

Ephesians 1b Outline of Book

05/03/99 6:40 AM

Overview

As in most of Paul's epistles, this section includes

- thanksgiving for the current state of the recipients and
- prayer for their future spiritual prosperity.

15-16a, Thanksgiving

Compare the thanksgiving sections across all the epistles.

- Gal, 2 Cor, 1Tim, and Titus have no thanksgiving sections; 1Cor and Phil do not fit into this pattern exactly, but may allude to it.
- The other seven reference some combination of faith, hope, and love.
- Except for 1 Cor, "faith" is the minimum, next joined by "love," and then by "hope" (1,2 Thess; Col) only when the other two are already there.

These three graces are the foundation on which the epistles build.

- Gal 5:5,6, the basis of our salvation, in contrast with circumcision or uncircumcision
- 1 Cor 13:13, without them, the spiritual gifts are unprofitable.
- 1 Thes 5:8, our defense in the day of tribulation from unbelievers
- Heb 6:10-12, the foundation for practical spiritual conduct
- Rev 2:19, alternating with "works" and "service"

Faith

Our response to God's offer of salvation in the Lord Jesus. For the most part, the epistles are not evangelistic tracts intended for unbelievers, but exhortation and encouragement addressed to those who have already believed on the Lord Jesus.

- Only believers can be expected to profit from the depth of teaching they contain.
- It is worth noting how carnal some of the behaviors are that are addressed among those who are still thus addressed as believers. This does not excuse carnality, but does encourage us to follow Paul's example and bear patiently with those whose lives do not yet manifest the full fruit of the Spirit.
- Possible exceptions: Gal and 2 Cor, which omit any of the graces, and deal with problems that may indicate that some are unbelievers. (1 Tim and Titus omit them as well, but both address the recipient as "my own son in the faith.")

Love

Our vertical relation to God in salvation has the effect of binding us together in love toward other believers.

- John 17:23, the world is to know that God sent the Son because of the unity of believers with one another.
- 1 John 4:7,8
- Recall that in the canonical statement of this trio of graces in 1 Cor 13:13, love is identified as the principal one.

Hope

In the context of this triplet, this is not a vague hope in a better future, but always the vivid expectation of the Lord's return. Why not in Ephesians, particularly since it IS in focus in Colossians? Answer: Ephesians unfolds in a prominent way the truth of our PRESENT session with Christ in heavenly places. It emphasizes the sense in which we are ALREADY with him, and discussion of the eschatological hope of his return would confuse this. Ephesians makes a great deal out of hope (1:18; 4:4), but in a different sense: not the prospect of the Lord's return and the messianic age, but the transformed life that we can enjoy now.

1:16b-19, Request

The burden of Paul's prayer is that God would reveal certain truths to them. Note his description of

- God as the author of revelation,
- The Spirit as the medium,
- The specific content that he desires them to know.

17a, The Author of Revelation

Two titles, recalling v.3.

"God of our LJC," as there, emphasizes our Lord's incarnation, taking the place of a creature in respect to God, while at the same time meriting the title "Lord." Thus this phrase in itself captures the entire mystery of the human-divine nature of Christ.

"Father of Glory" is subject to alternative interpretations.

- Simply "glorious Father"? Definitely true, and in the context (the repeated refrain in 1:6, 12, 14). In isolation, Semitic grammar would permit this, but 1:3 leads us to expect some connection with the Son.
- The one who begets or generates glory? Cf. 2 Cor 1:3, "Father of Mercies." Better, but still need to connect this glory with the Son.
- Best, per Alford, "the Father ... of that glory ... which shone forth in the manhood of the only-begotten Son," as in John 1:14; 2 Cor 4:4,6; Heb 1:3; John 14:9.

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This expression and the truth behind it are powerful fuel for our times of worship together around the Lord's Table. To appreciate our Savior aright, we must recognize in him the most perfect revelation of the Father's glory, the very image of God. He is the reflection that Adam was intended to be, but that was marred by sin.

Connection with this paragraph: Because God has already revealed his glory in the Lord Jesus, Paul recognizes him as the author of revelation. The incarnation shows God's willingness to disclose himself. So Paul can boldly ask that he reveal further specific truth for the help of the saints in Ephesus.

17b-18a, The Means of Revelation

Two verbs describe the means of revelation:

- “that ... God ... may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation”
- “The eyes of your understanding being [having been] enlightened”

The verb tenses (aorist in the first, perfect in the second) suggest a temporal order. First the eyes of their understanding were enlightened; then they are candidates for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. A teacher does no good to a person whose ears and eyes are sealed. First God fixes our constitutional problem, then he sends the Spirit to instruct us. Consider them in chronological order, which is the reverse of the order in which they are listed here:

18a, Eyes Enlightened

2 Cor 4:3-6 is an excellent background for this clause.

- The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers. Cf. 1 Cor 2:14, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” John 8:43, “Why do ye not understand my speech? [even] because ye cannot hear my word.”
- God sovereignly opens our eyes and enables us to see.

Paul may be particularly sensitive to this dynamic because of his own experience on the road to Damascus. The scales God put on his physical eyes were only an illustration of the spiritual blindness he had been in his entire life up to that point.

Thus we must depend on God to “enlighten the eyes” of those to whom we speak of him. Human cleverness or wisdom are futile; God must prepare the ground, and we should ask him to do so. This is important in two ways:

- doctrinally, as substantiation for the doctrine of total depravity;
- practically, showing the need for us to depend prayerfully on God in our outreach to others. Paul can here assume that the Ephesians have been enlightened, and pray for the Spirit's teaching; in evangelism, we need to pray for the enlightenment of those to whom we speak.

17b, Gift of the Spirit

Two important points here.

First, Paul is requesting, not a characteristic of the human spirit (“a teachable spirit”), but a particular ministry of the HS. Note repeatedly in the Bible that the HS has this role:

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- Gen 41:38,39, Pharaoh recognized Joseph's wisdom as coming from "the Spirit of God"
- Dan 5:11,14, Daniel's reputation as a wise person is expressed by saying that "the spirit of the holy gods" is in him
- Lk 12:12, the Lord promises the disciples that when they are brought before "synagogues, and magistrates, and powers," "the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what you ought to say."
- John 14:26, "But the Comforter, [which is] the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."
- 1 Cor 12:8, the Spirit gives the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge

Application.—The most important precondition for understanding spiritual things is not natural intelligence, or diligence of study, but being sure that we are open to the teaching work of the Holy Spirit. If we resist the Spirit through unbelief (Acts 7:51), or grieve him by sin (Eph 4:30), or quench him through negativism (1 Thes 5:19), we are simply shutting the door on our own spiritual education.

Second, this reception of the Spirit in his tutorial role is another way in which we follow in the steps of the Lord Jesus. Compare Paul's words here with Isa 11:1,2. Similarly, at the end of this same book, the armament that we don in 6:13-17 is the same that our Lord wore on his mission to earth, Isa 59:16,17.

Application.—The single most important practical guide for us in our daily life is the imitation of Christ. He is our example, and we should strive to imitate him, as Paul did, 1 Cor 11:1.

18b, The Content of Revelation

Paul asks that the Spirit would teach them three things. These correspond to the three major divisions of the book, but in reverse order. Thus this verse is a sort of table of contents of the rest of the epistle. (NB: Paul does this not infrequently in his epistles; cf. Jeremias, *ZNTW* 49 [1958] 145-156, e.g., Gal 1:10-12; 1 Cor 15:35; Rom 3:27-31 [alternation, not chiasm]; 1 Cor 9:1.)

Application.—He prays that the Lord would teach them, then he goes on to lay out those very truths. He is not asking the Lord to teach them so that he (Paul) wouldn't have to, but seeking divine aid in his efforts to serve the Lord. So must we, if we are to be effective.

It's easiest to see the connection with the rest of the book if we start with the third topic:

19, "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe"

This heading continues right on to the middle of the next chapter. The point (as in Rom. 1-8) is God's power in our salvation.

His power...—Demonstrated, as 20-23 shows, in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and his exaltation above all angelic hosts. Cf. Rom. 1:4, "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." Men know of no greater power than that which can kill; God trumps them by showing that he can raise from the dead.

- It is "power," reversing the natural trends of nature.

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- It is “great power,” noteworthy in its effects.
- It is “exceeding great power,” surpassing all other powers.

...to us-ward.—2:1-10 applies the resurrection of Christ to us. Just as he was “raised and set at [God’s] right hand,” 1:20, so he “hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised [us] up together, and made [us] sit together in heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus,” 2:5,6

18c, “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints”

Recall the two kinds of inheritance that we discussed in the opening doxology, illustrated in Deut 4:20,21: God’s blessings as our inheritance, and us as his inheritance. Here the focus is squarely on the later, the group of people that constitutes his inheritance. But what group is that?

Throughout the OT we read things like

- Deut 32:9, “Jacob is the lot of his inheritance”
- Ps 78:71, “Israel his inheritance”
- Isa 19:25, “Israel mine inheritance”
- Jer 10:16 = 51:19, “Israel is the rod of his inheritance”

Against this background, Paul’s phrase is striking. Under the old covenant, God’s inheritance was in Israel. Now it is in the saints, irrespective of their ethnic background. And that is just the theme of 2:11-3:21, that Christ “hath broken down the middle wall of partition” between Jew and Gentile (2:14) and “reconcile[d] both unto God in one body by the cross” (2:16), making “Gentiles ... fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (3.6). Thus the second section of the book, like that of Romans (9-11), deals with the relation of Jew and Gentile in Christ.

18b, “the hope of his calling”

His calling.—When the genitive (English possessive) is used with a verbal, it is usually either the subject or the object of the underlying verbal idea. We usually have to rely on context to make the distinction. Here Paul speaks of God’s calling. There are two options:

- Objective genitive: people call on the Lord for help. Common in the Pss (18:3,6; 55:16; 99:6; 116:4, 13, 17; 118:15); Paul also uses the idiom in Rom 10:12, 13 (quoting Joel 2:32), 14; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Tim 2:2. Then “the hope of his calling” would be that for which people hope when they call on the Lord.
- Subjective genitive: the Lord calls people. This is a very common idiom in Paul: Rom. 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28, 30; 9:7, 11, 24, 25, 26; etc. Then “the hope of his calling” would be the hope to which he has called us.

If we consider this verse in isolation, either gives a good meaning. To decide between the two, note two things:

- The correlation of the previous two topics with the flow of the book thus far;
- The recurrence of “calling” language in 4:1, 4. There “your calling” is a summary of “you are called,” thus unambiguously objective genitive, inviting us to see “his calling” here as the subjective counterpart.

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Hope of his calling.—With 4:1,4 in hand, we have a better sense of the overall phrase. The third section of the book (like that of Romans, in ch. 12-16) lays out God’s expectations for how his people will live. This is the hope to which he has called them.

NB: contrast this usage with Paul’s common use of “hope” to refer to the Lord’s return, as in Tit 2:13, “the blessed hope.” More generally, our “hope” is “the hope of glory,” Col. 1:27. That will be fulfilled on the Lord’s return, but can be anticipated now by the work of “Christ in you.” Positionally, we are seated with Christ in heavenly places, and we should live that way.

This emphasis on our hope in the present life reminds us of the omission of “hope” in the thanksgiving at the start of the epistle. The believer’s hope is “the hope of salvation” (1 Thes 5:8), and that salvation has aspects in this life as well as the life to come. Ephesians focuses our attention on the deliverance from sin and the victory in daily life that is our portion NOW, by the power of the Holy Spirit, just as other epistles (e.g., Thess and Titus) look forward to the future “blessed hope” of the Lord’s return.

Summary

So Paul lays out for us the lessons he hopes to teach, and invokes the Holy Spirit’s help in communicating these vital truths.

- Our salvation is a demonstration of God’s mighty power. Creation is the work of his fingers, but redemption requires his strong arm. We are delivered from sin by the same power that raised Christ from the dead.
- As Christ’s redeemed, we become part of God’s inheritance, on a par with Israel of old. Now his inheritance is not just Jacob, but all his saints.
- This salvation and integration with his people has a hope associated with it, a godly and spiritual life in this present age.