there was something that He *wanted*. He wanted the people the Father had given to Him to see His glory. Has that happened? Yes, in part. The first disciples saw His glory after His resurrection. They saw it and were amazed by it, by *Him*. But then He returned to heaven. Are we seeing His glory now? Not fully, for our glorious Savior is unseen in the present, at least to the naked eye. “Whom having *not* seen, you love,” said Peter in 1 Peter 1:8.

But that will soon change. The Son of God wants His people, His inheritance, to see His glory. And not only *see* it, but *share* it too. “We shall be like Him,” says the apostle John in 1 John 3:2. And what the Sovereign Son wants, the Sovereign Son will receive!

Beloved, this is truth. This is reality. This is fact. This is an incredible blessing that we have received. The Bible says that we are Christ’s inheritance. We belong to Him. We are the trophies of His grace. He has great things in store for us and through us, and He wants us to know it.

But as sinners, we need more than God’s blessing. We need God to open our eyes, to enlighten the eyes of our hearts so we’ll live in light of what He says is true. Here’s the bottom line reality. We who are God’s inheritance don’t always live like it. We try to find our significance in what we do in life, or how we look, or what we possess. And even though we belong to God, we’re prone to treat Him as though He exists for us.

This is why prayer is vital. We need God to open our eyes every day to the fact that we are His. We belong to Him. We are His inheritance.

When you know that, it changes everything. You do marriage differently. You parent differently. You work your job differently. You think of sex differently. And money. And retirement. And everything. Because we know we are His inheritance.

This is the kind of praying we need at WBC, for our kids, for our missionaries, for each other. Please pray this for me and the rest of your pastoral team. “Lord, give us eyes to see that we are Your inheritance.”

C. If we are in Christ, we have power (19-23). The ESV says, “And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.”⁹

I don’t think most of us have even scratched the surface in understanding the power that’s available to us for living the Christian life. One of the great excuses we often use to justify our ongoing, ungodly habits is, “I just can’t change. It’s the way I am!” And while it’s true that we cannot change if we’re depending on our own strength, we *can* change if we are depending on His strength.

We can get rid of that sinful habit. We can stop taking the Lord’s name in vain when we speak, and watching video clips we ought not watch, and using our speech to injure people. We can become gracious and kind people like our Savior. We can be witnesses for Him and be used to bring lost people in the eternal safety of His family. We can do all this and much more because we have His power.

But again, having it is one thing. But grasping that you have it and using it is another. And this is where prayer enters. Paul prayed that the Ephesians would grasp the incomparable power available to them for living God’s kind of life. How great is this power? Paul compares it to three previous demonstrations of divine power.

1. *It’s the same power that raised Christ from the dead (19b-20a).* “That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead.”¹⁰

⁹ The NIV says, “His incomparably great power for us who believe.”

On Friday, they nailed Him to a Roman cross, six hours later He died, but on Sunday morning that lifeless body began to live again. How much power does it take to cause a lifeless corpse to walk out of a tomb alive? Dear friends, God demonstrated His mighty strength in that tomb and raised up His Son from the dead.

And He's still doing it! I don't mean simply that in the future He will raise up His sons and daughters to eternal life, as wonderful as that is to ponder. Paul says that this resurrection power is available *now*. And he prayed that the Ephesians would know God's resurrection power *now*.

Why would they need such power now? For the same reasons you and I need it. To break stubborn sin habits, to overcome impossible challenges, to work through relational frustrations, to accomplish ministry assignments, to be witnesses for Him in a world that doesn't want to hear about Him. Every day we need *power*, and every day it is available. The very same power by which God raised Christ from the dead is ours for the asking.

So let's ask! Yet there's more. Paul gives a second illustration.

2. *It's the same power that seated Christ on His throne in heaven (20b-21)*. The NIV says, "That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead *and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms*, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."¹¹

The devil thought he had triumphed on Friday, but he was wrong. Three days later God raised His Son from the dead, and forty days after that His beloved Son returned to His home in heaven and His Father gave Him a seat on the highest throne in and over the universe. Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and a hoard of others have shaken their tiny fists at God, but they are not on the throne now. God's Son is. And under His Son, God has subjected all potential rivals, demonic, human, and every other potential rival, not just in this age but in the future age as well.

Beloved, we need power, not just for challenges we can *see*, but also for the *unseen*. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, not ultimately, but against principalities and powers. There is a demonic world that hates Christ and Christ's people. Can we stand? Yes, because we have access to Christ's ascension power.

And because we have it, we pray. We ask God, "Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord! Help our missionaries to experience Your ascension power today. They're facing obstacles way beyond their own abilities. But not Yours!"

3. *It's the same power that made Christ head over everything (22-23)*. Listen to how Paul finishes his prayer in verses 22-23, "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."¹²

He died the worst kind of death imaginable. He was nailed to two slabs of wood. He was mocked by those who said He was a fraud, that He lacked the power to come down from His cross. But He stayed on that cross. What power it took for Him to stay on that

¹⁰ The ESV says, "according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead."

¹¹ ESV, "and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."

¹² In the NIV, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

cross! What power to endure the eternal suffering that He chose to bear in the place of hell-bound sinners!

He is no longer suffering, my friend. Now He is ruling. All things have been placed *under His feet*, says Paul as he uses a word picture which speaks of total and absolute sovereign control.

He is *head over all things*, says Paul. In such a position He misses nothing and rules everything and everyone.

To the church, says Paul. Christ demonstrates His power now for the good of His beloved church, which Paul will later refer to in this letter as His dwelling place (2:22), His body (4:16), and His bride (5:25). Oh, how He loves His precious church!

“I need power,” you say. “Where can I experience this power to overcome sin and live for God?”

I’ll answer your question the way Paul answers it in Ephesians. If you want to experience, you must be *in Christ* (Ephesians 1) and *in the church* (Ephesians 2-3). That’s where the power is. So if you are in Christ, and you are in His precious church, you *have* it. In Christ we have all we need. In Christ we have hope. In Christ we are God’s inheritance. In Christ we have power. And we experience this as we choose to do life as a member of His wonderful body, the church.

Friends, if you are in Christ and in His church, what you need is not something else. What you need is to grasp what you have.

And this requires prayer. Specific prayer. Targeted prayer. Prayer in which we ask, first of all, for God to help us know Him better, and then secondly, to know His gifts better.

This brings us back to where we started. Remember the problem? *Blessed people do not respond rightly to their blessings*. They need the Word, and they need prayer.

My friend, if you have the blessings but do not have the Blessor, you will never be satisfied. You will always be looking for more blessings. A bigger house. A better family. A body that works better. A job that’s more satisfying. More blessing. More blessing. More blessing.

But if you know the Blessor, you will have the capacity to appreciate the blessings He chooses to give you, or chooses to withhold from you. You will have joy whether the blessings are there or not because you possess the greatest joy which is God Himself. Knowing God is eternal life. And knowing God better is the most important prayer request you will ever pray for your children, your friends, your neighbors, and yourself.

Make It Personal: Two resolves are in order.

1. *Let’s make sure our prayers are God-focused.*
2. *Let’s make sure our lives are God-focused.*

Song of Response: #26 “*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*” (all four verses)

This evening: *Scioto Hills Family Camp Chapel at 7:15 p.m., Aaron Cook preaching*