

Series on the Book of Ephesians  
Ephesians 1:17-18a  
Sermon #10  
August 7, 1988

## THE FIRST AND CONTINUING PRAYER REQUEST L. Dwight Custis

For those of you who are visiting with us, we are studying the Book of Ephesians. We are down, this morning, to the seventeenth verse and the beginning of the eighteenth verse. I want to read just the latter part of the chapter. The first part of the chapter has to do with Paul's doxology of praise to God for all that we have in Christ. That occupies verses 3 through 14. Then he follows that with not only mentioning that he was praying for them, but telling them what he was praying about. Of course, this is instructive and helpful for us as far as our prayers are concerned.

Let me read from verse 15 down to the end of the chapter.

"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; 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: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know (you will notice that there are three whats here) what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world (or in this age), but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

The world is full of people who cannot understand why anybody gets enthusiastic about the Bible. They do not understand a person who enjoys reading the Bible. They cannot understand anyone who wants to go to church where all you hear is Bible teaching. Such things do not really make sense to them. They would consider the prophet Jeremiah very strange for saying this: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts" (Jer. 15:16). They would probably think the Psalmist a little bit deranged for saying, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). Job certainly must have been in great need of help for him to have said, "I have esteemed (or treasured up) the words of his mouth (God's mouth) more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). Why would the Apostle Paul put such a limitation on the ministry of Timothy by saying, "Preach the Word," making it clear that he was not to preach anything else, and especially when he went on to say, "the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Why would Paul tell Timothy that the Scriptures alone would fully equip him for the work of the ministry? "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). I could multiply these statements.

Perhaps I could repeat some statements that some of you have made. The solution to all of this must be that these men whom I have quoted and countless others have seen in the Bible something which most other people have never seen. Many people have laid down their lives rather than give up their Bibles and give up the truth that is contained in the Bible. The bible, of course, has been responsible for changing countless numbers of lives, fortifying them in times of temptation, consoling them in times of trial and sorrow. The Bible has accomplished things for people which no other book has ever been able to do. Of course, most of you listening to me this morning feel like Jeremiah and you

feel like the Psalmist and you feel like the Apostle Paul and Job, these men who have said these statements. You love the Bible. You love to read it. You are disappointed whenever you go to a church and you do not hear the Bible preached and explained; but others, perhaps, who are present can see no reason for the Word of God. How are we to account for the difference between us?

I firmly stand on the side of those of you who love the Word, who believe the Word, who believe all of it, who seek to obey the Word day by day. I believe it so thoroughly that I am like the man who said that if the Bible had said that Jonah swallowed the whale, he would have believed that. We believe that it is the infallible Word of God, do we not; but how did you get this way and how did I get this way?

Our text for today gives us our answer. This is something that God has done for us. It is not to our credit at all. It is all to God's glory. One reason we preach and teach is because we want others to see what a wonderful book this is, what wonderful truth it contains, and how God will minister to their hearts as He has ministered to our hearts through His Word. If you love the Bible today, if you love to hear it taught, if you love to read it, it is because God has done something in your own heart to cause you to love it. He has made that change in your life. If you can get along without the Bible, or think you can, then you ought to be concerned about how this book can mean to you what it has meant to countless millions of others down through history. Surely there must be something about this great book that has had such great power and influence in people's lives. Consequently, if God gives you such a love as He has for many of us, then you would never want to be without it again.

As I mentioned, my text this morning is the seventeenth verse and I want to just take that first statement in the eighteenth verse, because this is really kind of preparation for his prayer. There is so much in his prayer that I just do not want to run into that and try to cover too much ground with the possibility that we might not be able to really take in and appreciate what Paul has said there in verse 17 and the beginning of verse 18. Let me read this for you again. He says in verse 16 that he does not cease to give thanks for them and that he is making mention of them in his prayers "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: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that . . ."

I want you to just notice the little word "that" that appears at the beginning of verse 17 and then, as you come down to verse 18 and the part that we will deal with next Sunday, the Lord willing, he mentions the word "that" again. These are all keys to help us to understand the Scriptures. He says in verse 16, "I am praying for you." The word "that" is the word in the original which means "in order that". "I am praying for you because I want God to do something for you." He mentions God here as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, and he says, I want Him to "give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; in order that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (vv. 17-18). I point this out because it is absolutely essential that God do what Paul is saying in verses 17 and the first part of verse 18 in order for us to know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe. You see, the one prepares for the other. When God gives us the spirit of wisdom and revelation and they eyes of our understanding are being enlightened, then we will know what is the hope of our calling. If He does not do that, we will not know what the hope of the calling is. So you see the connection between these verses.

Paul here, of course, is talking about the people of God in Ephesus. For the moment he is not talking about people who do not make any profession of being Christians. His burden, his prayer for them, would indicate that there were some Christians in Ephesus who did not love the Word of God and did not know the Word of God as well as they should. We would acknowledge, I am sure, that that is a possibility with us, a possibility with me; in fact, it is an actuality with me. I need to know the Word of God better than I do and I need to love the Word of God more than I do. Therefore, when Paul prayed this prayer, he did not say, "I am not concerned about those of you who have known the

Lord a long time, but I am deeply concerned about those of you who have recently come to know the Lord." He does not say that. He groups all of them together--those who have known the Lord a long time as well as those who might recently have been saved--and says, "I am praying for every single one of you." Paul is saying, "I would pray this for the most mature believer in Ephesus, the one who loves the Word the most and who loves the Lord the most and who is capable of teaching the Word. I would pray this prayer. . ." I think when he writes this out in this letter to them that he means, "As you pray for me, this is the way I want you to pray for me: that God would give me the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, that the eyes of my understanding might be enlightened." This is what we need, is it not? It is interesting to see that as Paul pours out his heart in doxology to God for the wonderful salvation that he is enjoying in the Lord Jesus Christ, then comes and says that "from the time that I knew that there were people in Ephesus who were believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, this is what I have been praying for." You will notice that he says, "I cease not to give thanks for you." This means that every day that you and I pray for other Christians, this is one thing that we surely ought to be praying for. Things can so easily come up, you know, that maybe just the business of our lives or a certain trial will come along. Maybe we are stumbling for a time over what God is doing in our lives. A lot of things can happen that would get us away from the Word of God. So Paul says that "unceasingly, as I think of you and as I pray for you, all of you, this is what I am praying for."

It is wonderful if you have somebody who is praying this for you. It is wonderful if we realize the importance of praying this for people we remember in prayer. Who do you pray for? Why you pray, obviously, I hope, for the members of your family. I hope that you are going through our church list at least once a week and remembering the Lord's people here in prayer. We pray for men who are ministering in other churches. We ought to be praying for believers in other lands, for missionaries who have gone to them. But you see, if you want to know how to pray for them, this is what Paul was teaching the Ephesians and this is what we need to learn.

Now. He was very specific, was he not, about the God to whom he was praying. Paul was not just saying prayers.

I have met a lot of people who talk about prayer. They say prayers, and perhaps have learned some prayers, but there seems to be very little realization in their hearts of the One to whom they were praying. There are many ways in which Paul could have spoken of God because his prayers were directed to God, but he is saying that "I am praying specifically to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." If you talked about God to the Ephesians, they might think of Diana or they might think of some other gods. This term "god" is a term that is used for many different gods; but he wants them to know that there is only One God that he is praying to and that is God whom the Lord Jesus prayed to when He was here on earth. This was the God who sent the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the God whom the Lord Jesus Christ revealed when He was here on earth. He makes it very clear that they must not be confused when they think of the One to whom he is directing his prayers. It is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father--the heavenly Father--of His people who is characterized by His glory. His glory is just simply the manifestation of the kind of God that He is: His mercy, His grace, His holiness, His righteousness, His unchanging character, His eternal character. He says, "I am pouring out my prayer to this God." We come to Him. He is the sovereign, almighty, eternal, unchanging, ever-present God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let that truth alone get into your heart. Just think about that for a while, not just while we are sitting here this morning, but as you come back to the Book of Ephesians. Think about it until the majesty of that statement just somehow overwhelms your heart with wonder and praise. This is the God to whom Paul was coming on behalf of the Ephesians and this is the God to whom you and I have the right to come on each other's behalf because He is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, of our dear Saviour. None can compare with Him. Actually, there is no God except for Him. Consequently, we need to seek His help and to seek His blessing. A Christian certainly ought to know that God is the only One Who can do in our hearts what needs to be done.

The purpose that he was praying for initially was that God may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Paul was not just praying to be praying, as I have said. He was not saying prayers, but he was praying because he wanted God to do something very specific for the Ephesian believers. He went to God believing that this was on God's heart and that God would answer Him, God would hear his prayer. So he is expressing his purpose: that he would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Now. What did Paul mean by this: the spirit of wisdom and revelation? Who or what is the spirit of wisdom and revelation?

If we were to turn to Isaiah's prophecy, in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, you would find Isaiah speaking of the Messiah, the coming of Christ in that passage of Scripture. He says this concerning the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him . . ." and then he calls him this, "the spirit of wisdom and understanding" (Isaiah 11:2). There, as here in our authorized version of Ephesians chapter 1 "spirit" is spelled with a small "s". But, you see, this is a matter of an interpreter deciding just what Paul did mean when he referred to the Spirit. I think that Isaiah chapter 11 leaves no doubt in our minds but that in both of these passages, Ephesians chapter 1 and Isaiah chapter 11, the writers were speaking about the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the word "spirit" here ought to be capitalized, "that he would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God."

Before I talk about the Lord giving the Spirit in this sense, let us make sure that we understand why he calls Him the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Paul, obviously, must have been referring to the Bible. That is the reason that I have been speaking of the Bible. The Bible contains the wisdom of God. If you were in Sunday School this morning, you would have heard that there is a wisdom of God and there is a wisdom of the world. These are diametrically opposed to each other. It is the Spirit of God who has given us this wisdom from God, these things that are revealed to us by the Spirit, so that when you put these two terms, wisdom and revelation, together you have Paul actually explaining what the Bible is and how we got it. The Bible is the wisdom of God and it was given to us by revelation from God. These men who have written the Bible were not men who were able to say these things because they were all geniuses and had knowledge greater than we. I am sure that they were very capable men; but God has to reveal divine truth. God has to bring divine truth to us. He does this by the Spirit of God. This wisdom is too high for us. We cannot really attain to it in our own wisdom. The things which our eyes have not seen and our ears have not heard and our hearts are not capable of discerning God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit. The Bible is not the product of men. The Bible is a revelation from God. This is the reason that people generally do not appreciate the Bible, do not understand the Bible, because it is the wisdom of God. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of wisdom and revelation because He is the One Who led Paul to write Romans and who led the prophet Isaiah to write that prophecy and whoever the writer of Scripture is, remember that it is proper to speak of only One person as the author of the Bible, and that person is the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Peter said in 2 Peter 1:21, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Paul, in 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is (God-breathed) given by inspiration of God . . ." This is why he calls him the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Then he says, "The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." We need to ask, To whom was Paul referring when he said "in the knowledge of him?" I think that if you just look at the words that precede and the words that follow, you will see that the One he is referring to by that preposition "him" is God. He is saying "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." God has given us His Word through the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we would know Him, so that we would become acquainted with Him. To be sure, God has revealed Himself in creation. The Bible recognizes that. We can look at creation. The Bible recognizes that. We can look at creation and we can see evidence of God's infinite wisdom and of His sovereign power. It just baffles, I think,

the mind of any Christian how anybody can look at creation and say, you know, that these things just happened or just developed. These are all the work of God; but if that is all that you have to understand God, you are going to be deficient in your understanding of God. This was why Christ had to come and this is why we have to have the Bible. It is in the Bible that we learn what God is like. So Paul was saying here what I have said many times, and it is certainly not original with me because the Lord's people have always recognized this; he was saying here that the Bible has been given to us not only as a revelation from God, but it is also a revelation of God. You see, the Holy Spirit has given us the wisdom of God as a revelation from God in order that we would know God, in order that we would have this divine revelation which tells us more about God than we can learn any place else. The Bible has come from God to tell us about God. As we read our Bibles, we soon discover that the greatest portrait of God that we have in the Scriptures is to be seen in Christ.

The Lord Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). The writer of Hebrews said, "God, who at different times and in different ways in times past spoke to the prophets, spoke to the fathers, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son" (Heb. 1:1-2). When Jesus Christ came, the Bible was completed within one hundred years because the full and complete revelation of God has been given to us in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The word that Paul uses here for "knowledge" is a word which was familiar with the Greeks. It meant "a full knowledge, a complete knowledge." It indicates that in this book, the Bible, which contains the wisdom of God and has been given to us by a revelation, God has been pleased to give a full display that is everything that you and I are possibly capable of understanding now. He has given us this in His Word. As Paul was praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the Holy Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you would fully know Him. You can see from that expression that you would have the full knowledge. He is indicating, as I have already said this morning, that as long as any Christian lives--and the people of God used to live longer than we do now. They lived at one time almost a thousand years; but you could take any of those people who lived one thousand years, or close to a thousand years, who walked with the Lord and who were exposed to the truth of God in their own day, when they got to the end of their earthly pilgrimage there was still a lot more that they could learn about this great and wonderful God we have, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Regardless of how long you have known the Lord, how much you have devoted your life to the reading of the Word of God and hearing the truth that has been taught, you still need this prayer, do you not, because you and I have not fully attained to everything that God has been pleased to reveal to us in this book.

This is the very essence of what Paul was saying.

Now. What does he mean "that God would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation?"

It has been taught in our Sunday School, and I think I taught this last Sunday morning, that you cannot be a Christian and not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. Dr. John mentioned this morning Paul's statement there in Romans 8:9, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." It was just kind of a reverse way of saying that if you are His, then you have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in you.

Then, what does Paul mean "that he would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation?" I have taught that we do not have to pray for the Holy Spirit. Am I in error in saying that when Paul says here "that he would give you the Holy Spirit of wisdom and revelation? No. I do not think I am or I would not have taught that. What I believe Paul is saying here is, "I am praying that the Spirit of God Who dwells in you, this Spirit of wisdom and revelation Who is there to teach you, will actually be teaching you, that God would move upon your heart in such a way by the Holy Spirit that you would be learning." You see, there are lots of Christians who are not learning much from the Bible. They are not reading it as much as they should. Perhaps they are not going to a church where it is being taught. Paul says, "I am praying that God Who has given you the Holy Spirit to indwell you

will Himself see to it that the Holy Spirit is exercising this ministry in your life." I am sure that as Paul began to pray for those Ephesians and pray that the Spirit of God would begin to stir up their hearts, I am certain that their consciences began to bother them because they were not paying as much attention to the Word and were not reading and listening to the Word the way they should. The first thing you know, they were aware of the fact that God was dealing with them. This was in answer to prayer. You see, you and I can pray about the very things that God says He has given to us because we need to appropriate these blessings and live in the light of these blessings.

I was just reading a little tract this morning by John Newton, perhaps some of you have read it, called "More Than a Calvinist." John Newton was talking about we believe in the omnipresence of God, we believe that He is ever-present with us, but then he goes on to say, "you know, if we really believed in the omnipresence of God, that He is always with us, we would live differently than the way we live." He said, "You will change your behaviour if you are in the presence of some friend, or some distinguished person, or somebody who is expecting something more out of you. You may not use language that you would otherwise use." In fact, he said that he had seen people's conversation change, Christian's conversation change, in the presence of a little child. Then John Newton went on to say, "If that is true, as far as a little child is concerned, and if that is the way we react with other people, what would be the effect on our lives if we lived consciously in the fact that we are never out of God's presence? He always knows what we are thinking. He sees where we are and day by day we are living in His presence just as much as if He were visibly with us, walking by our side day by day. That is what I am talking about. Paul was saying, perhaps in effect, "You have been sealed by the Spirit; you are indwelt by the Spirit; you know from the words of the Lord Jesus that He has been given to be your teacher; now I am praying that God would so move upon you heart that you would be conscious of the fact that the Spirit of God is so working in your heart that you begin to love the Word as you have never loved it before, you delight in hearing it taught, you want to live it in your life, and you just rejoice in everything that the Spirit of God has been pleased to teach you about God and about the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the sense in which he says, "that He would give you, that the Spirit of God would minister." You see, we are dependent upon the Lord to show us these things.

In view of this, what is the need that we have? He says, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened."

First of all, let me point out that the word "understanding" is a translation of the word "heart" in the original language because we understand with our hearts. That is the reason that they did it. If I were to read this literally, translate it literally, Paul says that "the eyes of your heart would be enlightened." That means that the eyes of your heart would be opened. Do you know that you have two sets of eyes? I am not talking about your glasses, if you wear glasses, but you have two sets of eyes. Your body has eyes and your heart has eyes. We use these eyes in our heads to see the Word of God. You know, you can see it, you can read it, you can hear people explain it, you can memorize it; but if that is all that you have, the truth of this book is not going to grip your heart. That is where the transaction needs to take place. The eyes of our hearts need to be opened. Before we were saved, we were blinded. "The God of this world hath blinded the minds," the Scriptures say, "He hath blinded the hearts of those who believe not." This is the reason the majority of people in the world today are not happy about the Bible and do not feel dependent upon the Bible and do not want to read the Bible and do not want to hear the Bible taught. It is because the eyes of their hearts have never been opened. They might have 20/20 vision physically, but be totally blind spiritually. This affliction, unfortunately, follows us as Christians and we struggle just as we struggle with our sins. God has provided wonderful deliverance for us, but we all know that it is still possible for us to sin. Paul is saying, "Without ceasing, I pray that God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, is going to minister to your heart through the Holy Spirit in such a way that your spiritual sight will be exactly what He wants it to be so that when you see, when you see the Word of God, it is going to make such an impression upon your heart that you can never be the same again.

Remember that verse that we have been memorizing in Sunday School? That "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). He is talking about seeing with your heart. The Psalmist prayed, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psalm 119:18). Was he talking about his physical eyes? No. He is talking about the eyes of his heart. "Let my heart, my spiritual eyesight, let those eyes be open so I can see the truth." Paul says this, "The eyes of your heart 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, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe." The person who says to you, "The Bible does not make any sense to me, I do not enjoy reading it, I do not want to hear anybody talk about it, is a person who is proclaiming to you that spiritually he is blind. But, oh, what a difference it makes when God opens our eyes. You see, God needs to keep our eyes open.

The Lord, in ministering to one of the churches, you remember, in the Book of the Revelation, He told them to anoint their eyes with eye salve. What was he talking about? These eyes? No. He is talking about the eyes that are in the heart. We comprehend with our hearts. We believe in our hearts, do we not? The Word of God talks about the heart. Solomon says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). My dear fellow Christian, let us be careful, let us be extremely careful about anything entering into our lives that would cause our spiritual sight to become dim so that we would not see in the Word of God what we need to see, we would not delight in the truth of the Scripture as perhaps we used to delight in it. Perhaps there are some of you like that this morning, and what you need to do is to pray that God would minister to you by the Holy Spirit, that He would open your eyes once again so that you could see the truth and rejoice in the truth and obey the truth all to the glory of God.

If you are not a Christian, this morning, you do not profess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Bible does not mean anything to you, oh, let me tell you from the depths of my heart, and there are a hundred people here this morning who could say the same thing, how grateful we are that God opened our eyes. The things which once did not mean anything to us have come to mean more than life itself. Now you can understand, can you not, why Job would say in the midst of all of his trials and testings, "Take away my food and take away my ability to eat, but do not take away from me the Word of God. I have esteemed the Word of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12).

May

God give us the spiritual sight that we need that we may rejoice in the truth and walk in the truth and love the Lord and His wonderful salvation the way we should. If you have not trusted Christ as your Saviour, this morning, let me plead with you to put your trust in Him. Perhaps, as I have been speaking the Lord has been opening your eyes so that you have been able to comprehend some of these things which before did not mean anything to you.