

November 13 Lesson 11 (NIV)

## Christ Is Wisdom

Devotional Reading: Psalm 16

Background Scripture: Acts 19; Ephesians 1:15–23; Revelation 2:1–7

### Ephesians 1:15–23

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

### Key Text

*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.*

—Ephesians 1:18

## God's Exceptional Choice

### Unit 3: We Are God's Artwork

Lessons 10–13

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**How to Say It**

AchaiaUh-*kay*-uh.

AquilaAck-wih-luh.

DemetriusDe-*mee*-tree-us.

MiletusMy-*lee*-tus.

OrualOh-roo-awl.

Pax Romana (*Latin*)Pahks Ro-*mah*-nah.

PriscillaPrih-*si*-uh.

PsycheSigh-kee.

**Introduction**

**A. Everything Looks So Different!**

When my father was in grade school, he was perpetually cutting up in class, distracting other students, and generally causing a ruckus. While looking for solutions to the issues, it was discovered that his eyesight was very poor. His whole world changed after receiving his first pair of glasses! He could see so clearly, and his lifelong love of reading was born. The once

rambunctious troublemaker could now sit quietly for hours with his books, enjoying a wider perspective thanks to the sharpness of his sight.

Perhaps you have had a similar experience, either literally or figuratively. The world that seemed normal to you became somehow different when finally the right “glasses” corrected your sight. In Christ, everything looks so different!

## **B. Lesson Context**

Ephesus was a leading city of the Roman Empire. It was a large administrative center, perhaps 200,000 in population. Its Jewish population was substantial (some estimate more than 10,000), with many synagogues. Ephesus was a bustling seaport at the time, the point of contact for trade from the eastern and the western parts of the empire. Its harbor eventually filled with silt and became unusable, however, so the site was abandoned within a few hundred years. Ephesus was home to the Temple of Artemis (the goddess’s Greek name; Diana in Latin), one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (Acts 19:35).

Paul’s first contact with the Ephesians was on his second missionary journey (AD 52–54). After his lengthy ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:11), Paul, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila, set sail for Ephesus. He remained there only a short time and then departed for Jerusalem, leaving Priscilla and Aquila behind (18:18–21).

Paul’s second visit to Ephesus was on his third missionary journey, the account of which is recorded in Acts 18:23–21:6 (about AD 54–58). He spent about two and a half years in that city (compare the chronological references in 19:8, 10 and 20:31). Those converted under Paul’s ministry gave up their magic practices and burned their magic books—worth 50,000 drachmas, which is estimated to be equal to the yearly income of more than 130 men (19:18–19). The impact of his ministry had such an effect in the city that Demetrius, a leader of the local silversmiths, incited a mob at the theater against Christian teaching (19:23–41).

Demetrius’s motive was less religious than economic. The problem was that, due to Paul’s ministry, widespread conversion to Christianity occurred. This meant that people were not purchasing the cultic paraphernalia of Artemis, and this created a significant income loss for the silversmiths. So Demetrius persuaded the crowds that Christianity was not only detrimental to their business but also brought disrepute to the goddess Artemis, who was worshipped throughout “Asia and the world” (Acts 19:27).

The message of Christianity was making inroads in a great trade city of the Roman Empire, upsetting the status quo in the process. Paul’s message reached both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10, 17; 20:21). After leaving Ephesus, he ministered in Macedonia and Achaia. And on his return Paul visited the Ephesian elders at Miletus, where he reminded them of his ministry, warned them about false teachers, and prayed with them before his departure (20:15–38). The letter we call Ephesians came about some five years later, while Paul was imprisoned (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).

Our text picks up exactly where lesson 10 (Ephesians 1:1–14) left off. Most letters in Paul’s time offered a brief word of thanks to whatever god the writer worshipped. Paul followed this practice in most of his letters in the New Testament, praising only the true God. And he used the thanksgiving not just as a formality—part of good letter writing—but as a way to introduce ideas that he would develop later in the letter.

## I. Prayer for the Present (Ephesians 1:15–16)

### A. Because of Faith and Love (v. 15)

#### **15a. For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus**

*For this reason* signals that the new thought beginning here is a result of what Paul has already written (Ephesians 1:1–14; see lesson 10). Paul was present with Priscilla and Aquila when the Ephesian church was planted (see Lesson Context). Despite cultural pressures, the Ephesians had maintained their *faith in the Lord Jesus*. Receiving this report from messengers or other missionaries put Paul’s mind at ease to some degree (compare 2 Corinthians 11:28–29).

#### **15b. and your love for all God’s people,**

The greatest expression of faith in Christ is loving one another (Matthew 22:37–40; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 2:10–11). Christians are called to love others because Christ has loved them at the cost of his own life (4:9–10). The love of Christ knows no boundaries and must encompass *all God’s people*.

### B. Of Thanksgiving (v. 16)

#### **16. I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.**

Paul practiced what he preached: “pray continually, give *thanks* in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:17–18). His time in prison likely afforded Paul time to spend in extended prayer. Even so, the phrase *have not stopped* does not mean he was praying 100 percent of the time. Instead, prayer was Paul’s faithful habit (compare Romans 1:9–10; 12:12; Philippians 1:4; etc.).

Though Jesus warned about heaping up words when we pray (Matthew 6:7–8), what Paul models here certainly is a positive example. Indeed, in many aspects Paul’s habitual prayers for churches and believers (example: Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2) fulfilled Jesus’ own model of prayer, beginning with the expectation that God would be glorified and that his kingdom would come and his will would be done “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). *Prayers* that come from sincere faith and love are never inappropriate and bear repeating regularly. God always deserves our praise, and giving him praise affirms that we treasure him above all else (compare 6:21).

## II. Prayer for Growth (Ephesians 1:17–19)

### A. To Know Him (v. 17)

**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.**

Paul has already spoken repeatedly of *the God of our Lord Jesus Christ* and expounded on the Father’s glory (see Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14; lesson 10). This inspires believers to praise.

*The Spirit of wisdom and revelation* in the original Greek can be taken, grammatically, to refer to the human spirit. In other words, Paul asked God to give each person wisdom and revelation

so that you may know God better in his or her own spirit. Elsewhere the Holy Spirit is associated with wisdom (Acts 6:3) and spiritual knowledge (1 Corinthians 2:4, 13). Ultimately the Holy Spirit gives wisdom (knowledge of how to live rightly applied to living) and revelation (the uncovering of knowledge that cannot be achieved by humans, no matter how hard we think or meditate, without the Spirit's intervention).

Paul did not pray that the Ephesian believers receive the Holy Spirit for the first time. They were sealed already with the Holy Spirit as their guarantee of a future inheritance from God (Ephesians 1:13–14; see lesson 10). But the Holy Spirit has a role in applying the truth of the gospel to the life of the believer (1 Corinthians 2:10–13; Colossians 1:9–10).

The Bible itself is a Spirit-directed revelation of God (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus is the most direct revelation of God that we have—God in the flesh (John 14:6–9). The Spirit is given to believers so that we can continue to grow in our knowledge of the Lord, and thus love him and follow in his paths (14:23–27).

The wise person does not simply know the truth but lives it out (examples: Proverbs 3:7; Matthew 7:24–27). True wisdom and revelation come through knowledge of what God in Christ has done (1 Corinthians 1:20–25). No true wisdom, knowledge, or revelation contradicts the Lord's.

## **B. To Be Enlightened (vv. 18–19)**

### **18a. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened**

The result of receiving “wisdom and revelation” (Ephesians 1:17, above) is godly enlightenment. Our physical senses allow us to make sense of the physical world around us. Our eyes can be similarly attuned to spiritual reality. This metaphor reminds us of Jesus' words about those who have eyes that see or don't see (Matthew 13:14–17; see Isaiah 6:10). Having our eyes wide open gives us a different perspective from which to interpret the world. What once seemed most important is now placed below seeking God's kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

### **18b. in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,**

Christian *hope* is more than a wish for the future, because it is based on the actions of our trustworthy God. Specifically, our expectant hopes are based on Jesus' ministry and especially his death and resurrection. Because of this work, the penalty for our sins is paid and we receive eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:1–4, 20–28). These are part of *the riches of his glorious inheritance* for us (Ephesians 1:14; see lesson 10). We have confidence that no matter what happens in the short term, we will experience the fullness of God's blessings.

The biblical concept of calling can be specific (like the call of a prophet to ministry; example: 1 Samuel 3:10) or general (like the call of Israel to be God's holy people; example: Joshua 24:1–18). The calling here is general, issued to all people to believe the gospel and put their hope in Christ (Matthew 28:18–20). Responding to this call results in some immediate blessings, such as forgiveness and reconciliation with God (John 3:16–21) as well as the presence of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Continuing in faithfulness to the call results in growth in the Spirit toward greater godliness (examples: 2 Corinthians 4:16; Galatians 5:16–18, 22–25). No matter where we are in

our spiritual walk, we can always be encouraged by the hope we have and continue to appreciate the fullness of the life we have in Christ (John 10:10).

**19. and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength**

In this verse Paul used several Greek words that can indicate *power* as a way of emphasizing God's *incomparably great power*. The greatest examples of God's power are found in Christ's resurrection (see Ephesians 1:20, below), in the Father's giving us new life in the Spirit now (see 1:17, above), and in our hope for our own future resurrection (1:13–14; see lesson 10). No force—not even sin and death—can stand against our Lord!

### III. Praise of God's Power (Ephesians 1:20–23)

#### A. Glorified Christ (vv. 20–21)

**20. he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,**

Power throughout the ages is often expressed as military might, political domination, and the unchecked use of wealth and privilege for one's own ends. But the power of God (see Ephesians 1:19, above) is seen in the cross and empty tomb of Christ. No amount of earthly power or wealth can restore life to the dead.

When David was king in Israel (1010–970 BC), he wrote, "The Lord says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'" (Psalm 110:1). This poem celebrated (in anticipation of) God's rule that would come through the king he had promised to David. Jesus referred to this verse when he asked the Pharisees who the Messiah is (Matthew 22:41–46) and again when on trial before the Jewish leaders (Luke 22:66–70). At Pentecost, Peter explained David's words as they referred to Jesus (Acts 2:29–36). Now Paul affirms that Jesus is indeed at the Father's *right hand in the heavenly realms*, a clear sign that Jesus is *Christ*, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *messiah* (John 1:41).

**21a. far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked,**

Listing *rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked* is not meant to be an exhaustive list of every possibility but, instead, a list that covers all possibilities succinctly in a few phrases. These terms have slightly different connotations—but taken altogether—indicate that Jesus' reign and power are *far above* any competing entity.

A name was considered a mark of power; invoking a name was thought to imbue a person with the power of the name they spoke (example: Acts 19:13–16). Jesus' name and power and dominion are above all spiritual and physical powers that are opposed to his reign (compare Ephesians 6:12; see lesson 13).

When considering powers or names that stood against Christ, Ephesian believers would likely have had two entities in mind: Rome and the goddess Artemis. Roman emperors had not always claimed to be deities, but when they started to do so, they were loathe to give up their god-like status. Terms like *lord* or *savior* were titles the emperors used in reference to themselves. The

Pax Romana—when many peoples and nations were forced into peace, or at least a cessation of hostilities (mostly)—seemed to the Roman emperors reason enough to be hailed as saving the people. This caused issues for Christians who refused to call the emperors by these titles. Though the emperors liked to think they had brought peace throughout the Roman Empire, what they had actually done was conquer in the same way that every other empire has ever done: with violence.

Christ the Savior, however, brings a kingdom that spreads by and with peace (Isaiah 9:7; contrast Matthew 10:34). Though the emperor might claim to be the ultimate authority on earth and to be a son of a god, only Christ is *the* Son of God.

Especially in Ephesus, the mythical goddess Artemis was named as a power opposed to Christ (see Lesson Context). Paul could have listed Artemis or Rome specifically, but kept his list general and therefore all-encompassing. We do well today to recognize those powers or entities—whether objectively real (like a government) or real only in terms of consequences (like a false god/false teaching)—that still try to exert power opposed to Christ’s own.

**21b. not only in the present age but also in the one to come.**

This phrase speaks to two realities. Certainly we understand that after Christ returns, his authority will be recognized as supreme (Philippians 2:10–11). But Paul first insists that the same is true *in the present age*. Those who seem to have ultimate power in our world in fact only have whatever power God allows them to exert (see John 19:10–11).

## **B. Body of Christ (vv. 22–23)**

**22–23. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**

Once again Jesus’ power is emphasized. *All things* are *under his* control, though this present reality is best seen in the church. Only believers willingly submit to Christ at this time and accept his leadership in all things. In Paul’s day some thinkers like the Stoic philosophers sought fullness through a complete, direct experience of the creator. By connecting to the god who created all (so they thought), they would gain fullness in their lives. Against this, Paul asserted that *fullness* is found in the church and God is experienced through his Son.

This is the first time in Ephesians that Paul refers to *the church* as Christ’s *body*, a metaphor he uses frequently in his writing (Romans 12:1–5; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Colossians 1:18–24; etc.). Growing in unity in faith and knowledge of Jesus causes the church—Jesus’ body—to grow toward “the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). As Jesus’ body, the church expresses *the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*. As Jesus revealed the Father (John 14:9–10), so we the church are to reveal Christ. Growing to spiritual maturity together yields a healthy body (Ephesians 4:15–16) that is equipped not only to reveal Christ but also to act in place of his physical presence on earth.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Live a Full Life**

Even the best of times can be very challenging. Paul's thanksgiving prayer in today's lesson is a reminder that in Christ we have an eternal reality, already begun, that transforms our lives. We can experience the fullness of living because Jesus gives that fullness to his body, the church.

The call to action for this lesson is quite simple—but quite difficult: rest in the truth of what Paul has taught. We do nothing to create the reality: that the Father has chosen to reveal himself in the Son and bring us to greater knowledge of him through the Spirit. All we can do is give thanks for this reality and constantly strive to live worthy of the calling. Our Lord is the Lord of the universe, and he gives us life to the fullest.

### **B. Prayer**

Thank you, Father, that you have chosen to show the fullness of your love through Jesus. We ask that your Spirit continue to enlighten and guide us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Nothing can stand against Christ our Lord.<sup>1</sup>