

Sermon Notes: *Digging Up God's Riches* (Ephesians 1:15-17)

Intro: All Christians acknowledge the necessity of prayer. All Christians, even the mature, also acknowledge the difficulty of prayer. Does prayer change things or does it change people? Does prayer move the hand of God or does God move us to pray? The great Church Reformer, John Calvin, used to emphasize that we must “dig up by prayer” the treasures of God’s grace which he has put in Christ for us. That makes sense. We believe in God’s sovereign invincible grace and in Christ’s perfect all-sufficient work but we also believe that God’s Spirit applies these blessings to us and others in answer to our prayers. Two qualities of Paul’s “digging” emphasized in 1:15-17:

#1: Praise for the great *proofs* of God’s grace (15). What two hallmarks of God’s grace dominate the Ephesians’ lives? “Faith in the Lord Jesus” and “love for all the saints.” These spiritual graces constitute two acid tests of true conversion which Paul always looked for (ex. Col. 1:3-4; 2 Th. 1:3). Authentic Christianity always transforms both the Godward and manward dimensions of life. Faith in the Lord is a proof of God’s grace. Apart from God’s powerful, intervening, transforming grace these Ephesians wouldn’t have cared a whit about Jesus (cf. 2:1ff.). They had been dead men walking. Having minds but not understanding, eyes but not seeing, ears but not hearing. Jesus had been an object of indifference or hostility but not of trust and devotion. But God had mercy. Poured out his Spirit, gave them new minds, eyes, and hearts. Jesus become an object of desire. God worked faith in them (2:8ff) and they trusted in the blood of the Son of God shed to take away their sins. Have you? How many who acknowledge God’s existence are yet separated from him and dead in their sins! How many who respect Jesus as a great teacher or moral example have yet to trust in his blood as the payment for their sins! May God have mercy and send his Spirit to illumine the eyes of our hearts and renew our wills to trust in Jesus as *our* Savior! However not simply initial but ongoing faith in Jesus was the proof of their conversion (cf. Col. 1:23). As Paul did in verses 3-14, let us take time regularly to praise God for the specific riches of his grace to us in Christ. Doing so will strengthen our faith and hope. God’s grace will no longer appear weak but as the strong rock and fortress that it really is! The fruit in our lives will be abundant! *Humility* in the face of God’s election; *sanctity* in our lifestyle because he has chosen us to be holy; *stability* because we know that we are anchored in the heart of God; *joy* because we have been given a great inheritance which we cannot lose. Love for the saints is a proof of God’s grace. The fruit of true faith is love (cf. Gal 5:6). It is not easy to live peacefully with one another in the family of God! We are prone to rivalry and jealousy. We easily see the splinter in our brother’s eye but refuse to acknowledge the log in our own. We sin against others and they sin against us. May God humble us with a deep awareness of what even our sins deserve! May God humble us with a deep appreciation that Jesus in love suffered to rescue us. May God enable us to rely on his glorious riches to us in Christ to bear and forbear, confess our sins to one another and forgive one another. Francis Schaeffer: “the final defense of the faith which Jesus gives is the observable love of true Christians for true Christians...[without this the world] will not believe that Christ was sent by the Father.”

#2: Petition for the greatest *privilege* of God’s grace (16-17). What is our greatest privilege? Our greatest privilege is knowing God. Opposition to many of the Christians in Ephesus had been intense at times. Did they now feel marginalized or ostracized in the great city they had once called home? How great were their needs! But Paul saw that their most basic need was

also their highest privilege. Knowing God (Jer 9:23-24). *Knowing God will strengthen us.* Knowing that God has reconciled us to himself and that we are his own children by the blood of his Son will assure us that his wisdom, power, goodness, and justice are working all things together for our good (Rom 8:31-32). *Knowing God will satisfy us.* It is the *only* thing that will finally satisfy us! Augustine: “thou hast formed us for thyself and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee.” The great burden on Jesus’ heart for the church as expressed in his great prayer on the eve before his death was that we might know God. Knowing God is what eternal life is (Jn. 17:4)! Knowing God was Jesus’ and Paul’s prayer burden. Is it ours? Let us pray that God will give a new desire for him a new holy curiosity so that we seek him prayerfully in the Scriptures! Our greatest privilege is known by God given illumination. How can we know God better? We need “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (ESV). “spirit of wisdom” echoes the expression used for the Holy Spirit in Paul’s Greek Bible (Septuagint) and “revelation” refers to God’s personal self-disclosure to us his covenant people. Dare we believe that God not only takes note of us but that he will even disclose himself to us? The gift of Jesus to make us his sons proves that he will do so by his Spirit (1 Cor 2:11). Prayerfully seek God’s self-disclosure by his Spirit in his Word! Don’t waste your life on lesser things (idols)!