

# ***The “What” of Intercessory Prayer, part 1***

*...so that you may know what is.... Ephesians 1.18, 19*

How do you see things?

Need glasses for distance? How about for reading? How about a magnifying glass for that fine print that seems to get smaller as time goes on?

Maybe the question isn't about the role of your eyes and optic nerves, but what attitude goes into your observation. Different people see the same event with different “eyes”, with different interpretations and perceptions. No wonder they say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder!

I am reminded of a cute story about Sherlock Holmes, the great detective, and his friend Dr Watson. They have gone on a camping trip, and in the middle of the night Holmes wakes Watson and asks him what he sees and can deduce from his observations.

Watson looks around, and seeing the moon and stars, deduces that it is the middle of the night. He sees the outlines of the trees, and sniffs, concluding that they are in a glorious pine forest.

Holmes commends his friend for the observations thus far, but then rebukes him for missing something very obvious.

“Watson, you can see all of that because someone stole our tent!”

Perhaps as you have been reading with us those verses in the earlier part of the chapter—vv. 3-14—you have taken issue with some part of what God does in salvation. Perhaps being chosen by the Father and being predestined for a rich inheritance does damage to your understanding of “free will”. Perhaps the fact that only in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ can you have redemption, the forgiveness of sins sounds so exclusionary. Maybe you struggle with God having a perfect plan that is being realized in history—and our current events—that seems so outlandish. Maybe you wonder about the sealing that is the Holy Spirit—how can that be possible?

Or perhaps as you have read those verses you acknowledge their truth in an academic, abstract sort of way—it's all true, but so what?

Now you know why God prays for the Ephesians, and for you.

It is because of what he wrote in those verses that he remembers them in his prayers, because he knew that those truths are contrary to the heart of an unbeliever, and difficult to many believers as well, especially new believers.

So after considering the “why” of his prayer last week, we now look at what he prays for them.

He desires that the God who orchestrated your salvation in Christ would give believers a two-fold spirit—wisdom and revelation—in the knowledge of himself. We might say that he realizes that we need an attitude adjustment. One that shifts our wisdom from the world's wisdom to God's wisdom, thinking his thoughts after him.

You may remember back to your youth when you thought some things the older generation considered important were so stupid, or useless (like math!?!).

And then you grew up a little, and you began to see the wisdom of certain subjects, of particular ways of doing things.

I am reminded of one Algebra I student who fell into my “trap”, saying he didn’t need math, he was going to be a carpenter. And then I showed him the value of the Pythagorean Theorem in squaring up the walls and foundation of a house. His eyes were now opened to how important math was, especially for a carpenter. He learned more than facts—now he was learning how to apply the facts rightly—therein is wisdom.

What happens in our normal human maturity is the same in our spiritual maturity. We need a new spirit, a new attitude within us that we call wisdom. That is what Paul prays for these believers.

And we also need an attitude adjustment regarding revelation—what he has revealed to us about the big picture of salvation.

Perhaps when we heard the gospel we were told that if you don’t want to go to hell, you need to turn to Jesus. True enough; that is part of it.

Maybe you were told that God was angry with you because of your sin. Also true, but not the whole story. Maybe you were told that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Also true, but again only part of the story.

Paul wants us to realize that God’s plan of salvation is so much bigger than just being an escape from hell, just making peace with God, just having a wonderful life from here to eternity.

He prays for the Ephesians, and by extension for us, that we would have a spirit of revelation in knowing God. Not just knowing facts about God, but *knowing God himself*.

So how does that happen? *By having the eyes of our heart enlightened*—having our eyes open to what really is going on in the big picture of God’s saving work, and not just seeing our own little worlds that we have made for ourselves, or seeing things from our very limited perspective. Because we cannot see it all without the eyes of our hearts being enlightened. Our horizons need to be supernaturally, spiritually expanded.

You may remember what Moses told the Hebrews in Deuteronomy 29. He had been reminding them of their Exodus experience, God’s redemptive work for them—the Passover in Egypt, the giving of the Law at Sinai, the construction of the Tabernacle, the journey through the wilderness, and finally the arrived at the edge of the promised land.

*You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. (Deuteronomy 29.2-4)*

They had seen the miracles, taken the journey, eaten the food, built the tabernacle, yet missed the big picture of God's redemption. They saw stuff, but not the importance of the stuff.

What did they miss? What Paul wants us to *not* miss. He wants us to see with our hearts—have the understanding—so that we might know 3 things:

- *what is the hope of his calling* in our lives;
- *what is the wealth of the glory of his inheritance in the saints*, all that God has prepared for us; and
- *what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe according to the working of his powerful strength which he worked in Christ by raising him from the dead and seated him on his right hand in the heavenlies.*

For this morning I would like for us to just focus on the first thing: the hope, or expectation of God's calling in our lives.

What the Hebrews missed was the larger picture of redemption. Their immediate concern was their suffering as slaves in Egypt, with persecutions and increasing labors from their task masters. They wanted relief. They wanted out of there.

And God got them out. But do they ever ask the question, "Why?"

Why indeed would God go to all that effort? Why 10 plagues and not 1 or 2? Why any plagues at all? Why a Passover meal? Why leave by the Red Sea, and not the northern route? Why go to Sinai? Why have the Law, or the Tabernacle, or the celebrations?

Better question: "Why me? Why was this nation redeemed with a mighty hand, when other peoples at other times were not?"

Better yet: Why would God redeem at all, considering that mankind is responsible for disobedience in the first place? Why not just walk away, so to speak, from these people who continually disobey, who continually reject what is right?

The Hebrews missed some very important observations surrounding their redemption.

They missed that God had made a promise to Abraham, which included their being given a promised land, and more than that included that they would be instruments among the peoples for his glory.

They missed that in those plagues there was a distinction made between them and the Egyptians. They were spared the plagues.

They missed that with the Passover there is a perpetual reminder of God's saving power being displayed—*for them*.

They missed that the Law was given for their good and not their harm, and that the Law was their wisdom before the watching world, as they were to be the example of righteousness and holiness as they lived it out.

They also missed that their redemption was to be a picture of a greater redemption that God had planned and illustrated in a variety of ways throughout their history.

Well, so much about what they missed.

Paul prays that the eyes of our hearts would be opened so that we would know the hope—the expectation of his calling in our lives that brought us to himself.

What is that expectation for us? Not just that we would avoid eternity in hell, but that we would have the certainty continued communion with Jesus Christ, in this life and in the next. The certainty that we will be conformed to his image, that process beginning in this life, and being completed when we arrive on the other side. It is the certainty of the resurrection to life. It is the certainty of our being found guilt-free when the Books are opened at the great judgment. It is the certainty of no condemnation, no tears, no regrets, no sorrow when he finally brings us home.

That is the hope, the expectation of God's calling on our lives.

That is why we come to this table today. It is a remembrance of Christ as our Passover Lamb, and a reminder of a great feast yet to come as a part of that calling.

If you are a believer, may the eyes of your heart be enlightened to see more of what God has done for you in Christ Jesus.