

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Introduction:

"At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

From the majority opinion of the Supreme Court in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern PA v. Casey* (1992)

We are apologists in a spiritual battle. That doesn't mean we *apologize* for the gospel. It means that God's Word is always spoken *into human culture*. God used prophets and apostles to speak revelation into their cultures. Now he uses his own sons and daughters to show and tell the gospel to those whose minds are "darkened." For the wisdom, courage and power to do so, we have texts like Ephesians 1:15–23. The truths the Apostle Paul so eloquently explains encourage the church to show that God is more beautiful, personal, powerful and loving than anything the pagan world can offer.

Paul has set the stage in Eph 1:1–14: we are blessed in the heavenlies, since Christ himself is there and we are chosen to be in him. If any of *us* had been writing Ephesians, we would have put the battle chapter first, then the everyday things, then the battle (holding-on-to-the-end), and finally, promotion to the heavenlies. That is always the order in pagan spirituality. But not in the gospel of Jesus! In Christianity, the heavenlies are *already won* – and that's *why* we can stand and fight in the temporary, wiping-up skirmish against the defeated wicked powers.

¹⁵ *For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,* ¹⁶ *I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,*

Paul knows this church, which is full of faith and love. He loves them and prays for them to have Enlightenment, Power and Full Fellowship with God and with one another.

Enlightenment

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

False Enlightenment

Our culture thinks of "enlightenment" as a New Age, Oneist spiritual experience.

Based on experience alone

The "look within" enlightenment is addictive and often isolating. There are huge differences between godly meditation and pagan trance-inducing mantras.

The Bible tells Israel not to copy pagan worship:

Deut 12:29–32 *When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, ...take care that ... you do not inquire about their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods?- that I also may do the same." You shall not worship the LORD your*

Women's Bible Study, Ephesians 1:15-23

September 27, 2017 Rebecca Jones

God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

1 Kgs 18:28–29 *And [the priests of Baal] cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.*

Founded on one's own imagination

In Jude, pagans have wormed their way into the church and found a welcome:

Jude 1:10–13 *[T]hese people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. Woe to them! ...These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.*

Brought by evil spirits

Pagan trances and enlightenment are demonic. The US is becoming a modern-day Ephesus. From "A Guide to Spirit Animals," for example:

In certain cultures and spiritual systems, there is a belief that we each travel with a cadre of spirit guides, which also includes animals. Shamanic healer and intuitive, Colleen McCann, explains below what spirit animals are, and how they can be harnessed for help in life, whether through meditation or totem form.¹

Leading to fear and despair

Ephesus was known for powerful magic to ward off evil spirits. Similar techniques are offered today. Pagan meditation techniques produce a semblance of peace, which is really a false detachment (e.g. Buddhist "mindfulness," Hindu "yoga"). Watch out for spiritual systems or techniques, some of which are even in the church. Paul doesn't offer amulets with Jesus' picture on them, or special places where the Christians should go to pray.

True Enlightenment

He asks that "the eyes of their heart" (v 18) should be open. This expression is found neither elsewhere in the Bible nor in the literature of the day. Perhaps Paul is thinking of that dramatic day when he lost his physical sight, but gained "eyes of the heart." His powerful "enlightenment" had him preaching the resurrection of Christ only days after being floored by the glory of the risen and reigning Jesus! He was forced to reevaluate everything he had learned about the OT, Jahweh, the temple, and the Messiah. From a murdering terrorist to a praying Apostle—a more dramatic change can hardly be found.

Knowing God comes from knowing his revelation of himself in Creation, in the Scripture and in Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension (vv 20–22). This knowledge leads to a very Christian "enlightenment," which often has an emotional element of course! But whatever the emotion that accompanies it, true enlightenment leads to true wisdom.

Based on knowledge

Eph 4:17–21 *[Y]ou must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.*

John 17:3 *And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

We can truly “know God.” Notice that Christians have “heard,” been “taught,” and “learned” THE truth because God has revealed himself.

Drawn from revelation

Pagans want “wisdom” or “signs” (and wonders). Paul says we know God through the cross, which is “foolishness” to the world.

1 Cor 1:20–24 *Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Brought by the Holy Spirit

True Enlightenment is stirred up in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. In 2 Cor 3, Paul speaks of hard minds and dark, veiled hearts. Those hearts are only freed and brought to glory by “the Lord who is the Spirit.” This is the enlightenment of the heart that we see in v. 18.

Leading to thanksgiving and hope

True Enlightenment drives out fear and brings hope. Paul reminds us that we are called, chosen, adopted, redeemed, holy, blameless, blessed and already sitting in the heavenlies. Our inheritance is sure!

“Inheritance” – Are we God’s inheritance or is God our inheritance? Scholars disagree for this text. The Bible teaches both truths. See Micah 7:14 – “the flock of your inheritance,”; 1 Pet 1:3–5 – “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you”; and 1 Pet 2:9 – “a people for God’s own possession.” Inheritance may also have a special meaning to Paul, who was no doubt disinherited by his family.

Power

and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

The pagan spirituality in Ephesus had many words for power, which they used to master life and one another.² Paul uses all these terms in abundance in Ephesians to describe the realm of evil spirits, which have no ultimate authority. As Clinton Arnold puts it,

Those who formerly put their faith in magical practices and have since professed faith in Christ now have apostolic instruction about how they are to regard the deities or spirits in which they formerly trusted in light of their confession of Christ. The pagan deities are not imaginary or lifeless and therefore harmless, but neither are they omnipotent. They are powerful and evil emissaries of the devil himself who need to be resisted with the powerful armor of God.³

False power

From demonic sources

The Ephesians sought power using the names of powerful gods and goddesses. They used mantras, the "Ephesia Grammata" (special magical "letters" and spells), and incantations to ward off evil spirits, lay a curse on someone or command the gods. Such "power" works only evil and depends on using wicked powers or created beings -- Spirit guides, spiritual guides, animal spirits, etc. Think this is far away and long ago?

You can buy the Power Animal Oracle card app for your iPhone⁴ or the children's Spirit Animal Cards version. You have friends who rely on karma and arrange their furniture according to Feng Shui. You can learn from a psychic to keep your room clean, since evil spirits like mess!

On Global Wizardry (a volume from a *truthXchange* conference) shows the incredible global similarities in pagan worship. Spiritual power comes from an indwelling—whether the choking, soul-destroying indwelling of wicked spirits or the life-giving indwelling of the Holy Spirit, from which the water of life flows. Here is a description of African paganism by Dr. Yusufu Turaki:

"An African pagan believes that he can, by a variety of methods:

1. Communicate with, and receive communication from, the spirit world;
2. Acquire powers from the natural and the spirit world;
3. Exercise those powers in and through human beings, other creatures, nature and the spirit world;
4. Experience spirituality through festivals, rituals and ceremonies;
5. Consult professional communicators who contact the spirit world and help the practitioner exercise spiritual power."

"...the spirit world is densely populated with

1. Spirit beings, spirits, and the living-dead or the spirits of the ancestors and
2. Impersonal, mystical mysterious, unseen powers and forces.⁵

This description fits Ephesus well and is the context in which the Christian church lived.

For selfish reasons

False power manipulates others and sees one's own comfort as the highest good. Last week, Rhonda read a spell-like prayer that used incantations and magical words to curse a competitor in a chariot race. Here is a modern expression of the ideal goal for a pagan exercise of power:

"Wouldn't it be powerful if you fell in love with yourself so deeply that you would do just about anything if you knew it would make you happy?" -- Alan Cohen, American author and speaker

False power is used out of fear. Fear is part of life on a planet affected by sin. Those born into a world dominated by pagan principles and spirituality long for safety and use the only techniques they know to acquire it.

In possessive ways

False power is exercised through possession and for the purpose of possession. Notice the many demonic possessions around when the Christ came on the scene! False power tries to take possessive power over others.

True power

Based on Christ's resurrection and transformation; his authority as he sits at the right hand of God; and is working out his victory over the devil, death and sin.⁶

Personal and tender, evidenced by the triumph of Jesus Christ

The name above all names. The magical religion of Ephesus depended on using powerful, often secret "names." Cities would believe they could not be conquered unless their enemy learned the secret name that protected them. Paul encourages us to remember that no name has the power of the name of Christ and his power is "toward the saints"!

Humble and submissive

Christ is raised to the heavenlies. Because we are "in him," we do not have to climb some power ladder using techniques, meditation, special words or names, relics, , special Scripture reading methods, holy routines or places. From heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ protects us, guards us, watches over us, and intercedes for us. We are already there, in him – in the presence of the holy God, accepted and pure.

Triumphant over all evil

There is no power on earth or in the spirit world that is not under the power of Jesus Christ in the heavenlies. He rules over and directs all.

Eternal

Jesus' power is not limited geographically or temporally. He is ruler of the ages. Let's not forget that we are already IN eternal life. One day God's power will transform us, eradicating all trace of sin and remaking our bodies so they are fit for the age to come.

Fullness

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

False fullness

Everyone feels the world should make sense and have some kind of unity. However, all those who refuse to recognize the Creator end up in the same place, despite the seeming "variety" of spiritualities on offer. They must make God *a part* of everything, which keeps the idea of "spirituality" and creates a kind of "fullness" system, often described as some version of a circle. The only religion that can't fit into the circle is Christianity. You will hear spiritual notions like non-dual spirituality, karma, soul-consciousness, reincarnation, perennial philosophy,

contemplation, meditation, mandalas, and so on. All of these approaches reject the Creator God who reveals truth and requires allegiance and obedience. Such approaches seek to suppress the mind.

"the more irreconcilable various theological positions appear to be, the closer we are to experiencing truth." -- A leader in the emergent church movement

"God has made different religions to suit different aspirations, times and countries...one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with wholehearted devotion." Ramakrishna, Hindu mystic

This fullness can either be "religious" (open to any and all gods/goddesses) or "secular" (rejecting the very notion of spirituality – leaving us with the God of the human mind.) Either approach is impersonal and empty. Woody Allen says it clearly:

"Most of life is tragic. You're born, you don't know why. You're here, you don't know why. You go, you die. Your family dies. Your friends die. People suffer. People live in constant terror. The world is full of poverty and corruption and war and Nazis and tsunamis. The net result is, you lose—you don't beat the house."

True fullness

The "pleroma" Paul speaks of is different. The word is used several times in Ephesians, so we will it as applied to the beautiful, cosmic marriage/union of Christ and his church. God has set his love on the church. Jesus rules and reigns *for the church!* Just as a husband and wife become one flesh, one body, so we have been chosen to be united to Christ in his infinite love that he set upon us due to nothing we have done.

This beautiful, tender, powerful Savior rules over all, but his power does not terrify. It inspires; it strengthens; it inhabits us—bringing confidence, peace, joy, and the courage to walk through the life Woody Allen describes so poignantly. Being united to Christ and experiencing God's fullness does not destroy your identity, but creates it! You, personally, as a member of his church, maintain your individuality. Indeed that individuality grows, as it stays united to Christ and stays in connection to his church.

Do not feel that you are proud by saying that there is only one true religion—only one true source of spiritual power. That is the most humble thing that any of us could say. All is of Christ. He rules, he knows, he cares, he loves, he empowers, and he will one day bring you safely to his eternal family reunion. He's already there—preparing a place for you.

Sources

Arnold, Clinton. Gen. Ed. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

----- . *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989, 1992.

Baugh, S. M. *Ephesians*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

Bruce, F. F. *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.

Calvin, Jean. *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, trans. 1965.

Dowling, Michael and Dowling, Sarah. *Telling Fables: Amusing Tales about Timely Topics of Timeless Significance*. Unpublished manuscript, 2017.

Ferguson, Sinclair. *Let's Study Ephesians*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005.

Jones, Peter. Gen. Ed. *On Global Wizardry: Techniques of Pagan Spirituality and a Christian Response*. Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 2010.

¹ <http://goop.com/guide-spirit-animals>. The site goes on to say: "A spirit animal is characterized as a teacher or messenger that comes in the form of an animal and has a personal relationship to an individual. Other names might be animal guides, spirit helpers, spirit allies, power animals, or animal helpers. It is believed that you do not choose the animal, rather it chooses, or has already chosen you. The animal is there to provide "medicine" to the recipient in the form of guidance, lessons, protection, power, or wisdom. Shamans worldwide have relied on the guidance, wisdom, and symbolism of spirit animals for thousands of years."

² *Dunamis* (power), *energeia* (effective power), *ischus* (strength), *krato* (dominion), *exousi* (authority), *kuriotes* (lordship), *archon* (ruler) and *kosmokrator* (world ruler), among others!

³ Clinton Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989, 1992), 67. Arnold also points out that Paul uses the language of the times to discuss "rulers of the spirits of the air" and "principalities, powers, and authorities in heaven."

⁴ With this Oracle Cards app you can: Give "oracle readings" anywhere, anytime on your iPhone or iPod Touch; Choose between 1-card, 3-card, 5-card and 12-card readings; Save and load your "oracle readings" for review at any time; E-mail "oracle readings" to friends; Flip cards over to read the full meaning of each card; Review the entire deck of cards in Browse mode.

⁵ *On Global Wizardry* (Escondido, CA: Main Entry Editions, 2010), 115-6. This volume is a collection of essays about the practices of pagan spiritual techniques and an analysis from a Christian point of view.

⁶ Sinclair Ferguson, *Let's Study Ephesians*, 32.

⁷ From an interview by Douglas J. Rowe, published by the Associated Press, March 25, 2005. Quoted by Michael Dowling in his Study Guide for an as yet unpublished manuscript, *Telling Fables*.