

Our Enlightenment in Christ

LIFE IN CHRIST: An Exposition of Ephesians #1 - Pastor Gary Combs - September 27, 2026 - Ephesians 1:15-23

INTRO: Good morning church! Today, we're in part 2 of our series entitled, "LIFE IN CHRIST: An Exposition of Ephesians." We're spending 6-weeks going through the first 3 chapters, then we'll take a break for the holidays and come back to it in 2027, Lord willing, to finish up the last 3 chapters.

The key phrase in Ephesians is "in Christ." Paul uses some form of this phrase 36 times in his letter. Ephesians divides naturally into two parts: Our position in Christ and Our practice in Christ. Ephesians tells us that the Christian life is not merely life *for Christ* or life *like Christ*. It is **life in Christ**.

The apostle Paul knew Ephesus well. He had spent three years ministering there around 52–55 AD, longer than he stayed in almost any other city.

Ephesus was one of the greatest cities of the Roman world with an approximate population of 250,000. Located on the western coast of Asia Minor, it was a major port city, commercial center, and the seat of the Roman proconsul. Most of the ruins seen today date from the 1st century. As more Ephesians became believers and stopped buying Artemis souvenirs, Demetrius, a silversmith, incited a riot in the 25,000 seat stadium where the crowd shouted "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians."



About seven or eight years later, while imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote this magnificent letter.

Last week, we looked at Paul's greeting and his opening praise to God for the blessings believers have in Christ.

Now this week, we'll be looking at Ephesians 1:15-23 and Paul's prayer that believers would be enlightened to know the reality that these blessings are already theirs in Christ Jesus.

ILL: I remember Bill Bright, founder of CRU, telling the story of Ira Yates, a struggling West Texas sheep rancher. According to Bright, the family was living on government assistance and Yates was in danger of losing the ranch.



In 1926, an oil company drilled on his property and struck what would become the famous Yates Oil Field, one of the great oil discoveries of its day. Suddenly, Ira Yates became a wealthy man.



But here's what makes the story so powerful: the oil had been beneath his feet all along. He already owned the land and the mineral rights. He had been living in poverty while possessing resources he didn't even know were his.

Need: Many Christians live the same way spiritually today. We live as though we are spiritually impoverished because we don't understand the riches that already belong to us in Christ.

Trans: That was Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers. They already possessed every spiritual blessing in Christ. Paul was not praying that God would make them rich. He was praying that God would open their eyes to the riches that were already theirs!

BODY: In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he prayed that God would enlighten the eyes of their hearts so that they might know what belonged to them in Christ. We can understand what God has given us in Christ. What can we understand about what God has given us in Christ? The text reveals three realities we can understand about what God has given us in Christ.

Read text: Ephesians 1:15-23 (ESV) 15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

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THREE REALITIES OF WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN US IN CHRIST:

1. The reality of our hope in Christ.

EXP: (15-18a) Paul had just finished one enormous sentence of praise (202 words in Greek) in verses 3–14, pouring out blessing after blessing that believers have “in Christ.” Then, almost as if he took a breath, he launched into another long sentence (169 words in the Greek) of thanksgiving and intercession.

He was thankful (16) for their “faith and love” (15), and prayed that “the eyes of [their] hearts [would be] enlightened” (18) to know three realities, the first being “what is the hope to which he has called you” (18).

“**This reason**” (15) (διά, *dia*) - by reason of; therefore. Paul’s blessing (3-14) intervened between the opening salutation and the thanksgiving that normally follows it in Paul’s letters. His thanksgiving arises out of what he has just written in vv.13-14 “In him you also, when you heard ... the gospel ... believed in him.”

“**I have heard**” (15) - news had been brought to him at Rome, probably from Timothy and other believers.

“**Faith in the Lord Jesus**” (15) - Paul had heard of their faith. Faith finds its focus in Christ. And...

“**Love toward all the saints**” (15) (ἀγάπη, *agapē*) - love expressed. Such outgoing love towards fellow believers is the evidence of genuine faith.

“**Thanks**” (16) (εὐχαριστέω, *eucharisteō*) - to be grateful, feel thankful; give thanks

“**Remembering you in my prayers**” (16) (μνεία, *mneia*) - remembrance, memory, mention

“**God ... may give you**” (17) (δίδωμι, *didōmi*) - to grant, give to one asking, to supply.

“**The Spirit of wisdom**” (17) (σοφία, *sophia*) - wisdom, ability to rightly apply knowledge

“**Revelation**” (17) (ἀποκάλυψις, *apokalupsis*) - laying bare, a disclosure of truth, instruction.

“**Eyes of your hearts**” (18) (καρδίας, *kardias*) - the heart; denotes the center of physical and spiritual life.

“**Enlightened**” (18) (φωτίζω, *phōtizō*) - to enlighten, illumine; to bring to light, render evident, to understand.

“**Know**” (18) (εἶδω, *eidō*) - to see; to perceive with the eyes; to perceive by any of the senses

“**What**” (18,19 3x) - three “what(s)” that Paul asks God to give them, the first being...

“**Hope**” (18) (ἐλπίς, *elpis*) - expectation of good, hope; joyful and confident expectation.

“**He has called you**” (18) (κλήσις, *klēsis*) - an invitation, calling. As an invitation to a feast.

ARG: Our hope is secure because it’s rooted in Christ’s resurrection and reaches forward to His return.

1 Peter 1:3 (ESV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

Titus 2:13 (ESV) waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ

Our hope in Christ is like an anchor for our souls in the present.

Hebrews 6:19 (NLT) This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God’s inner sanctuary.

ILL: An anchor holds in the storm. It holds secure because it is fastened to something outside the ship.

APP: This hope means that we can stop interpreting our future through our present circumstances and start interpreting our circumstances through our future in Christ. When we are discouraged, we can say, “This is not the end of my story.” When we face loss, “My hope is a living hope and in the resurrection.” When the world seems uncertain, “My future is anchored in the living Christ.”

We can live with joyful and confident expectation because we understand the reality of this hope.

Will you let God’s Spirit of wisdom and revelation enlighten the eyes of your heart that you may know the hope to which you’ve been called?

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2. The reality of our inheritance in Christ.

EXP: (18b) Paul next prayed that believers would know “what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” “Grammatically this could mean the inheritance God receives (i.e., we are His inheritance) or the inheritance that we receive” (Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, p. 38). There is something wonderfully rich about Paul’s language. He seems to be searching for words big enough to describe what belongs to us:

“Riches” (18) (πλοῦτος, *ploutos*) - wealth (as fulness), i.e. (literally) money, possessions, abundance

“Glorious” (18) (δόξα, *doxa*) - glory, splendour, brightness, magnificence, excellence, majesty

“Inheritance” (18) (κληρονομία, *klēronomia*) - an inheritance, what is given to one as a possession.

“Saints” (18, also 15) (ἅγιος, *hagios*) - most holy one, sacred, saint.

ARG: Unlike worldly possessions which are temporary, our spiritual inheritance is priceless and eternal.

1 Peter 1:4 (NLT) and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay.

One of our blessings in Christ (5) is we are adopted as God’s children, now co-heirs with Christ.

Romans 8:17 (NIV) Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ

ILL: In 1988, a man named Bud Post won \$16.2 million in the Pennsylvania Lottery. Overnight, he possessed enormous wealth. But within a few years, the money was gone and he ended up in bankruptcy. His problem was not that he lacked riches. His problem was that possessing riches did not automatically give him the wisdom to live according to them.

APP: That helps us understand Paul’s prayer. God has already given us a glorious inheritance in Christ, but Paul prayed that the Father, through the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, would open the eyes of our hearts so that we would know what we have been given, and that God has adopted us as His inheritance.

It is not enough to possess the riches of Christ. We need God’s wisdom to understand it and live in light of it. This wisdom teaches us how trust Christ for our needs in the present. As Paul said:

Philippians 4:19 (NLT) And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

3. The reality of our power in Christ.

EXP: (19-23) Now we come to our 3rd “what.” Paul’s language becomes even more extravagant. He prayed that they might know “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power” (19). He piles up six Greek terms for power in verse 19 because ordinary vocabulary almost seems inadequate:

“Immeasurable” (19) (ὑπερβάλλω, *hyperballō*) - to throw over or beyond, to surpass, exceed.

“Greatness” (19) (μέγεθος, *megethos*) - magnitude (figuratively):—greatness.

“Power” (19) (δύναμις, *dunamis*) - strength power, ability; inherent power.

“Working” (19) (ἐνέργεια, *energeia*) - efficiency (“energy”):—operation, strong, (effectual) working.

“Great” (19) (ἰσχὺς, *ischys*) - ability, force, strength, might.

“Might” (19) (κράτος, *kratos*) - force, strength; power, might: mighty with great power, a mighty deed

Then Paul gives the supreme demonstration of that power. It is the same power God exercised when He:

- (1) Raised Christ from the dead (20).
- (2) Seated Christ at His right hand (20).
- (3) Placed Christ above every spiritual power and authority (21).
- (4) Put all things under Christ’s feet (22).
- (5) Gave Christ as head over everything to the church (22).

So the measure of God’s power toward us is nothing less than the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus!

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"That he worked in Christ" (20) (ἐνεργέω, *energeō*) - to be operative, be at work, put forth power

"He raised him from the dead" (20) (ἐγείρω, *egeirō*) - to arouse, cause to rise; to arouse from sleep

"Far above all rule" (21) (ὑπεράνω, *hyperanō*) - above a thing; of a place; of rank or power

"Authority ... power ... dominion" (21) (κυριότης, *kuriotēs*) - dominion, power, lordship

"Above every name that is named" (21) (ὄνομα, *onoma*) - name: univ. of proper names. Philippians 2:10

"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."

"In this age ... also in the one to come" (21) (αἰών, *aiōn*) - forever, an unbroken age, perpetuity of time

"All things under his feet" (22) (ὑποτάσσω, *hypotassō*) - to arrange under, to subordinate

"Head over all things" (22) (κεφαλή, *kephalē*) - the head; supreme, chief

"Church" (22) (ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*) - Lit., "called out ones." The church.

"Body" (23) (σῶμα, *sōma*) - body. Metaphor for the church. Not an organization, but an organism.

"Fullness of him" (23) (πλήρωμα, *plērōma*) - fulness, abundance. The church contains the fullness of Christ, who fills the church.

ARG: **God never intended us to live the Christian life in our own strength. Jesus said:**

John 15:5 (ESV) ... apart from me you can do nothing.

God never intended us to live the Christian life in our own strength. Paul learned to say:

Philippians 4:11-13 (NLT) For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength

ILL: **Think about where some of these Ephesians were coming from.** Some were formerly caught up in magic, the Artemis cult, astrology, and emperor worship (Acts 19). Their lives were dark and perverted (Eph 4:17-19) until Christ saved them. The people of this culture lived in fear of hostile spiritual forces. Paul is assuring them that God's power is supreme over all their enemies!

APP: So when we say: "I can't forgive that person." "I can't overcome this temptation." "I can't endure this trial." "I can't keep serving." "I can't change." We may be correct if the sentence ends with "in my own strength."

But Paul wants the eyes of our hearts opened to "the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe." Our confidence is not "I am strong enough." Our confidence is "Christ risen, reigning, and His resurrection power at work in His people."

We can live powerfully because we understand the reality of our power in Christ.

CONCLUSION: Maybe our greatest need today is not for God to give us something more, but for Him to open our eyes to see what He has already given us in Christ.

(1) **Our hope is secure in Christ** because Jesus died for our sins, rose from the grave, and is coming again.

(2) **Our inheritance is glorious in Christ** because through faith in Him we have been adopted into God's family and made co-heirs with Christ.

(3) **Our power is immeasurable in Christ** because the risen and reigning Jesus is at work in us.

At the cross, Jesus paid for everything that separated us from God. In the resurrection, He conquered the grave. And now He is seated at the Father's right hand, far above every power, ready for the day when He will return.

So church, let us not live like spiritual paupers when we have been made rich in Christ. Let us pray, "Father, open the eyes of our heart. Help us to know the hope of Your calling, the riches of Your inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of Your power toward us who believe."

And if you have never trusted Christ, these riches become yours only in Him. Turn from your sin, put your faith in the crucified and risen Jesus, and receive the life that is found in Christ alone. Let's pray.