

Sermon Title: Pray Like An Apostle  
Scripture Text: Eph. 1:15-23 (Ephesians #7)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 6-13-21

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Come back with me to Ephesians Chapter 1.

As a preacher, I can tell you that working with this chapter is a little bit like participating in an avalanche—you have to start small, you have to take bite-sizes of things. Today, the ball is rolling—brace yourself: we're going to study *nine verses* today. And as it was in Verses 3 through 14, we're going to study one sentence today. This one might be the *second* longest sentence in the Bible; this one is 169 words long in the Greek, but it's all one unit, and I've titled it: "Pray Like An Apostle," and I think that you'll be able to see why that is.

For several weeks, we've harped on the fact that Verses 3 through 14 is this litany of this incredible array of what is summarized in Verse 3 as "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted); and then he talks about the past, he talks about the present, he talks about the future; and then, as you'll see when we get to Verse 15 today, it starts with: "For this reason..." What reason? Well, what he's just said: *all* of that stuff about who you are "in Christ." Because of what is true about the riches that are ours in Christ, there is a way that we can pray for one another—there's a way that the Apostle Paul prayed for his friends, and as he would pray for us, and as he would want us to pray for one another.

I'd like you to think back to about the last ten things that you prayed about; a couple of them might have been meals—and mind you, I have no delusion that you can *remember* the last ten things that you prayed about. But, by any chance, did any of them have to do with yourself—your circumstances, or maybe an illness, maybe an issue related to money or employment, something like that? It's not a bad thing at all to pray about such matters; those are the realities of life! All of those things can represent what James calls "various trials" (Jas. 1:2) that we "fall into" (NKJV), or that we "encounter" (NASB).

But I think you're about to see that you can most certainly improve the depth and the impact of your prayers. You can think of this passage as a prototype of prayer, as exemplified by the Apostle Paul. It's legitimate to say that from this text, you can learn to pray as an Apostle—even though you aren't one. And as you learn, you will also, just tangentially, reinforce what you have already discovered so far in Ephesians.

Here's where we're going, to learn to Pray Like An Apostle: We'll start with The General Prayer in Verses 15 through 17; and then, some Specifics in Verses 18 through 23; and then, I'll try to give you some Applications—some general principles to take these things and learn to pray as an Apostle might pray.

Let's look at the General Prayer—Verses 15 through 17. It starts out with: "For this reason..." So this is one of those passages you dare not memorize, unless you're quite familiar with what comes before it. "For this reason"—because of what you have in Christ—"For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

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Let's look at *who* he prays for, and then *how* he prays for them.

Who does he pray for? Well, he says, "I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, *and* you are those who have 'faith' and 'love.'" (cf. 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:13) In other words, he's praying for people who have sound doctrine rooted in who Christ is and what He has done, *and* a visible manifestation of the *effects* of proper doctrine (see Rom. 1:5; 16:26b; Gal. 5:6b; Jas. 2:26; 1 Jn. 2:3-5). If you *believe* the right thing, you will *demonstrate* your faith, and it will show up in the love that you have for one another in the Body of Christ (1 Jn. 3:14; 5:1). True commitment in faith to the Word of God, true commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, *always* shows itself in a lifestyle of service to others (1 Jn. 3:17).

Paul prayed for these people simply because they were fellow believers in Christ. It's not because they were sick, or they needed a job—I'm sure that some of them *were* sick; I'm sure that some of them probably *did* need a job—but nearly every prayer in the New Testament is a prayer for spiritual growth and for the most effective use of the Word of God; and in that is a lesson concerning what to pray for. We'll talk about that more as we wrap up this morning.

Notice *how* Paul prayed for these people. In those three verses that we just read, there is thanksgiving; *every time* you know of a believer in Christ, you have a reason to give thanks (2 Thess. 2:13). Look what God did, as "Amazing Grace" says: "saved a wretch like me." Every one of them is the same; every other believer is the same.

And then, there's a request that they would grow in their understanding: May God "give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation." Now, that doesn't mean that He prayed that they would receive the Holy Spirit! They *already had* the Holy Spirit (see vs. 13-14; cf. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:12). He's not praying that you will *receive* the Spirit of God, but he's praying about an attitude that he wants to be developing within you, a certain kind of attitude "in the spirit."

What Paul was praying for was that God might so work in the lives of these brothers and sisters in Christ that they would have the spiritual wisdom and understanding in Him which is the result of the Holy Spirit's work of energizing the human spirit (Ezek. 36:27); he's praying for a spiritual maturity, a continual growth. In other words, he wasn't praying that they would get more *information*; he's praying that they would get more *comprehension* of the information that was already available to them. Remember: "For this reason"—because of all that you have—I want you to grow in your understanding of that. So he's praying on behalf of believers for what theologians call "illumination." This is probably a review for you; but just in case it isn't, these are three words you have to understand and keep distinct: "Revelation," "Inspiration," and "Illumination."

"Revelation" is what God gives to us; He makes it known—God making Himself known in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 2:10). It is *impossible* for us to fully know God. Why? Well, let's see: He is "infinite" (Ps. 147:5; Jer. 23:24); I am finite. He is the Creator (Is. 45:12; Eph. 3:9b); I am the creature (Ps. 100:3). I *cannot possibly* grasp everything about Him.

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As a matter of fact, I couldn't even know Him in a personal way, if He didn't make Himself known to me. You can read Romans Chapter 1: Just by creation, everybody should know that *there is* a God, and that He is very powerful (cf. Ps. 19:1); but to *know Him*, He has to make Himself known (Matt. 11:27).

That is "Revelation." That word comes from a Greek word that means "hidden" and the preposition "from." It "comes from hidden"—it can't be known until God makes it known. That is "Revelation," that's the content of what He makes known. This book is Revelation from God (Deut. 29:29; Ps. 119:104; Jn. 17:17; Rom. 16:26; Heb. 1:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:2).

Now, how did we get this Book? Turn to the word "Inspiration." "Inspiration" is what the Holy Spirit did with the human authors of Scripture. Second Timothy 3:16—"All Scripture is inspired by God." That word is literally: "God-breathed"—God breathed it out. "Spirit" is the same word for "breath." The Holy Spirit gave that Word, guided the human authors of that word. The description of how it works is in Second Peter 1:21—"Men" were "moved by the Holy Spirit," they were guided along in the process (cf. 2 Sam. 23:2).

So "Revelation" is what we have received. "Inspiration" is the process by which we got it. Now comes "Illumination." That's the work of the Holy Spirit—the same Holy Spirit who inspired it—in giving *you* understanding of the inspired revelation of God (Acts 16:14; 18:27b; 1 Cor. 2:10-12; 12:3b; 2 Cor. 4:6).

It is a *very* dangerous, *wrong* thing to say that God gives revelation to people outside of the Bible! (cf. Heb. 1:1-2 with Eph. 3:5; Prov. 30:6; 2 Pet. 3:2; Jude 3; Lk. 10:16; Jn. 13:20; Col. 2:18) I read something just this week—it was a pastor who did something in *total contradiction* to the Scriptures, and his explanation was: "The Lord just told me what I needed to do, and I did it." Okay—so, God contradicts Himself, right? He told you in His Word: "This is wrong! You're doing it!" And you said God *told you to do it!*

*Anyone* who claims that God speaks to them in addition to what He has said in the Scriptures is, at best, misguided. The revelation is complete! How complete is it? Peter says it contains "everything" you need for "life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). It's *all there!* And it's "given by inspiration" (2 Tim. 3:16).

Now, *when I come to it*, here's the cool thing: I have a special relationship with the very same One who wrote it! The *same* Holy Spirit who guided the writing of the words of Scripture can *help me* to understand it! That's the process of Illumination. So, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman...accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). And along that process, for the rest of your life you can be basking in the illumination of the Holy Spirit. And by the way, the reason I said "all your life" is: Illumination is not a once-for-all zap; it's not like a spiritual Taser that hits you and then you shake, and "Now I open my Bible, and I understand *all* the depths of everything that is there!" No, it's day by day, moment by moment, situation by situation, prayer by prayer, I can go mine the riches that are in the Word of God, and find refreshment for my soul *every day*, and as needs arise, I can even find *fresh* ways to apply the timeless Word of God (Ps. 119:24; Rom. 15:4).

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So, Paul says it's "the eyes of your heart" being opened. John wrote it in a little different way: In First John Chapter 2, Verse 27, he calls this Illumination the "anointing." 'Anointing' is connected with the Holy Spirit: "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you"—you have the Holy Spirit *in you*—"and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him."

Now, that doesn't mean there is no place for teachers (Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:9); but it's saying: The Word is all there, and you have the "anointing" to help you understand it—you don't need some "new revelation."

So, a situation arises. You weren't looking for trouble; you didn't do anything wrong. But there's the sudden illness, there's the unexpected unemployment, there's the car crash, there's the broken relationship—whatever crisis it might be. And so, you bow before the Lord. You ask Him for wisdom. And as you ask Him for wisdom, you search the Scriptures. And as you search the Bible, He *answers* that prayer to give you wisdom as you understand what His Word says, and He gives you that wisdom and "understanding" (Ps. 119:104).

The very same concept is described in different terms over in First Corinthians Chapter 2, Verses 12-16, where "natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God" (vs. 14), but we have "the mind of Christ" (vs. 16).

Now look back at the last part of what this General Prayer says: What is he praying for? Verse 17—"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

"Wisdom" comes from a Greek word that you know; you just probably didn't know that it's a Greek word. You probably thought it was a girl's name: *sophia*; that's the word for "wisdom." I don't know if parents name their daughters that *hopefully*; I don't think they can *prove* that they *deserve* the name, but that's the word—that's where it comes from. It means "spiritual understanding *and* the will to use it rightly—for the glory of God."

"Revelation"—I already told you about that word—is literally an "uncovering"; it means "making known." Paul is praying that our spirits will be in harmony with the revelation that is given from God.

And then, "knowledge"; that's an interesting word. There are different words for "knowing" or for "knowledge" in the New Testament. *This* is one that you may have heard someone pronounce before: it's *epignōsis*. You've maybe heard of *gnosis*—that's "knowledge"; *epignōsis* is a strengthened form of that word.

There are three different words used in the New Testament for "knowledge." There's one—*oida*—that refers to intellectual understanding of something. For example: I grasp that the area of a circle is to be calculated by Pi-R-Squared; you can *grasp* that, intellectually. Two plus two is four—you can understand that intellectually.

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Then, there's the word *ginōskō*—it means that you can understand something through being acquainted with it by experience. So, let's stick with circles: How far would it be for me to walk around this thing? Well, what's the circumference? It's Pi times the diameter. Then you could *experience* walking around that circle, whose area you have already calculated; you've had a personal experience with it.

*Epignōskō* is the strengthened form of that word. A guy named Richard Trench was quite a lexicographer in his day. He defines *epignōskō* this way: "It is bringing me better acquainted with a thing I knew before; a more exact viewing of an object I saw before, afar off." So, *epignōsis* is the fullest, the deepest understanding.

So, Paul is praying for his Christian friends to have "a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the *epignōsis* of Him"—which means growing in the knowledge and the application of the truth about Christ made known through the written Word of God (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). It's a matter of uncovering and putting to use "every spiritual blessing" that we saw mentioned back in Verse 3 of Chapter 1, and then largely elaborated upon down through Verse 14.

So, how do you best pray for brothers and sisters in Christ? How do you best pray *for yourself*, in any situation? You pray for *spiritual growth*. You pray for deeper and deeper knowledge of the Word of God, and the application of what you learn, so that you can *grow* in your relationship with the God of the Word. Spiritual growth is the result of taking in and digesting spiritual food so that you "grow up grow up in all aspects into Christ"—we're going to see that terminology in Chapter 4 of Ephesians. You wind up living like who you really are in Christ (cf. Heb. 5:13-14).

Now, that's The General Prayer. Then, he's going to give you some Specifics, starting at Verse 18—"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"—and we'll stop there for a moment.

Now remember: this is one continuous sentence, so this actually shouldn't have started a new sentence at the beginning of this verse, but never let that bother you. He wants to "pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." That needs a comment. I usually don't go this far, but I would tell you, if you are prone to writing in your Bible: it shouldn't say, "may be enlightened." It *should* say, "*having been* enlightened." It's a perfect participle in the Greek—three people in the room might know what *that* is all about—and I don't know why they translated it "pray that you *may be* enlightened."

I know that my Greek professor—who was part of the translation committee of the original New American Standard Bible—lost the argument on this verse, because he *knows better*, and he taught us better. And as a matter of fact, the new *improved* "Legacy Standard Bible"—it's now available in the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs; the whole Bible will be done by the end of this year—if you look there, it's how it should be: "having been enlightened." "I pray that the eyes of your heart having been enlightened," or, "since the eyes of your heart are enlightened, you will know these things."

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This is a really cool mixture of words: "the eyes of your heart." "Eyes" are what you take in visual data with—light and dark and color and all of that. "Of your heart"—how does that work? I pray you will uncover and apply more and more of "the true knowledge of Him" (2 Pet. 1:3).

First of all, you have to understand how the word "heart" is used—and most of you have heard this. The King James Version, for this reason, used the word "understanding" instead of the word "heart." The word is actually *kardia*; all of our words—"cardiac," "cardio"—they all come from this Greek word.

But there's something important about it that you have to understand: In English, we usually use the word "heart" as the center of our emotions. We say things like: "I Left My Heart In San Francisco." Well, you are in a bad way if you actually left your heart in San Francisco; I think the Greek word for that would be "dead." You can't go *leaving* your heart someplace! Well, what do you mean? "I have *incredibly joyful memories* of whatever happened in San Francisco." Or, I was thinking about this one on Lawrence Welk: I remember a *really good arrangement* of people singing, "Zing Went The Strings Of My Heart!" That doesn't make even a tiny bit of sense—but we know exactly what it means, right? Because we think of "heart" being tied to emotion.

But both the Greek and Hebrew languages—and therefore, both the New and Old Testaments—equate heart with the whole center of the being, more like we use the word "mind" or "person" or "will." And this phrase "the eyes of your heart" tells you that, theologically-speaking, your "heart" involves your ability to grasp things, your ability to understand spiritual truth, your ability to relate to what God has said to you. In other words: "the heart" is used figuratively for, you might say, the hidden springs of the personal life—it's the *center* of you.

The Bible describes your depravity as a "heart" problem. Matthew Chapter 15, Verse 19—"Out of the heart"—that's where you get "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries," all of those things (cf. Jer. 17:9; Matt. 12:34; Heb. 3:12).

And in the New Testament, "the heart" describes the seat of evil, but it's also the seat of things where God works in the renewed heart (Acts 16:14; cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 24:7; Ezek. 36:26; Heb. 8:10), the seat of your moral life—your moral nature, your spiritual life (see Eph. 6:6b; cf. 2 Chr. 16:9; Is. 51:7). It's where grief comes from, and where joy comes from; the desires, the affections, the longings, the perceptions, the thoughts, the understanding, all your reasoning powers, your imagination, your conscience, your intentions, the purpose that you seek to fulfill—all that is from "the heart."

So when the Bible talks about feelings, it isn't talking about the heart. And when it talks about the heart, it's talking about something *far more profound* than feelings (Heb. 4:12b; cf. 1 Chr. 28:9). As a matter of fact, when the Old and New Testaments—which are very consistent in the use of the word "heart"—when they describe the powerful feelings, they use a word that literally means "inward parts."

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And as the English language has changed, our use of terminology has changed a bit. For example: The King James Version translated this word by "bowels," meaning your "guts" (e.g., Gen. 43:30; 1 Ki. 3:26; Jer. 4:19; 31:20; Lam. 1:20). And just to give you an example, Song of Solomon—the book about romantic love between a man and a woman, a husband and wife—Chapter 5, Verse 4 says, in the King James Version: "My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him." Hallmark, where are you when we need you? That shows you: when you're *profoundly moved*, it jumbles up your guts, doesn't it?—good or bad. That's the point.

Spiritual change and growth in your life *don't come from feelings*, they come from growing and increasing in your understanding and application of the Word of God (Rom. 12:2). When you have Illumination to understand the Inspired Revelation—that is how you grow. The best way to bring about spiritual growth is *not* to act upon your feelings and experiences, it's to bring your feelings and experiences under the authority and the control of the Word of God (Jn. 17:17; 2 Cor. 10:5)—and He operates through your heart (Ps. 51:6b; Prov. 3:1; 4:4, 21).

I have to stop there. Remember, I made a big deal about saying this is "since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened"—in other words: Since you have come to Christ, since you have experienced the new birth (Jn. 3:3, 5; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23), since you now have the Holy Spirit, I have to ask you: Are "the eyes of your heart enlightened"? It's not *just* intellectual stuff! And it's certainly not *just* attending church; it's not *just* saying certain things; it's certainly not *just* doing rituals, like we did a reminder of the life and the death of Jesus Christ around the Lord's Table this morning.

But, are "the eyes of your heart enlightened"? Because this prayer can't apply to you unless they *are*—unless you are "in Christ." Do you know for sure that if—and we don't wish this on anyone—but if, God forbid, you were to die today, do you know for sure, do you have confidence, are you steadfastly assured that you would immediately go to be in the presence of the Lord? (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23)

And the follow-up question to that is: If that happened, and if the Lord stopped you and said, "Why should I allow you into My presence?"—what would you say? If your answer has *anything* to do with anything you've done, *you don't understand the right answer*, because *nothing* you have done can get you into the presence of the Lord! (Phil. 3:7-9) It's only what *the Lord* has done, that He has granted to you as a "free gift" (Rom. 6:23), completely on the basis of His "grace" (Eph. 2:8-9). So, *if* you should be asked that question—and you won't be, because you won't be in the presence of the Lord unless you belong to Him—but if you were asked that question, the right answer is: "I am here *only* because of what Your Son did for me, shedding His blood to make atonement for my sin." (1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10)

Do you have a hunger and thirst for the Word of God? (Ps. 119:97; Jer. 15:16; Jn. 8:47) Because this is the prayer: "the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you will *know* what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

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Now, let's look at the other Specifics of this prayer, and I think you'll see three things that Paul wanted the Ephesian believers to know:

One of them is right here: "the hope of His calling." This is another way of describing God's plan. Your "hope" is your settled assurance—remember, your *confidence* in the plan of God (Rom. 5:5; 8:25; Heb. 11:1). "Hope" is the settled confidence and the assurance of the future—that God is in control of it, and He will bring it to His appointed end (Acts 24:15; 2 Cor. 1:10; 3:12; Col. 1:5, 27; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18; Titus 1:2; 2:13; Heb. 3:6; 6:11, 18-19; 1 Pet. 1:13).

In other words, he prayed that they would understand just what it is that they had been called to. This is an *eternal* plan that you're part of! Remember how he starts out with: "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world"—it started in eternity-past (2 Tim. 1:9; Rev. 17:8); it's brought to fruition in eternity-future (Ps. 103:17; 1 Thess. 4:17); and *everything* in between there is Him working out His plan for His own glory.

And do you understand that *you have a part* in that plan? That's where praying so diligently comes in! "Lord, I'm going along, I'm trying to do this thing, and this awful thing happened! Lord, how can I honor You here? Give me wisdom! Give me understanding! Let me see with 'the eyes of my heart' what Your Word has to say to me." (cf. Jas. 1:5).

The second thing that we have here, besides "the hope of His calling," is "the riches of the glory of His inheritance." That refers back to what we said...well, let's see—way back *last Sunday*! We talked about our "inheritance" (vs. 11), and the *certainty* of our inheritance.

So you are part of this eternal plan, and you want to say, "How do I do my part?" Well, you have some resources! Move on to Verse 19—"and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might."

So the third thing he wants you to understand is "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." Do you realize that you have, by virtue of the power of God, flowing through your life, all of this same power that *raised Christ from the dead*? This is the guarantee of the riches, this is the guarantee of the joyous outcome of the plan of your life.

And I want you to get a load of this power. Right there in Verse 19 that I just showed you, there are four words that describe this power of God that is at work in you:

There's the word "power"—we get our English word "dynamite" from this; the Greek word is *dunamis*. Dynamite is pretty powerful stuff, right?

Then there's the word "working." That comes from a Greek word that comes over into English as the words "energy" and "energize" and "energizing."



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And then, there's the word "strength"—that translates a Greek word that means "exercised strength." I mean, picture the guy holding the barbells over his head that are so heavy that they're bowing, and he lifts that off the ground and he holds it up there, and then with great drama, jumps out from underneath it and drops it so he doesn't break everything on the way down, and you hear it hit the ground! What *strength* it takes to move that! That's the idea of this word, but on a *supernatural* level.

And then there's the word "might," and that means: "great *inherent* strength." In other words: What do you have to help you in this process of growing—as Peter would put it: "Grow[ing] in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18)? Well, this is the power that is visible in the activities of God in which He exercises His great inherent strength—and He will do it *through you!* (see Eph. 6:10)

He describes this power again in Verse 20, as we read on. This is that "which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places."

So, this is *the same power* that raised Christ from the dead! God grants *you* the inner spiritual strength *greater* than the power of death! And this is the power that "seated Him...in the heavenly places"! Does that remind you of Chapter 1, Verse 3? "Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"—Christ is "in the heavenly places," and "Christ" is "in you" (Col. 1:27), and you are "in Christ" (Col. 1:2)!

This is really astounding! This is the power of God that conquers His foes! Read on: Verse 21—"far above all rule and authority and power and dominion." Where did He exalt Christ to? "Above all rule and authority and power and dominion"—and by the way, those words are ranks of angels and demons—"and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." Christ is over every other heavenly being that there is (Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9-11).

There was a heresy that began to arise in the First Century—it came to fruition in the early Second Century—that focused on those names and those ranks of angels; we talked about it when we studied Colossians, and the idea that it was "salvation by knowledge," and I likened it to a video game: You work a certain level, you accomplish a certain number of things, and then, "Oh, congratulations! You've finished Level 1!"—and then you move up to Level 2, and then you move up to Level 3, and then pretty soon you get to "Master," and then you get to "Supermaster," and then you get to "Grandmaster," and it seems like there's a never-ending series of levels; and you work your way up through all those rungs, through all of those angelic manifestations...and that's salvation by works. And Jesus Christ is superior to *all of that!* (Gal. 2:16)

Well, that system—called "Gnosticism"—it was a false religious system offered by the fallen angel, Satan; and it was *resoundingly* denounced in the Second Century. It made a *very strong* resurgence among Evangelicals in the 1990s under different names, and it was just as wrong last century as it was in the First Century.

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And there are people today who have a great fascination with angels. "Oh, I'm so happy! I have *angels* all around me, all the time!" And I say, "That's *totally irrelevant!*" If you have angels around you all the time—oh, and by the way, *you do*; we're going to see some of that in Ephesians Chapters 3 and 4, mainly 3, about how there *are* angels that minister (cf. Heb. 1:14). But, you know what? You belong to Christ, and He is the one who *dispatches* every single one of those angels (Col. 2:10b; e.g., Matt. 13:41; 24:31; Acts 12:11; Rev. 19:10). Don't worry about angels, don't worry about demons—you *know the One who created them all, to whom they all answer!* (Heb. 1:7)

So He is "seated far above" all of those beings (cf. Heb. 1:13). This is the forever power of God—"far above...every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." It's an eternal plan—from "eternity" past (2 Tim. 1:9) to the "new heaven" and the "new earth" (Is. 66:22; Rev. 21:1), and you are part of the plan in between.

Again, read on: Verses 22 and 23—"And He"—that "He" is God the Father—"put all things in subjection under His feet"—the "His" is the Son, Jesus—"and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

There's an excellent thought here. The obvious part is: "Christ...is the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23), and we're going to see that played out a lot as we move along through Ephesians. But there's something else here; notice: "the church, which is His body, the *fullness* of Him who fills all in all." That word "fullness" means: "that which is the completion." As the "bridegroom" is incomplete without the "bride" (Jn. 3:29a), so, in a sense, Christ in this age is incomplete without His church.

Now, don't take that and ride off into a theological sunset of troubles. But many of the analogies for the Church emphasize that same thing. A "vine" is incomplete without "branches" (Jn. 15:5). The vine puts out the branches, and the branches put out the fruit, and it's one organic, interconnected process. A shepherd—he might be a really nice guy, but he's not much of a shepherd without a flock, right? And we are the "sheep" and He is the "shepherd" (Jn. 10:11). A "head," if you will, is incomplete without a "body" (Eph. 5:23). So in a very real sense, the Church is, on Earth, the visible manifestation of Jesus Christ in the world! That's why I say there's a *sense* in which Christ is incomplete without us, because He gives that analogy of "bridegroom" and "bride"—and until they *come together*, they're not husband and wife; they're not bridegroom and bride.

Now, this *does not mean* that we are divine! This *does not mean* that we are "little gods." This *does not mean* that we are little pieces of Jesus, running around. This is *not* to say that Christ *lacks* something apart from us—that He wouldn't *really* be the Christ without us. But we visibly represent Him and manifest Him to the world. I've always likened it to a mosaic. A mosaic is a whole bunch of little tiles, or little pieces of rock. Each one on its own—doesn't look very significant. But when you see a mosaic and stand back from it, you see the grand picture, right? You see the big picture. Now, if you happen to be Stone #47 in Column #98, and you're just looking at that stone, you'd say, "Hmm. That's a yellow rock." It maybe doesn't seem too significant by itself. But *in conjunction with everything else*, you get the proverbial "big picture." The "big picture" is Christ.

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So, we—as the individual members of the body, "members one of another" (Rom. 12:5)—we portray Christ to the world. They "will know that you are My disciples" by "the love you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35). They have the right to look at the mosaic and say, "Somebody put together a beautiful thing here!"

Now, if there are a whole bunch of little tiles *missing*, the picture is not as beautiful as it should be, right? *How crucial are we?* One hundred percent, absolutely *essential!* My beloved friends, *it is not possible* to practice Christianity apart from *union* with other believers in a local church, manifesting the characteristics of Christ to the world! Did I say that strongly enough? *You can't practice Christianity* apart from the Church, "the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

"You mean I can't be *saved*? I get saved by coming to church?" *No*, I don't mean that. You get saved by "the free gift of God," which is "eternal life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:23). You must receive that "free gift." But once we receive that "free gift," *we become part of the picture*—every one of us! And every one of us is *needed!* That's why, when "one member suffers, *all* the members suffer with it"; when "one member is honored, *all* the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). *We need* each other! (Gal. 6:2; Heb. 10:24-25).

So, that is the One who is "the fullness of Him who fills all in all." That "fills all in all" part is added to clarify that Christ is not in any way *deficient* without us; He still runs the whole universe (Heb. 1:3), but what an *incredible* point of identity for us! We live in the era of "Identity Politics"—defining people by their skin color, by their ethnicity, by their social status, by their gender identification. Look, there are *two kinds of identities in the world*: Christians and Non-Christians (Jn. 3:18; 1 Jn. 3:10); those that are part of the body of Christ, and those that aren't (Matt. 25:24, 41, 46); those that are alive and those that are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1, 4-5); those that are "in Christ" and those who aren't (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Jn. 5:24; 8:24); those who have the Holy Spirit and those who don't (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19; Jude 19; 1 Jn. 3:24). *That's the solution* to all of the unity problems—or, *lack of unity* problems—with all of those worldly divisions that we define! The reconciliation—the unity—is "in Christ" (Gal. 3:28), and He is *the only answer* that will ultimately solve those things!

There's a General Prayer—Verses 15 through 17; those are Specifics there in Verses 18 through 23. Very quickly, at least three Applications that I would like to suggest to you, to be sure that you are part of the answer to the way the Apostle Paul prayed.

First of all: Realize who you are. You are part of "the fullness"—or, the "complement," if you will—of Jesus Christ. What an identity we have! (Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:15; 12:27)

Secondly: Commit yourself to getting to know the Lord Jesus Christ by pursuing true, accurate knowledge of Him from His Word. Take your "enlightened" mind—that "heart" whose "eyes" have been opened (Lk. 24:45; Acts 16:14)—come to the Scriptures, seek wisdom, let the Holy Spirit enable you to learn what you need to know, and *grow* in it (Eph. 4:15). No one ever lives life by principles that they don't know. No one ever becomes godly without understanding what godliness *is*, from the Word of God itself.

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And then, I thought one more is worth our consideration here: Based on who you are in Christ, based on all that you have in Him, don't let anyone intimidate you to go another direction. Don't let anyone intimidate you by displays of pseudo-spirituality.

There are a lot of people today who will tell you a lot of things like, "This is what you have to do to be spiritual. This is what you have to do to be spiritually *mature*"—and they are *diversions*, they are cheap substitutes (see Matt. 15:9).

About the same time that Paul wrote this book, that we know as "Ephesians," he also wrote a letter to the nearby sister-church in the city of Colossae; and in the middle of that letter, he wrote something that he didn't put into Ephesians; there are a lot of parallel passages between Ephesians and Colossians, but this one is only in Colossians—but I think it fits here with the idea of what it means to grow, to be developing this "spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

Look over at Colossians Chapter 2, Verses 16 through 19—"Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink..." There are people today who will tell you that there is a certain diet that you must eat in order to be "spiritual," or, "the *most* spiritual." That's not true! (see Mk. 7:18-19; Rom. 14:17; 1 Tim. 4:3-5)

Now, as I always say: A constant diet of Spam and Twinkies may not be very wise, *but it doesn't have to do with your salvation!* It has to do with your stupidity. You can be a [good] steward in that (eating), but *that will not make you spiritual!*

"Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day..." There are people today who will tell you that to be a mature Christian, you should really be practicing all of those "festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths" prescribed in the Old Testament (cf. Acts 15:1, 5). *They are wrong!* (cf. Rom. 14:5; Gal. 5:3) Why? Jesus "fulfilled" it all! (Acts 3:18; cf. Matt. 5:17; e.g., 1 Cor. 5:7b)

"No one is to act as your judge in regard to...a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are *a mere shadow* of what is to come; but the *substance* belongs to Christ." So, if you have the *reality*, why would you go back to the "shadow"? (Gal. 4:9-10; cf. Heb. 8:7-8, 13; 9:11-14, 24; 10:1-10)

"Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement..." Some people will tell you that you are more spiritual—the more you deny yourself, the more spiritual you'll become. *That won't make you more spiritual!* It'll make you have less stuff! That's what it will accomplish. (cf. Col. 2:23)

"...and the worship of the angels..." All the preoccupation with angels—it *all* comes straight out of the "New Age" movement! *It's not Biblical! It's not correct!* Read Hebrews Chapter 1—*Christ* is the One who dispatches the angels to do as He pleases (Heb. 1:7), and it's *completely* outside of our purview (Heb. 13:2). We do not worship angels (Rev. 19:10; 22:9), and we do not *talk* to angels, and we do not *pursue* angels.

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Now, listen to Paul's assessment of those things; here is his description of people who "defraud" you in that way: "...taking his stand on visions he has seen"—very popular today; or, people who are "prophets," who claim to be speaking for the Lord (Jer. 5:31; 14:14; Ezek. 22:28; Matt. 24:11; 1 Jn. 4:1).

Here is the description of those people: "inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God" (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6-7). *God* gives the growth *through* "the eyes of your enlightened heart" taking in His Word! You have everything you need "in Christ"! (1 Pet. 2:2; cf. Acts 20:32)

Now, if Satan could not keep you from coming to Christ (2 Tim. 2:25-26), he would love nothing more than to short-circuit your growth by sidetracking you from the *true source* of growth and power, which is "the Word of God" (Heb. 4:12) applied by "the Spirit of God" (Rom. 8:14; cf. 1 Pet. 1:2).

I promise you: I am not an Apostle. But I'd like to pray for you, like one would.

Let's pray:

*Father, thank You for all that is ours in Christ. I pray that You would evermore give us "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" in the true knowledge of Christ. I pray that You will work through our enlightened eyes to know "the hope of our calling," to know "the riches of the glory of our inheritance" in Your Son. I pray You would help us to understand "the greatness of Your power." I pray that You will help us to understand Your choice, your plan to work through Your Church—"the Body of Christ"—and that is us. And so, our Father, when all of those vicissitudes of living in a fallen world come our way—with each of those trials, with each of those pains, with each of those occasions of joy—please, our Father, help us to see them in terms of Your eternal plan, and to joyfully embrace what You have for us in them. So do with us as You will, for Your plan, to make us all the more useful members of one another in the Body of Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.*