

## No Power Shortage

Ephesians 1:15-23

May 27, 2018

A long ago there was a small church, in a small town, in a small county, where a small congregation had tried for years to get the biggest “sinner” in town, Sam, to come to church. Sam the sinner would have nothing to do with the church. He wouldn’t even come on Easter or Christmas. One day the small church building caught fire. Of course, this was in the days before fire engines, so the town’s folk all pitched in to form a bucket brigade. From the local stream, all the way to the church, they formed a human chain. Passing along the buckets of water, they desperately tried to extinguish the flames. The pastor of the church was so engrossed in the struggle that it was several minutes before he noticed that Sam was standing next to him, passing along the buckets. The pastor looked at Sam with sweat rolling down his brow and said, “Well, Sam, it looks like we finally got you to come to church.” Sam handed the pastor another bucket and said, “Yep, I guess you’re right, preacher, but this is the first time the church has been on fire!”

Last week, I mentioned that unless we are centered on God in our personal and corporate lives, we will lack the power needed to reach the lost for Christ. I want to follow up on that this morning, so I invite you to turn in your bulletin to page 5.

Our scripture this morning comes from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. The Book of Acts<sup>1</sup> records Paul’s first brief visit to Ephesus as he was on his way to Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. After this visit to Jerusalem, he returned to Ephesus and spent three years ministering to this great city of commerce, a city given to the worship of idols. Here Paul established a strong community of believers, both Jews and Gentiles, who responded to the message of the Gospel. Paul left Ephesus under severe persecution. As he was returning to Jerusalem on his third missionary journey, Paul did not visit Ephesus, but called the elders of the Church to meet him on the coast and after some exhortation, he left them telling them it would be his last time to see them. A sad farewell is recorded in Acts 20:31-38.

Paul wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians while he was a prisoner in Rome, about 63 AD.<sup>2</sup> And while he was in prison, the reports of the continued growth of the church must have been a great encouragement to Paul. He wrote, “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.” And when Paul says he is praying, he means it. Let’s look and see what he prays for the Ephesians to have.

READ EPHESIANS 1:15-23

The first thing Paul prays for the Ephesians is this: **Spiritual wisdom and understanding to grow in knowledge of God.**

Verses 15-17

*Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God’s people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you*

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 18:19-21

<sup>2</sup> Explorer’s Bible Study

*constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.*<sup>3</sup>

Later in chapter 4:13, Paul says,

*This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.*<sup>4</sup>

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know Christ better, that they would have spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Some people say that couples that have been married for a long time get so they look alike. Now, that's a scary thought for many of you ladies. They start having the same kinds of expressions on their faces. They start having the same kinds of physical characteristics. I'm not sure how true it is, but then I started to look, and it really is true. Have you ever considered why that happens? Well, that's because people have abided with one another, and they begin to be like one another. It's the same way when we are abiding with Christ. We become more Christlike. We begin to take on the characteristics of Christ as we abide in him.<sup>5</sup>

Christ is our model. The more we know of him, the more spiritual wisdom and understanding we have, the more we will be like Him. Paul prays that the church will receive the wisdom and understanding to be like Jesus. Personal knowledge of Christ will change your life.<sup>6</sup>

I want you right now to take out a mirror; you know, that special mirror that shows you not what is on the outside, but what is on the inside. Look at yourself in that mirror and ask yourself this question, "Who do I see: me or Jesus?" If you see yourself, Paul is praying for you.

**The second request Paul prays for the church is that their Hearts flooded with light to understand the promises of God.**

Verse 18:

*I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.*<sup>7</sup>

In Hot Springs, Arkansas, for 50 years, you'd find the Morris Antique Mall. Nothing on the inside distinguishes this antique store from dozens like it in town. There's a musty smell and dusty relics from the past. But if you looked closely at the outside of the Morris Antique Mall, you'd see something that makes it distinct: before it was an antique store, it was a church building. A focus on the future prevents a church from becoming a resting place for dusty relics.

The hope and understanding of a wonderful future we have is not a vague feeling that the future will be positive, but it is complete assurance of certain victory through God. This complete certainty comes to us through the Holy Spirit who is working in us.<sup>8</sup> We in the church need this prayer answered. We're so afraid that it will not work, or that

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 1:15-17 (NLT2)

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 4:13 (NLT2)

<sup>5</sup> Steve Brown, "The Prime Principle," Preaching Today, Tape No. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Life Application Bible: Ephesians 1:16-17

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 1:18 (NLT2)

<sup>8</sup> Life Application Bible: Ephesians 1:18

we can't win. But as Christians, we can be confident that God has won the final victory and is in control of everything. We need not fear any dictator or nation, any cancer or collusion, not even death or Satan himself.<sup>9</sup> We must remember that in the end we win!

**We Win! Who wins? We win!**

**The third request Paul makes of God for the church is this: to Understand the power of God.**

Verses 19:

*I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him.<sup>10</sup>*

A 747 was halfway across the Atlantic when the captain got on the loudspeaker: "Attention, passengers. We have lost one of our engines, but we can certainly reach London with the three we have left. Unfortunately, we will arrive an hour late as a result." An hour later the captain made another announcement: "Sorry, but we lost another engine. Still, we can travel on two. I'm afraid we will now arrive two hours late." Shortly thereafter, the passengers heard the captain's voice again: "Guess what, folks. We just lost our third engine, but please be assured we can fly with only one. We will now arrive in London three hours late." At this point, one passenger became furious. "For Pete's sake," he shouted. "If we lose another engine, we'll be up here all night!"<sup>11</sup>

Paul says some things about this "incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him" in verse 19:

1. It raised Christ from the dead (Verse 20).
2. It is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else in this world or in the world to come (Verse 21).
3. And God has the power to put all things under the authority of Christ, and he gave him this authority for the benefit of the church (Verse 22).

Many of us have been watching the situation with North Korea. There is only one reason why North Korea is in our news: the threat of nuclear war. We fear the power of the atom, yet we belong to the God of the universe who not only created that atomic power but also raised Jesus Christ from the dead. God's incomparably great power is available to help you. There is nothing too difficult for him.

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:1-5:

*You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!<sup>12</sup>*

The "form" or appearance of godliness includes going to church, knowing Christian doctrine, using Christian clichés, and following a community's Christian traditions. Such practices can make a person look good, but if the inner attitudes of

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<sup>9</sup> Life Application Bible: Ephesians 1:20-22

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 1:19 (NLT2)

<sup>11</sup> Nathaniel Scott Miller -- Reader's Digest, June 1989.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NLT2)

belief, love, and worship are lacking, the outer appearance is meaningless. Paul warns us not to be deceived by people who only appear to be Christians. It may be difficult to distinguish them from true Christians at first, but their daily behavior will give them away.<sup>13</sup>

The story is told of a Welsh woman who lived in a remote valley in Wales. She went to a great deal of trouble to have electrical power installed in her home. They noticed she didn't use very much electricity at all. In fact, her usage was minuscule. They sent a meter reader out to check on the matter. The man came to the door and said, "We've looked at the amount. Don't you use electricity?" "Oh yes" she said. "We turn it on every night to see how to light our lamps and then we switch it off again." This sounds like the way many Christians apply the power of God in their lives.

The Church of God apart from the Person and Power of Christ is a useless structure. However ornate it may be in its organization, however perfect in all its arrangements, however rich and increased with goods, if the Church is not revealing the Person, lifting Him to the height where all can see Him, then the Church becomes an impertinence and a sham, a blasphemy and a fraud, and the sooner the world is rid of it, the better.<sup>14</sup>

Joshua 23:10 says, "Each one of you will put to flight a thousand of the enemy, for the LORD your God fights for you, just as he has promised."

Why count heads? One person with God is a majority though there be a thousand on the other side. The Lord's hosts are never too few. When God founded a nation, He called Abram alone and blessed him. When He conquered proud Pharaoh, He used no armies, but only Moses and Aaron. Did all the Israelites together slay so many as Samson alone? The Lord can give the enemy long odds and yet vanquish him. If we have faith, we have God with us, and what are multitudes of the world? One shepherd's dog can drive before him a great flock of sheep. The Lord is sending us, and His strength will accomplish his divine purpose. Therefore, rely on the promise, and be very courageous.<sup>15</sup>

There is only one thing that can stop God's power from work, and that is a church that will not use to. It is a Christian who doesn't tap into God's power.

Paul prays for the Ephesians

1. Spiritual wisdom and understanding to grow in knowledge of God.
2. Hearts flooded with light to understand the promises of God.
3. Understand the power of God.

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<sup>13</sup> Life Application Bible: 2 Timothy 3:5

<sup>14</sup> G. Campbell Morgan in Giant Steps. Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Adapted from "Faith's Checkbook": May 24