

10/13/24 Christ Fellowship

Unified Under Christ – Eph. 1

Let me tell you about a couple of my friends. The first guy I see pretty often and I know him pretty well but he loves to talk. Anybody else have a friend that loves to talk? I saw this guy the other day and I said, “*Good morning, Dave*” and I’m not exaggerating, for the next fifteen minutes I never said another word. He just talked and talked and talked. I heard about his childhood, where he went to school, his first car, his first apartment and how much the rent was. He talked about the weather and politics and one story just led right into another story and on and on he went. I wasn’t in a hurry so I just let him talk and I was actually pretty amazed that he could go on for so long with absolutely no encouragement from me.

Now my other friend likes to text. He’s not much of a talker but he sends long texts. The problem is there is zero punctuation or grammar of any kind. Do you have any friends that text like that? It’s just one long sentence with no periods, no commas, no punctuation or capitalization of any kind. And I always tell him that I can’t read that. It doesn’t make sense to me. One thought rolls into another and I’m sure when he was texting it made sense to him but in written form, it’s confusing.

Now, can you imagine those two friends combined? Well, you can if you read Ephesians chapter one because that is similar to how Paul wrote this letter. He talks a lot and says a lot of words and it all seems to run together sometimes. We just started studying the book of Ephesians last week and you may have noticed that the whole first chapter is basically like two sentences. We know that ancient Greek had no punctuation but when we translate it, we add it in there. But Paul’s thoughts still make for really long sentences and sometimes it seems like he rambles a bit.

Who am I to knock how the Apostle Paul wrote, right? But I’m reminded that Simon Peter also thought like I do. He actually said in **2 Peter 3** that some of Paul’s “*letters contain some things that are hard to understand.*” So, don’t feel bad if you get a little lost reading some of this stuff. And I think it is even more pronounced when Paul is writing in a good mood like he was when he wrote Ephesians. When he wrote to the Corinthian church who was all kinds of messed up, Paul wrote, “*Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ.*” No flowery words there, Paul. No beating around the bush or rambling about that.

BUT...when you get to what Paul is really saying...when you peel back all the layers and read between the lines and cut through all the wordy words...oooh! It's such good stuff! It's such powerful stuff like only Paul could write because only Paul had been given some of this stuff and he got it straight from God. And God gave Paul his ability to write, his ability to preach and his reward for doing all of that as well. And that is part of what Paul is talking about in **Ephesians chapter 1, verses 15-23**.

The second half of chapter one is really a prayer that Paul prays for the church at Ephesus and all the other churches as well, including Christ Fellowship. It is a prayer for the global church, the ecclesia, the called-out ones, the believers and followers of Jesus. He said in the first part of the chapter that the church has the inheritance of Heaven for eternity and because of that, Paul prays this prayer. Let's read it in **Ephesians 1:15-23**.

*“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, 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 of wisdom and revelation, so that **you may know him better**. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²²And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”*

Do you remember in school in English class when you had to diagram sentences? I hated that. You had to tell which word was the noun and which was the verb and which words were related to what other words and all that stuff. Well, this paragraph is an English teacher's dream. It has points and sub-points and verbs that affect the sub-points but not the points except for when they do. Good grief, Paul!

Well, I have done my best to diagram this and separate out the points and here is where it starts. Paul is praying for the church. And for what is he praying? Is he praying for physical healing for those that are sick? Is he praying for the financial well-being of the church? Is he praying for them to have a building to move into soon? No. Look at **verse 17**. When you peel back all the flowery words, Paul is praying that the church would know God better.

The atheist claims there is no God for us to know. The agnostic says that if there is a God then we can't know Him. But Paul has met God in the person of Jesus Christ and he knows that man can't really understand much of anything without a knowledge of God. (Warren W. Weirsbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 2, pg 15)

How can you make wise decisions if you don't have wisdom that comes from God? How can you know which way to go if you don't have the Holy Spirit living and active in your life? I met a man in jail the other day that said something I thought was pretty profound. He said, *"My best choices in life...led me here (to jail)."* He said he was tired of making bad choices so he was asking God to be his Savior. And that is a great first step. But we should strive with everything we do to know God more and better. God is not only our Savior. He's not just the way we get to Heaven and our "Get Out of Hell Free Card." He is also our Father and Friend and Guide and the better we know Him, the better choices we make.

So, of all the things Paul could have prayed for, he prayed that believers – you – would know God better. But then, if you keep digging, you find that Paul prayed for three specific ways that we would know God better. Look at **verse 18**. He prays that we would know the **hope of God**. That word "hope" in the Greek is "elpis" which means *"a favorable and confident expectation, a forward look with assurance."*

A man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, *"Eighteen to nothing--we're behind."* "Boy," said the spectator, *"I'll bet you're discouraged."* *"Why should I be discouraged?"* replied the little boy. ***"We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!"***

That's hope! But it's not the kind of hope that we have in Jesus. That boy was optimistic and he hoped they could win the game but he didn't know for sure. We can know for sure that as believers and followers of Jesus that we have Heaven guaranteed to us for eternity. We have the hope and guarantee of God's presence with us as we go through difficult times. That is biblical hope.

G.K. Chesterton said, *"Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all...As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength."* (G.K. Chesterton, *Signs of the Times*, April 1993, p. 6.) Do you see the difference in worldly hope and biblical hope found by knowing God? And do you see the benefit of knowing God more and better and how it brings more and better hope? And do you see how it is hope that gets us through the difficult times? That's why Paul was praying that we would know God better. It brings hope. What a blessing that is!

Then, still in **verse 18**, Paul says he is praying that we would know the riches of His **glorious inheritance**. Okay, I want you to use your imagination with me for a minute. I want you to imagine that your earthly father is rich. I don't just mean he's pretty wealthy. I mean he's loaded! He is Bill Gates and Elon Musk combined. He is Elon Gates and he loves you very much. Now, you don't wish anything bad to happen to your father by any means of course. But you know that when he dies, you are going to have quite an inheritance. You are going to get the house, the mansion, the castle, the villa in southern France, the chateau in the mountains of Aspen; you are going to get the car collection, the gun collection, the polo pony stables, the yacht, the library, the artwork and boatloads of cash. It's all going to be yours. That would be something to look forward to, wouldn't it?

I want you to know...okay, Paul wants you to know that God looks down and says, *“Aw, that poor Elon Gates. He only has six houses. He only has twenty cars, three yachts and two boatloads of cash. But I own all of it! Not only that, I have so much more and so much better waiting for you as an inheritance, not when I die but when you die and come to live with me in Heaven for eternity.”* That is what God says and that is what we have to look forward to and why Paul is praying that we realize the riches of God's inheritance.

Paul says in **Colossians 3** to *“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”* And part of setting our minds on heavenly things is thinking about our inheritance that we have as true believers in and followers of Jesus. Do you see now why I said last week that I think Paul was in a good mood when he wrote this? He just wanted to encourage the church in Ephesus and the Christ Fellowship church that in this nasty, old world there are some good things to look forward to. So, he is encouraging us to know God better by realizing our hope and our inheritance in the next life.

But then – and I feel like the TV ad guy – but wait there's more! But then Paul tells us that there is another benefit to following Jesus, not in the next world but in this world. And that benefit is **God's power**. Do you see it in **verse 19**? *“...and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...”* That word “power” is “dunamis” in the Greek and it is the word from which we get dynamite and dynamo. We have explosive power inside of us right now that God gives us, the same dynamite explosive power that Jesus had when He overcame death and walked out of that grave like a boss.

So, what are you going to do with that power? Are you going to use it to blow something up? Are you going to use God's power to tell off your boss at work? Are you going to use it

to be able to work more hours and make more money? No, that's not what that power is for. That power is power that God gives us to live righteously, to live right with Him.

What has God called us all to do? He said in **Matthew 28** that we are to go and make disciples. Well, God gives us the power to do just that. It's not by our own power. What else has He called us to do? Well, He has called us to be holy as He is holy. We are to be set apart and different from the rest of the world. That means our language, our habits and hobbies are different from the world. Where we go and what we do and how we act should be way different from what the world does. And God has given us the power to do just that. He has given us the power to make our church family a priority. He has given us the power to thrive in our marriages, to be good parents and grandparents and to endure suffering that comes from Satan who wants to steal our inheritance and take away our hope!

But we have God's power to overcome, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead allows us to make good decisions and avoid sin and do what God has called us to do. No wonder the Gospel is called the Good News! We get all of that – the hope, the inheritance and the power and more – when we are followers of Jesus. And that leads to the last point of chapter 1.

Look at **verse 22** again real quick. *“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body..”* This book is all about unity in the church. As a church, we have hope, inheritance and power and we are all under Jesus. When this church starts making decisions based on money or people or fame or anything but what Jesus tells us to do, we will no longer be unified. If we step out of line and step out from under the headship of Jesus, that's when the church dies.

Paul says in the last verse in this chapter that the church is the body of Jesus and if the body is separated from the head, there can be no life. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes and I want you to just spend a minute or two praying about what God wants your role in this church to be. As the body of Christ, we can't all be the head or the backbone or the eyes, but we can all have a part. We are a unified body and we have great dynamite power. How is God telling you to use the power that you have to serve Him better and to know Him better?

Do you have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus? Do you really have faith? Are you living out that faith every day by being obedient to Him? If not, ask God to forgive you of all your sins and then repent of those sins and turn around and start living the way He has called you to live. Do it right now as the music plays.