

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: Moving Toward a Deeper Spiritual Understanding, Ephesians 1:15-23

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INTRODUCTION: The title of my message today is “Moving Toward a Deeper Spiritual Understanding.”

I say “moving toward” because all of us, no matter what our age, should be continually growing in our spiritual walk with God. Contemporary thought teaches us spirituality is whatever you want it to be. I read an article which talked about recycling and caring for the earth as spiritual things. This is stewardship, yes, but recycled aluminum won’t help us when we grieve or when we die.

The most mature Christian here—who certainly isn’t me— should continue to grow in his or her spiritual understanding of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But, how do we grow? What is it we must do to grow? Everything in life worth anything takes effort, and in the same way, deepening one’s spiritual understanding takes effort. Here are the three points I am going to make today about moving toward a deeper spiritual understanding:

1. The spirit of wisdom and revelation helps us know God better.
2. The spirit of wisdom and revelation lead to enlightenment.
3. Christ is the epicenter of all things.

Last week I started in Ephesians 1 and took you through verse fourteen. During this time, I pointed out some important revelations to you.

- Things happen in the spiritual realm we cannot understand.
- Hearing and believing are necessary to know Jesus Christ.
- The Holy Spirit is our deposit.

I also pointed out that creating something for the sole purpose of destroying it is against the creative nature of God. We don't have one example of this in Scripture. If God destroyed something, it was because of man's sin. I told you I believe in predestination because it's in the Bible, and I also told you I believe in the free will of people because the Bible teaches this too. I highlighted there are a lot of mysteries we will never understand, and even in Heaven, there will be things we never understand—such as the grace of God. We'll spend eternity learning more about his grace.

Predestination and the free will of people are both above my thinking and yours as well, and we should become comfortable accepting the mystery of it all. I refuse to reduce the complex revelation of both doctrines—predestination and free will—to a few clever sentences or acronyms.

Last week, we ended with the Holy Spirit being our deposit until the day of the return of Jesus Christ.

Today, we will talk about how this deposit—the Holy Spirit—will help us know God.

First, THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION HELPS US KNOW GOD BETTER.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:15-17 ¹⁵ *For this reason, [What reason? Since they heard and believed] ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people,* ¹⁶ *I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.* ¹⁷ *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*

EXPLANATION: Notice how Spirit is singular. In this context, Spirit means “Holy Spirit.” It doesn't say “spirits” (plural) but “Spirit” (singular). The Spirit of wisdom and revelation is one Spirit, not two. It does not say, “*the spirit of wisdom and the spirit of revelation*,” but references one Spirit.

During our mid-week Bible studies for the next few weeks, I'll be teaching about Solomon. In First Kings Chapter Three, Solomon asked God for wisdom, admitting he was but a child when it came to leadership. God granted his request for wisdom, and he immediately started showing his wisdom in the way he dealt with justice. You see, Solomon's wisdom didn't come from himself. He asked God for it, and God gave it to him.

SCRIPTURE: James 1:5 ⁵ *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to you.*

APPLICATION: I challenge all listening to me to ask God for wisdom. It says he gives generously to all who ask, so why not ask? Only pride would keep a person from asking for wisdom. If Solomon was humble enough to ask for wisdom, so should we.

EXPLANATION: The Greek word for wisdom is *Sophia*—the girl's name. This word is used fifty-one times in the New Testament. Because it is used in different contexts, we must be careful about how we interpret this.

- One example is the collective gaining of human knowledge. For example, Acts 7:22 tells us “*Moses was educated in all the **wisdom** of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.*”
- Another example is non-virtuous wisdom. II Corinthians 1:12 says, “*Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.* In this sense, the words “worldly wisdom” could be translated “craftiness”...which is the opposite of the wisdom I'm talking about in Ephesians 1:17.

How do we know what type of wisdom Paul wrote about in our passage this morning? We have a really strong clue: He said the spirit of wisdom *and* revelation helps us know God better.

The Greek word for revelation is *apokálypsis*, which means an uncovering of what was previously hidden. Here's what Bible scholar Joseph Thayer said about Paul's use of the word *apokálypsis* in his exhaustive study on the New Testament. In Paul's epistles it's been "a disclosure of revelation, instruction, concerning divine things before unknown — especially those relating to the Christian salvation — given to the soul by God himself, or by the ascended Christ, especially through the operation of the Holy Spirit and so to be distinguished from other methods of instruction; ... a spirit received from God disclosing what and how great are the benefits of salvation."

Thayer lived from 1821 to 1901, and the clarity of his explanation of this word is amazing. He references First Corinthians 2:10, but when I read it, I felt including the verses before and after verse ten give it greater meaning:

SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 2:6-16 ⁶ *We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.* ⁷ *No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.* ⁸ *None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.* ⁹ *However, as it is written:*

"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him—¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ *For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.* ¹² *What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.* ¹³ *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.* ¹⁴ *The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.* ¹⁵ *The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments,* ¹⁶ *for,*

*“Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?”
But we have the mind of Christ.*

EXPLANATION: Here’s what Paul means: The spirit of wisdom and revelation reveal to us the previously hidden revelations about Christ and the benefits of salvation.

Second, THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION LEAD TO ENLIGHTENMENT.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:18-19 ¹⁸ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,* ¹⁹ *and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*

EXPLANATION:

- Enlightenment leads to knowing hope to which God has called you—an abundant life in Christ
- Enlightenment leads to knowing the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. What does this mean? Rich, Christian fellowship, and love for one another.
- Enlightenment leads to knowing his incomparable great power...for *those who believe*. Circle that – *those who believe*.

There is so much in this chapter we could spend hours talking about it. The revelations here are mind blowing!

Third, CHRIST IS THE EPICENTER OF ALL THINGS.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:19^b-23 ^{19b} *That power is the same as the mighty strength* ²⁰ *he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,* ²¹ *far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.* ²² *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head*

over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

APPLICATION: When I read this, I thought about how powerless most of us are. I thought about our lack of faith. How would we react if we saw an unusual manifestation of God’s power? Would we be critical like the Pharisees? Would we be skeptical? We pray for God to intervene in a situation, and then we are surprised when he does.

ILLUSTRATION: Several years ago, I went with a group to a small island in the Caribbean to help a pastor whose church had been destroyed by a hurricane. While there, the pastor asked me if I could help him get some floor tile. It was a tall order, but he said he had to rely on people to help because the island did not manufacture anything. When the group returned home, we gave a report to our church. I mentioned the need for the tile. A couple of days later, a man who missed our report came to my office and gave me a business card. He said he was a salesman and one day a man came to him on his sales route and asked him if he knew of a church or Christian ministry in need of floor tile? The salesman said no, and the man said to hang on to his card because he would hear of such a need in the future.

I took the card and called the man in Clarksville. I asked him if he remembered the encounter with the salesman a few months prior. He said no. I started telling of the need of the floor tile for the church and he said, “*Why are you so surprised? God met a request, and there is no surprise.*” Long story short, he had a couple of tons of matching tile—the amount the church on the island needed. A few people provided the shipping, and the need was met.

Let’s be excited when God meets a need—but, let’s not be surprised. The same power which raised Christ from the dead is alive and well.

When I preached through Hebrews, I told you about how the cross is where time and space intersect. It’s difficult for some to understand; it really is mind-blowing. The last phrase of the verse reads the church is *the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

CONCLUSION: We don't realize Christ fills everything in every way until the spirit of wisdom (*sophia*) helps us understand it and the same spirit of revelation (*apokálypsis*) reveals it to us. And, when that happens—when the veil is taken away—we will see Christ was there all the time.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at www.thbc.com Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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