

life groups' sermon guide

stained glass people: the unstoppable force



Life Groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for spiritual growth, caring for one another, and reaching out to others.

Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

15 Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere 16 I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, 17 asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. 18 I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

19 I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power 20 that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. 21 Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. 22 God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. 23 And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

Ephesians 1:15-23

I'm grateful for the opportunity to reflect on this passage with you. I want to talk about Christ's power over all other powers, about the prayer that God open the eyes of our hearts, and about the comprehensiveness of the vision which is revealed when we become aware of the hope to which God is calling us.

Christ's Power above all other Power

The first theme I want to tackle is God's power, as revealed through Christ's resurrection. The passage contains quite an impressive array of words about God's power. Verse 19 alone contains four different Greek words for power, combined with amplifying words like "greatness" and "overwhelming". Verse 20 evokes the Hebrew Bible imagery of "the right hand of God", an expression of God's ability to accomplish mighty deeds on earth. Rather than trying to separate these tightly packed references apart, the message here seems to be about the comprehensiveness and fullness of God's power. The author piles on words because ultimately words are inadequate.

The resurrection message is that God is still in power, even when it seems like the powers and principalities of this world are gaining in strength. The passage doesn't say that those other dominions and authorities don't exist. But God's power, poured out through Christ in the resurrection, is above all these things. There is no other power we need fear. Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God.

It's fairly easy to claim that God's power is above all destructive powers and authorities. But that isn't the only thing the passage says. It reminds us that Christ reigns over every government and authority, power and dominion and any title bestowed. This includes those powers and authorities which seek good in the world. When we come before the cross, we realize that these things have no power of their own. Even the forces of good in this world are only good when they live not for themselves but for Christ. Even our own

Christian efforts for faithfulness and righteousness only work for God's kingdom when we give over our own wills and our own desire for power, and know finally that all power is God's.

God's power is above all pretensions of power, and our responsibility is to discern what God is already doing and to pray to be used by God. Christ reigns over the church and the world. The church must not act in the world "in his name", as if it is a proxy for his power. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us."

Q: In what ways do you struggle to recognize God's Lordship over all things?

Q: How does this concept of God's sovereign power challenge us in our daily walk with him?

Q: What are some ways that we can show regard to God's power and authority over heaven and earth?

Open the Eyes of the Heart

The second theme of the passage has to do with this work of discerning the movement of God's power in the world.

Q: How do we know that God's power reigns, over all other powers and authorities in the church and the world?

We don't often see this with our rational mind. There's so much evidence to the contrary. But when we see with the mind of Christ, we begin to glimpse a deeper truth than the world's truth. Paul prays in this passage that God will open the eyes of our hearts. To me, this is the crux of the passage, the center of Paul's prayer for the church.

Open the eyes of the heart. This is perhaps similar to the circumcision of the heart in Romans 2:29. It is not really about a physical experience, about literal eyes, but using body imagery to express something which goes beyond the body, but which certainly includes the body. Like the psalmist who says that all creation has a new smell, we may indeed see with new eyes.

The eyes of the heart — I see this as a poetic way of describing our God-given, created connection to God through the Light of Christ, the image of God in humanity. The eyes of the heart, when opened by the Holy Spirit, can become the eyes of Christ. To discern the mind of Christ is to see with eyes which see the whole, not with our own fragmented vision.

What do we see? "the hope to which he is calling you", hope for all creation, the hope of unity and reconciliation which is the essence of the gospel. We see the role of the church in God's plan, and know that we are called to participate in the hope of creation. Our faith is not for our own benefit, but that we might participate with God in the hope of the world.

To understand the significance of Christ's reign, we must be filled with his light, en-light-ened by his light. We stand under his power in order to understand. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, not our own work. We recognize moments of unique perspective, in which we see beyond ourselves and are aware of God's view. What an awesome feeling.

Q: Describe a time when you felt you were seeing with His eyes, when you had clarity of vision and purpose.

Fullness of the Vision

So what are the characteristics of that vision, of the glimpses we get when we see through illumined eyes of the heart? The most fundamental characteristic which I see in this passage is the fullness of the vision. “Full of him who fills all things totally.” The concept of fullness at the end of the passage is hard to translate into grammatical sense. Like the use of “power” earlier, there is the sense of heaping on words, to try to express in words what is really inexpressible. Our tendency is to visualize Christ in too narrow terms. This passage pushes us to broaden our faith beyond that which we can know by human means.

The body of Christ imagery is expansive, beyond whatever definition might spring from our own experience of the church. The passage emphasizes the fullness of it all. It can only be grasped by opened eyes. Such enlightenment is a collective experience, not an individual one. We need each other, in order to approach the light and mind of Christ. Let us remember that Christ’s power is above our power. Let us pray for God to open the eyes of our hearts, that we can see ourselves and the world through the eyes of Christ who sees and knows and loves and redeems all in universal hope.

Q: How do we achieve this collective vision?

Q: What activities can we engage in to bring about the clarity of vision that we seek?

Q: What does it look like for you and I to live this passage out in our lives?