

Matthew Henry's Commentary

We have come to the last part of this chapter, which consists of Paul's earnest prayer to God in behalf of these Ephesians. We should pray for the persons for whom we give thanks. Our apostle blesses God for what he had done for them, and then he prays that he would do more for them. He gives thanks for spiritual blessings, and prays for further supplies of them; for God will for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them. He has laid up these spiritual blessings for us in the hands of his Son, the Lord Jesus; but then he has appointed us to draw them out, and fetch them in, by prayer. We have no part nor lot in the matter, any further than we claim it by faith and prayer. One inducement to pray for them was the good account he had of them, of their faith in the Lord Jesus and love to all the saints, v. 15. Faith in Christ, and love to the saints, will be attended with all other graces.

Love to the saints, as such, and because they are such, must include love to God. Those who love saints, as such, love all saints, how weak in grace, how mean in the world, how fretful and peevish soever, some of them may be. Another inducement to pray for them was because they had received the earnest of the inheritance: this we may observe from the words being connected with the preceding ones by the particle wherefore. "Perhaps you will think that, having received the earnest, it should follow, therefore you are happy enough, and need take no further care: you need not pray for yourselves, nor I for you." No, quite the contrary. Wherefore-- I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, v. 16. While he blesses God for giving them the Spirit, he ceases not to pray that he would give unto them the Spirit (v. 17), that he would give greater measures of the Spirit. Observe, Even the best of Christians need to be prayed for: and, while we hear well of our Christian friends, we should think ourselves obliged to intercede with God for them, that they may abound and increase yet more and more. Now what is it that Paul prays for in behalf of the Ephesians? Not that they might be freed from persecution; nor that they might possess the riches, honours, or pleasures of the world; but the great thing he prays for is the illumination of their understandings, and that their knowledge might increase and abound: he means it of a practical and experimental knowledge. The graces and comforts of the Spirit are communicated to the soul by the enlightening of the understanding. In this way he gains and keeps possession. Satan takes a contrary way: he gets possession by the senses and passions, Christ by the understanding. Observe,

I. Whence this knowledge must come from the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, v. 17.

The Lord is a God of knowledge, and there is no sound saving knowledge but what comes from him; and therefore to him we must look for it, who is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ (see v. 3) and the Father of glory. It is a Hebraism. God is infinitely glorious in himself all glory is due to him from his creatures, and he is the author of all that glory with which his saints are or shall be invested. Now he gives knowledge by giving the Spirit of knowledge; for the Spirit of God is the teacher of the saints, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. We have the revelation of the Spirit in the word: but will that avail us, if we have not the wisdom of the Spirit in the heart? If the same Spirit who indited the sacred scriptures do not take the veil from off our hearts, and enable us to understand and improve them, we shall be never the better.-- In the knowledge of him, or for the acknowledgment of him; not only a speculative knowledge of Christ, and of what relates to him, but an acknowledgment of Christ's authority by an obedient conformity to him, which must be by the help of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. This knowledge is first in the understanding. He prays that the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened, v. 18. Observe, Those who have their eyes opened, and have some understanding in the things of God, have need to be more and more enlightened, and to have their knowledge more clear, and distinct, and experimental. Christians should not think it enough to have warm affections, but they should labour to have clear understandings; they should be ambitious of being knowing Christians, and judicious Christians.

II. What it is that he more particularly desire they should grow in the knowledge of.

1. The hope of his calling, v. 18. Christianity is our calling. God has called us to it, and on that account it is said to be his calling. There is a hope in this calling; for those who deal with God deal upon trust. And it is a desirable thing to know what this hope of our calling is, to have such an acquaintance with the immense privileges of God's people, and the expectations they have from God, and with respect to the heavenly world, as to be quickened thereby to the utmost diligence and patience in the Christian course. We ought to labour after, and pray earnestly for, a clearer insight into, and a fuller acquaintance with, the great objects of a Christian's hopes.

2. The riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. Besides the heavenly inheritance prepared for the saints, there is a present inheritance in the saints; for grace is glory begun, and holiness is happiness in the bud. There is a glory in this inheritance, riches of glory, rendering the Christian more excellent and more truly honourable than all about him: and it is desirable to know this experimentally, to be acquainted with the principles, pleasures, and powers, of the spiritual and divine life. It may be understood of the glorious inheritance in or among the saints in heaven, where God does, as it were, lay forth all his riches, to make them happy and glorious, and where all that the saints are in possession of is transcendently glorious, as the knowledge that can be attained of this upon earth is very desirable, and must be exceedingly entertaining and delightful. Let us endeavour then, by reading, contemplation, and prayer, to know as much of heaven as we can, that we may be desiring and longing to be there.

3. The exceeding greatness of God's power towards those who believe, v. 19. The practical belief of the all-sufficiency of God, and of the omnipotence of divine grace, is absolutely necessary to a close and steady walking with him. It is a desirable thing to know experimentally the mighty power of that grace beginning and carrying on the work of faith in our souls. It is a difficult thing to bring a soul to believe in Christ, and to venture its all upon his righteousness, and upon the hope of eternal life. It is nothing less than an almighty power that will work this in us. The apostle speaks here with a mighty fluency and copiousness of expression, and yet, at the same time, as if he wanted words to express the exceeding greatness of God's almighty power, that power which God exerts towards his people, and by which he raised Christ from the dead, v. 20. That indeed was the great proof of the truth of the gospel to the world: but the transcript of that in ourselves (our sanctification, and rising from the death of sin, in conformity to Christ's resurrection) is the great proof to us. Though this cannot prove the truth of the gospel to another who knows nothing of the matter (there the resurrection of Christ is the proof), yet to be able to speak experimentally, as the Samaritans, "We have heard him ourselves, we have felt a mighty change in our hearts," will make us able to say, with the fullest satisfaction, Now we believe, and are sure, that this is the Christ, the Son of God. Many understand the apostle here as speaking of that exceeding greatness of power which God will exert for raising the bodies of believers to eternal life, even the same mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him, etc. And how desirable a thing must it be to become at length acquainted with that power, by being raised out of the grave thereby unto eternal life!

Having said something of Christ and his resurrection, the apostle digresses a little from the subject he is upon to make some further honourable mention of the Lord Jesus and his exaltation. He sits at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places, etc., v. 20, 21. Jesus Christ is advanced above all, and he is set in authority over all, they being made subject to him. All the glory of the upper world, and all the powers of both worlds, are entirely devoted to him. The Father hath put all things under his feet (v. 22), according to the promise, <Ps. 110:1>. All creatures whatsoever are in subjection to him; they must either yield him sincere obedience or fall under the weight of his sceptre, and receive their doom from him. God GAVE him to be head over all things. It was a gift to Christ, considered as a Mediator, to be advanced to such dominion and headship, and to have such a mystical body prepared for him: and it was a gift to the church, to be provided with a head endued with so much power and authority. God gave him to be the head over all things. He gave him all power both in heaven and in earth. The Father loves the Son, and hath given ALL things into his hands. But that which completes the comfort of this is that he is the head over all things to the church; he is entrusted with all power, that is, that he may dispose of all the affairs of the providential kingdom in subserviency to the designs of his grace concerning his church. With this therefore we may answer the messengers of the nations, that the Lord hath founded Zion. The same power that supports the world support the church; and we are sure he loves his church, for it is his body (v. 23), his mystical body, and he will care for it. It is the fulness of him that filleth all in all. Jesus Christ filleth all in all; he supplies all defects in all his members, filling them with his Spirit, and even with the fulness of God, <Eph 3:19>. And yet the church is said to be his fulness, because Christ as Mediator would not be complete if he had not a church. How could he be a king if he had not a kingdom? This therefore comes in to the honour of Christ, as Mediator, that the church is his fulness.

Adam Clarke Commentary

Ephesians 1:17

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

[That the God of our Lord Jesus]

Jesus Christ, as man and mediator, has the Father for his God and Father: and it is in reference to this that he himself says: I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God; <John 20:17>

[The Father of glory]

The author and giver of that glory which you expect at the end of your Christian race. This may be a Hebraism for glorious Father, but the former appears to be the best sense.

[The Spirit of wisdom and revelation]

I pray that God may give you his Holy Spirit, by whom his will is revealed to men, that he may teach and make you wise unto salvation, that you may continue to acknowledge him, Christ Jesus, as your only Lord and Saviour.

Ephesians 1:18

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

[The eyes of your understanding being enlightened]

The understanding is that power or faculty in the soul by which knowledge or information is received, and the recipient power is here termed the EYES of the understanding; and we learn from this that huper (grk 5228) ho (grk 3588) ophthalmos (grk 3788) en (grk 1722) too (grk 3588) soomati (grk 4983), touto (grk 5124) ho (grk 3588) nous (grk 3563) en (grk 1722) tee (grk 3588) psuchee (grk 5590), as Philo expresses it: What the eye is to the body, the understanding is to the soul; and that as the eye is not light in itself, and can discern nothing but by the means of light shining, not only on the objects to be viewed, but into the eye itself; so the understanding of man can discern no sacred thing of or by itself, but sees by the influence of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation; for without the influence of God's Holy Spirit no man ever became wise unto salvation, no more than a man ever discerned an object (no matter how perfect soever his eye might have been), without the instrumentality of light.

Instead of tees (grk 3588) dianoias (grk 1271), of your understanding, tees (grk 3588) kardias (grk 2588), of your heart, is the reading of ABDEFG, and several others; also both the Syriac, all the Arabic, the Coptic, the AETHiopic, Armenian, Sahidic, Slavonian, Vulgate, and Itala, besides several of the fathers. The eyes of your HEART is undoubtedly the true reading.

[The hope of his calling]

That you may clearly discern the glorious and important objects of your hope, to the enjoyment of which God has called or invited you.

[The riches of the glory of his inheritance]

That you may understand what is the glorious abundance of the spiritual things to which you are entitled, in consequence of being made children of God; for if children, then heirs, heirs of that glorious inheritance which God has provided for the saints-- for all genuine Christians, whether formerly Jews or Gentiles. On the chief subject of this verse, see the notes at <Gal. 4:6-7>

Ephesians 1:19

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

[The exceeding greatness of his power]

As the apostle is here speaking of the glorious state of believers after death, the exceeding greatness of his power, or that power which surpasses all difficulties, being itself omnipotent, is to be understood of that might which is to be exerted in raising the body at the last day; as it will require the same power or energy which he wrought in

Commentary on Ephesians 1:17-19

Christ, when he raised his body from the grave, to raise up the bodies of all mankind; the resurrection of the human nature of Christ being a proof of the resurrection of mankind in general.

[According to the working of his mighty power]

Kata (grk 2596) teen (grk 3588) energeian (grk 1753) tou (grk 3588) kratous (grk 2904) tees (grk 3588) ischuos (grk 2479) autou (grk 846) According to the energy of the power of his might. We may understand these words thus: MIGHT, ischus (grk 2479), is the state or simple efficiency of this attribute in God; POWER, kratos (grk 2904), is this might or efficiency in action; ENERGY, energeia (grk 1753), is the quantum of force, momentum or velocity, with which the power is applied. Though they appear to be synonymous terms they may be thus understood: passive power is widely different from power in action; and power in action will be in its results according to the energy or momentum with which it is applied. The resurrection of the dead is a stupendous work of God; it requires his might in sovereign action; and when we consider that all mankind are to be raised and changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, then the momentum, or velocity, with which the power is to be applied must be inconceivably great. All motion is in proportion to the quantity of matter in the mover, and the velocity with which it is applied. The effect here is in proportion to the cause and the energy he puts forth in order to produce it. But such is the nature of God's power in action, that it is perfectly inconceivable to us; and even these astonishingly strong words of the apostle are to be understood as used in condescension to human weakness.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary

Ephesians 1:17

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

A fit prayer for all. "I also," corresponding to "ye also," <Eph. 1:13>. Paul joins his praises and prayers to theirs.

[The God of our Lord Jesus]-- appropriate title here; as in <Eph. 1:20-22> he treats of God's raising Jesus to be Head over all things to the Church. Jesus called the Father "My God" <Matt. 27:46; John 20:17>.

[The Father of (whose characteristic is) glory] (cf. <Acts 7:2>)-- father of that infinite glory which shines in the face of Christ; the true Shechinah glory; through whom also 'the glory of the inheritance' <Eph. 1:18> shall be ours (<John 17:24; 2 Cor. 3:7> to <4:6>).

[The spirit of wisdom] -- whose is infinite wisdom; who works wisdom in general in believers <Isa. 11:2>.

[And revelation] -- whose function it is to reveal spiritual mysteries <John 16:14-15; 1 Cor. 2:10>.

[In the knowledge] -- Greek (see note, <1 Cor. 13:12>), 'in the full knowledge [epignoosei (grk 1922)] of Him'-- namely, God <2 Pet. 1:2>.

Ephesians 1:18

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

Result of the gift of the Spirit.

[Understanding.] 'Aleph (') A B Delta G f g, Vulgate, read 'heart.' Compare the contrary state of the unbelieving, the heart being in fault <Eph. 4:18; Matt. 13:15>. Translate, 'Having the eyes of your heart enlightened' (<Matt. 4:16; Eph. 3:9>, Greek; <Eph. 5:14>): the first effect of the Spirit moving in the new creation, as in the physical creation <Gen. 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:6>. Where spiritual light is, there is life <John 1:4>. The heart is 'the core of life' (Harless), the fountain of the thoughts; whence, 'the heart' includes the mind, as well as the inclinations. Its "eye," or inward vision, both receives and contemplates the light <Matt. 6:22-23>. The eye is the symbol of intelligence <Ezek. 1:18>.

[The hope of his calling] -- the hope appertaining to, and worked in, you by the calling wherewith He has called you.

[And ... (so C: omitted in 'Aleph (') A B Delta G f g, Vulgate) riches of the glory] <Col. 1:27>. The accumulation marks unspeakable preciousness.

[His inheritance in the saints] -- the inheritance which He has in store [estin being understood] in the case of ('among, ' Ellicott, <Acts 20:32; 26:18>) the saints ('the sphere in which it is found'). Perhaps 'the inheritance which He has in his saints.' (See note, <Eph. 1:11; Deut. 32:9>). This latter translation would be more certain if the article tees (grk 3588) had been before en (grk 1722) tois (grk 3588) hagiois (grk 40)

Ephesians 1:19

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

[Exceeding]

-- `surpassing. '

[Power to us-ward who believe]

-- the whole working of His grace which He is carrying on, and will carry on to glory, in us who believe. This is that whereby the "hope" is realized: a climax. The hope which the calling awakens; the glory of that inheritance to which hope is directed; the power that shall bestow (and is bestowing) it (Ellicott). By "saints" <Eph. 1:18>, believers are viewed as absolutely perfected, and so as being God's inheritance: in this verse, as in the course of fighting the good fight.

[According to]

-- what might be expected from [kata (grk 2596)].

[Working], [energeian (grk 1753)]

-- `the energizing; ' "the effectual working" <Eph. 3:7>. The same superhuman power was exerted to make us believe, as was exerted to raise Christ from the dead <Eph. 1:20>. Compare <Phil. 3:10>, "the power of His resurrection" <Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:3-5>.

[Of his mighty power], [tou (grk 3588) kratous (grk 2904) tees (grk 3588) ischuos (grk 2479) autou (grk 846)]

-- `of the strength of His might. ' [Ischus (grk 2479), `strength, ' is God's passive inherent power; kratos (grk 2904) is His power evinced in action; `might' (Ellicott).]