

EPHESIANS 1:17b  
The Wonderful Work of Salvation  
Message 26, November 14, 1999

INTRO: In the allegorical story called, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a story written by John Bunyan almost 300 years ago, Pilgrim comes to a place in his journey called the interpreter's house. On Pilgrim's journey this was one of the few pleasant places. In the interpreter's house Pilgrim was given to understand various things which were a mystery to him without the aid of the interpreter. Here Pilgrim wandered from one room to room while Interpreter entertained him with explanations of the various things he saw. For example, he was led into a private room. There interpreter called on his helper to open a door. And when he had done so Pilgrim saw a picture of a very grave person hung up against the wall. His eyes were lifted to heaven and he had the best of books in his hand. The law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind its back, and he stood as if pleading with people, and a crown of gold did hang upon his head.

As pilgrim goes from room to room and sees sight after sight he keeps on asking, "What meaneth this? What meaneth this?" This is the question he asks after seeing the picture I have just described. Let me give you part of the answer, "And whereas thou seest him with his eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, and the law of truth writ on his lips, it is to show thee that his work is to know and unfold dark things to sinners; even as also thou seest him stand as if he pleaded with men.... Now, said the Interpreter, I have showed thee this picture first, because the man whose picture this is, is the only man whom the Lord of the place whither thou art going hath authorized to be thy guide, in all difficult places thou mayest meet with in thy way; wherefor take good heed to what I have showed thee, and bear well in thy mind what thou hast seen, lest in thy journey thou meet with some that pretend to lead thee right, but their way goes down to death" (30-31).

Well, next Pilgrim was shown a room which had never been swept. Then Interpreter called for his man to sweep the room. Bunyan writes, "...the dust began so abundantly to fly that Christian had almost therewith been choked." Then Interpreter called for a damsel to come and sprinkle the room and when she had done that the room was swept and

cleansed with pleasure. Then comes Pilgrim's usual response, "What meaneth this?" There were many other such things to which, if you want to know them, you must read the book.

We have begun looking at the first of two purposes of Paul's prayers for the Ephesian believers. Paul writes that he prays to the God of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, that He might give to the Ephesian believers the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Now turn to Ephesians 1:17, where Paul's request is that the God of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory would give to the Ephesian believers the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. Ah, here we have arrived as pilgrims at the Interpreter's house. So let us look at the content of Paul's first purpose in praying for the Ephesian believers.

(Howard Hendriks). Don't preach on Ephesians. Pastor has been in it for several years and is only in chapter 2!.  
(Theme of 1-3 on top of outline).

1) The content (1:17a)

The content of Paul's first purpose in praying for the Ephesians is that the God of the Lord Jesus Christ would give to them the spirit of wisdom. Consider Isaiah 11:1-2, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."

Now turn with me to Revelation 1:4, "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne." Many take these seven Spirits as a reference to the Holy Spirit in His seven-fold perfection. One of the aspects of the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom. We want to consider this first.

(a) Spirit of wisdom

Let me give you one of the most important things in Bible interpretation. It is to ask questions of the text. Like Pilgrim in the Interpreter's house we must ask, "What meaneth this?" Now you will say to me, "It is not the question that is important, it is the answer." And I say to you that most answers are worth very little until the question is there.

The Scriptures say that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. The Word of God is our Manna. When the children of Israel were first given manna they gave it a very interesting name (Exodus 16:11-15). When they saw this whitish substance on the ground they said, "Manna" meaning, "What is it?" Now this is a primary lesson in Bible interpretation. When we come to a text we must say, "What is it?" Or, "What meaneth this?"

Well, let us do exactly that. We have seen that Paul asks the Spirit of wisdom for the believers at Ephesus and now we must ask, "What is it? What meaneth this?" I want us to notice first in Ephesians 1:17 that wisdom is not knowledge. We often think of people with a lot of knowledge as wise people. That is not necessarily so. Spurgeon says there is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. Notice 1:17 indicates that one may be given the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of God. In other words knowledge comes before wisdom. One may have knowledge without having wisdom, but one may not have wisdom without some knowledge.

In my understanding wisdom is the ability to use knowledge to bring about desirable results. Let me illustrate. You will remember that Solomon was given the choice by God to ask for whatever he wished for, and he asked for wisdom and 1Ki 4:29 says, "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that [is] on the sea shore." You will recall how two ladies, both of which had babies, slept together and one of the ladies suffocated her baby accidentally at night. So she took the dead baby and placed it with the sleeping woman and she took the sleeping woman's living baby. Well, the case came before Solomon. Solomon is now in need of wisdom to know how to bring about the desirable results so he calls for a sword to cut the living baby in half and give each lady half. Of course the mother of the child immediately begged to let the child live and give it to the woman whose baby had died and then Solomon knew whose baby it was.

The older I become the more often I go to the Lord for wisdom. When I think of the need of wisdom my mind immediately goes to parents with children. How often do we not need wisdom here? I also think of those in church leadership positions.

So our next question must be, "How do we get the Spirit of wisdom?" Listen to this familiar verse in James 1:5 "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all [men] liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Now come back to Ephesians 1:17 to discover that God gives us wisdom in the knowledge of Himself. In order to gain wisdom we

must not only ask God but we must get to know God. Oh, here we come to the importance of the Word of God. I would be so brave as to say that if we are not people of the Word we are not a people gifted with wisdom! We are not speaking here of worldly wisdom. We are speaking about godly wisdom, the only real wisdom.

Consider for a moment the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1:17-31). God has given me the privilege to work in places where God's people applied worldly wisdom in order to gain the approval of people. For example, one of the things I remember was that if you have problems with someone under you, when you call them into your office, wear dark clothing. Dark clothing, they reasoned, intimidates. Noe there is one word in the OT that describes that kind of operation, Ichabod! The glory of the Lord is departed! Oh to understand what Paul is asking for when he asks for the Spirit of wisdom!

One little word here. If you and I would have the Spirit of wisdom we must ask for it from the God of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory!

(b) Spirit of revelation

But Paul does not stop at asking for the Spirit of wisdom for these believers. He asks for the Spirit of revelation. Again we must go to the Interpreter's house and say, "What meaneth this?" Well, let's begin by taking a look at the word used here. It is the Greek word *apocalypsis*. We get our English word *apocalypse* from this word. It means to uncover, or

unveil. The opposite of this word is *sunkalupto* which means to cover.

If you turn to Revelation 1 you will find this word in the first verse. It says, "The revelation of Jesus Christ..." There is discussion as to what the word revelation means here but I have no doubt that it means the unveiling or uncovering of future events.

So we come to the Bible student's inevitable question, "What meaneth this?" What is revelation? (Illustr.) It means the unveiling or uncovering of truths in the Word of God. You see, we can study this book as much as we want and unless we receive the spirit of revelation we cannot see or understand this book. Oh that God would give to more of us at TEC the spirit of revelation. I cannot see how a person can have wonderful things revealed to him and that such a person does not want to communicate these truths to others. If God should grant to more of us the spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Him, we should not have a shortage of Sunday School teachers, even for the adult class!

Now let me give you a caution. There are today many people who claim to be getting divine revelation above and beyond the Scriptures. I have an uncle who said these words, "Many people only know about Jesus what they find on the written page." Oh, these people get to know Jesus without the written page. They have special revelations, so they claim. And so I warn you not to look for extra revelations beyond the written page. And I further warn you that these people will make great claims and cause you to think that they have a special in with God, one

that does not come from the written page. I want to go on record as saying I believe that is a lie from the Devil. So we must turn our attention to the means by which we receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

2) The means (1:17b)

So having seen the content of Paul's first purpose in praying for the Ephesian believers, we want to ask another question: By what means does God give to believers the Spirit of wisdom and revelation? Does He choose some and not others? Does He give only to those to whom He wishes to give these? I want you to notice now how the spirit of wisdom and revelation are available to us. This text reveals to us that God gives to us the spirit of wisdom and revelation "...in the knowledge of Him..."

That brings us to a very important topic, the intake of the Word of God. In order to have the knowledge of God we must have an intake of the Word of God. I ask you a personal question this morning: Do you have a regular intake of the Word of God? How long does it take you to notice if you have misplaced your Bible? Does it take more than a day? Let me ask you another question: When you read and study, is the book dry? Do you not read and study because it is dry? I want to encourage you to something: Begin by setting aside even a few moments a day to read the Word of God. And if you read and you say, "I don't understand. What meaneth this?" then you are on the right track. Keep reading day by day and keep asking. Ponder the Word as you work and if you keep doing this, the Lord will begin to guide you in growth in His Word. I have learned in my Christian pilgrimage that God does not reveal great truths to the uninterested or those who do not give themselves to a regular intake of

the Word of God. And this is important to receiving the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Let us ask another interpreter's question: What is knowledge? And when we ask this question we must be oh so careful to stay away from the vanity of entering philosophical arguments of the field they call epistemology.

Knowledge is a very interesting field. If it were not for the nature of our congregation and the various ages present, I think one of the best insights given on the meaning of knowledge in the Bible is the special relationship between husband and wife. And thus we read in the Bible that Adam knew his wife etc... With those brief words, my understanding of knowledge is that it is the coming together of my mind with data or information. Let me give you an example. How many of you know how old I am? For those of you who do not know, I was born on April the 18th. 1951. That makes me 48+ years old. Now that I have given you that bit of information you know how old I am. I shall not bore you with the over 20 Greek words that come from this word to know, *ginwskw*. But in my understanding from the Greek NT there are two major parts to the mind. One of those is called the *nous*, n o u s. In the nous data is stored. Just a moment ago I gave you my age. You have processed that data and stored it. And now you know how old I am.

Now to our question, how do we gain knowledge of God? I tell you assuredly that we cannot learn the important knowledge about God apart from divine revelation, which is the Word of God. Our spiritual life cannot exceed our intake of the Word of God. Little intake, little knowledge of God. Little knowledge of God means little wisdom and little revelation.



I marvel sometimes that not more of you take advantage of Bible study. I know it is a bit heavy but here you can learn much. On the other hand, I am so encourage by how many of you come to Sunday School. Here we grow in knowledge of Him and this is essential in order to have the spirit of wisdom and revelation imparted to us.

CONCL: So in closing this message, would you not say that here is an important need for us at TEC? Do we not need the spirit of wisdom and revelation? And if so, is it then not absolutely necessary to grow in the knowledge of Him? How about a commitment this morning to a regular intake of the Word of God?