**Characteristics of God’s Family Ephesians 1:15-23 July 18 2021**

Certain names create common images amongst the wider population, Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, Fred Hollows, Rosie Battie, Florence Nightingale, their reputations precede them. In the case of the church at Ephesus their reputation preceded them. The author whom I will refer to as Paul has heard about them and been impressed by their reputation. They have a reputation for the extent and quality of their love and faith.

The letter contains instructions and encouragement regarding how they are to live as God’s people within the wider context of their community. It contains two specific prayers, the only one of the epistles to contain two prayers. We are looking at one of them today.

**A prayer which inspires lives marked by love and faith**

Paul speaks about his understanding of their love and faith motivating him in praying for them. He is proud of the way they are demonstrating these fundamental Christian virtues. This congregation has a “word of mouth” reputation, “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is not always easy to “love all the saints” remember that the designation “saints” applies to all followers of Christ. We sometimes find certain saints annoying, unhelpful, or demanding. Love does not always flow freely unconsciously within the community of the church. We often need to work at loving others, extending grace towards others and recognising that they may also be working hard at these same things towards us. The church at Ephesus were doing well in this area, so much so, that this had formed the basis of their reputation in other places. It reminds us that our Christian faith is lived out in community. We are not called to be solitary Christians, we are called to be members of the body of Christ, the church, with Jesus as our guiding head. We are called to be concerned for others and to give of ourselves to others. Benjamin Franklin is widely attributed as saying, “A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small parcel”.[[2]](#footnote-2) These Christians at Ephesus were certainly focused beyond themselves, sharing their love with others. So Paul is prompted to “not stop giving thanks [to God] for [them]”.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is challenging to consider how would our love for others, or lack of it, be having an effect on people around us and their understanding of the church. The early Christians were identified in the wider community for the love they had for one another and for all people.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Perhaps we need to apply our attention to considering how do our churches become known for their faith in Jesus and loving attitude and service to others?

**A prayer that they may be blessed with wisdom and revelation**

Paul’s concern for this community of faith is expressed as he commonly expressed his concerns, through prayer. He prays that they may be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation as the key to growing in knowledge of God. The epistles often speak about growing in the knowledge of God, this involves far more than growing in their intellectual understandings. This knowledge involved a Spirit inspired understanding of God’s self-revelation in Jesus.

Leon Morris stated “Just as it is true that the believer should aim for the highest mental excellence that the Spirit of God can give, so it is true that the believer is never in the position of being able to work out the Christian way by means of the best wisdom he or she can acquire. Christianity is a religion of revelation.”[[5]](#footnote-5) “Christianity is a religion of revelation.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Hence it is most appropriate that Paul prays for his communities, that the Spirit of God will reveal God to them, and that thereby they will grow in wisdom and understanding.

He also prays that “the eyes of [their] heart[s]” will be enlightened. This phrase only occurs here. The heart is understood to encompass the mind, feelings and the will, so this enlightenment will permeate their whole beings, leading to commitment and action. F. F. Bruce describes it as “spiritual eyesight”.[[7]](#footnote-7) This enlightenment surpasses academic knowledge, as it encompasses understandings which God alone can imbed deep within us. This type of enlightenment is available to people regardless of academic expertise or intellectual limitations. It gives greater depth, perspective and clarity. It is a little like viewing a township through binoculars, and then using a telescope. “The telescope seem[s] to have the uncanny power of making things appear out of nowhere.”[[8]](#footnote-8) God given wisdom, and enlightenment gives whole new understandings.

**A prayer that they may have a confidence in the hope of their destiny.**

Secondly Paul prays that they may be confident in their hope because they understand their destiny. Hope in modern times seems to have been down graded from blazing certainty to little more than feeble optimism.[[9]](#footnote-9) Hope in Scripture is not a psychological trait, but a response to who God is, what God has done and what God promises. [[10]](#footnote-10) It is because we belong to God that there is a certainty for us about the future. Paul has already affirmed their faith, which is their trust in God in the present, now he reminds them that they have hope related to their confidence in God for the future. This type of hope changes how we live in the present as it reminds us that life is more than the life we are experiencing here and now, there is a reality of life with God that stretches beyond our mortality. God will not let us down, God will fulfil God’s purposes for us.[[11]](#footnote-11) It is easy for us just to think about what is happening here and now, but as followers of Jesus we have been promised a place in God’s Kingdom, a place in God’s new heavens and new earth. This can stretch our powers of comprehension, but Paul emphasises this is a work of God, a demonstration of God’s power at work for us, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

It’s all because of Jesus – Jesus ca fill us with love and faith, Jesus gives wisdom and insight, Jesus is the source of our hope and Jesus is in control, he is the head of his body the church, he will powerfully fulfil his purposes for us and with us.

**God encourages us through this passage to**

**Commit to love widely and well to nurture the community of faith**

**Be willing to listen and respond to God’s wisdom and insights**

**Embrace the hope God gives us – God is still on the throne.**

So as we go into a new week in these unusual days we have the opportunity to

* look at how we are going in loving one another, within this church community and in our broader contexts
* we have the chance to take some time to be open to the wisdom and insights that God alone can give us
* we can seek to see ourselves in God’s grand picture, affirming our hope in Christ and the power that he exercises in our world.

1. Ephesians 1:15 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Generally attributed to Benjamin Franklin [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ephesians 1:15b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “See how these Christians love one another quoted by a pagan Roman, quoted by Tertullian. *Apologeticus* chapter 39 section 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians,*(Grand Rapids: baker publishing, 1994) 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Morris, *Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians,*31 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians,*32 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Tom Wright, *Paul For Everyone: The Prison Letters,* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) 14-15 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians,*32 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Pheme Perkins, “The Letter to the Ephesians: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections, in Leander E. Keck et al (Eds) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 385 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jere 29:11-12 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)