

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

PAUL'S PRAYERS FOR BELIEVERS (PART 1)

This morning we are going to go the book of Ephesians and cover Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers in Chapter 1, verses 15-23. Before we get to the passage, let's briefly talk about the context of the passage. Ephesians is one of the four Prison Epistles - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. These letters were written during Paul's first imprisonment after he returned from his third missionary journey – between 60-62 AD. During his first imprisonment, he was able to receive visitors relatively freely and through these visitors he could keep up with the condition of the churches and correspond with them. Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon may have been written and sent for delivery at the same time – and Ephesians and Colossians share some similarities in content. Although, the letter was written to the Ephesians, it was probably intended to be read first by that church and then circulated to the other churches in the region. So, this letter fits in quite well with our study of Colossians that Pastor Alex is normally doing at this service.

The Context of the Passage in The Letter of Ephesians

Ephesians can be divided into two basic parts. Chapters 1-3 are what a lot of people call the “doctrinal” portion of the book and Chapters 4-6 are practical application. All instruction is doctrine – so really, in that sense, everything in the book is “doctrine”. So - when we say the first three chapters are “doctrine” – to me, it is the part of the book that reveals and explains theological truths – the things we need to know about theological reality – in order to understand how to live and please God based on this reality. This is a common structure of Paul's letters.

Paul's prayer in Chapter 1 is in the “doctrinal” part of the book. It follows a very long sentence in verses 3-14 in which Paul praises God for all He has done for us as believers. This is a wonderful passage that – in the context of praising and glorifying God – it summarizes how God has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ” and goes on to describe these blessings:

- ***Before the foundation of the world, He chose that believers would be holy and blameless before Him [God the Father] in love. (verse 4)***
- ***He predestined believers to be adopted as His sons through Christ. (verse 5)***
- ***He freely bestowed His grace on believers through Christ – our redemption through Christ's blood and the forgiveness of our sins (verses 6-7)***
- ***He revealed a mystery to us - something unrevealed to previous generations - His will concerning the summing up of all things in Christ – all heavenly things and all earthly things. (verses 9-10)***
- ***We have been made His [God the Father] inheritance (or possession) (verse 11)***
- ***We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit – given as a down payment of our future glorious inheritance (verses 13-14)***

This is where Paul offers his prayer for them in verses 1:15-23. Here's our passage:

¹⁵ For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:15–23 (NASB95)

Here's an outline of the Prayer:

1. **Request** – that God will give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him
2. **Purpose** – so that they might know:
 - a. *The hope of His calling*
 - b. *The wealth of His glorious inheritance in the saints*
 - c. *The surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe*
 - i. *Evidence of God's power – God's power manifested through:*
 1. *God's resurrection of Christ and exalting Christ over the Universe,*
 2. *God's subjecting everything in the Universe to Christ*
 3. *God's giving Christ to the Church*

Before we get to the actual prayer, notice in verses 15 and 16, Paul says:

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers

“For this reason” refers back to all the things Paul has just praised God for in verses 3-14. All of the things that God has done for believers. And Paul thanks God that the Ephesian church has been made partakers in all those things.

Notice also that Paul is getting reports about them - he has heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus – this is not just talking about the faith they had when they were saved – it is also talking about their continuing faith – the application of their faith – living by faith. One way the application of their faith is evident to Paul is the next thing he heard about them – he heard about their love toward all the saints. The fruit of the application of their faith was the manifestation of love toward one another. The Ephesian church was characterized by its continuing faith – walking in faith – and by the fruit of their faith – love for one another. This was the report Paul was getting about the Ephesian church. Every local church – our church included – needs to really think about that – if Paul were receiving reports about us – about our faith and our love – what would the reports be? I'll leave that for us to think about.

So, Paul says he never ceases giving thanks to God for them because of all of the things that God has done for believers – the Ephesian church being partakers in those things – and because of their continuing faith and love for one another. And not only does he continually give thanks to God for them, but he also continually prays for them. And this passage tells us what that prayer is.

Now, as we go through this – remember that although Paul is writing this letter to the Ephesian church and is specifically praying for them – this prayer applies not just to the Ephesians, but to all the churches. Remember - this letter was written to the Ephesians, but was probably intended to be read first by that church and then circulated to the other churches in the region. So, we can conclude that the things that Paul is asking that God do for the Ephesian church are also things that are important and needed in the other churches – Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, knows what the churches need and he is praying for it. All of us – each of us individually and our local church – need what Paul is asking God for in this prayer. That’s why I wanted to study this passage – it helps us understand things that are important and necessary for us to live and serve God.

Ok, let’s start with Paul’s request in verse 17:

17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

What is Paul asking God to do for them? – He’s asking God to give them something – he calls it “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him”. What does this mean? To help understand this we need to consider the meaning of the words “wisdom” and “revelation” and then “spirit”. Wisdom is the English translation of the Greek word “σοφία” – which can be defined as “the capacity to understand and function accordingly”. Harold Hoehner defines it as “insight into the true nature of things”ⁱ. It is an understanding of the truth and reality about something – not just intellectual knowledge about something, but real understanding and how to apply it. Revelation is the English translation of the Greek word “ἀποκάλυψις” – which can be defined as the revealing of something that was previously hiddenⁱⁱ. It’s the same word translated “Revelation” in the title of the book of Revelation. So – Paul is asking God to give to the Ephesians wisdom and to reveal something to them that has been previously hidden. The next clause in the verse tells us what the subject of this wisdom and revelation is – the knowledge of God. Paul’s request is for the Ephesians to be given more wisdom into the true nature of God - and knowledge of things about God that have not been previously disclosed to them.

But notice something – even though Paul is asking God to give them this wisdom and revelation – he doesn’t put it exactly that way. He asks God to give them a **“spirit”** of wisdom and revelation. Why does Paul put his request this way? What is this spirit of wisdom and revelation? Spirit is the Greek word “πνεῦμα” and it can mean “wind” or “breath” – it can mean our human spirit - the component of each of us that gives life to our bodies, as well as the source and seat of our mind, will and emotion. It can also mean a spirit being – like the Holy Spirit. Or Paul could be using it as an adjective to describe a type or quality of wisdom and revelation – in which case it would be translated “spiritual wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him”. Paul is not referring to wind or breath here, but otherwise, it is very hard to tell what Paul is referring to when he asks God to give them “a spirit” of wisdom and revelation.ⁱⁱⁱ

In thinking about this, we need to note that God is the One who Paul is asking to give this spirit. So, whatever Paul meant by “spirit”, it is something that God gives. It comes from God. It is not something the believer can do for himself or herself. God gives it.

Another thing to consider – at the time Paul wrote Ephesians, the canon of Scripture had not been completed and the spiritual gifts related to new revelation were still active – in fact, in Chapter 4 of this same book, he lists apostles and prophets – both who communicate new revelation - as gifted people given to the Church at that time. Also, 1 Corinthians 12:8 describes a spiritual gift Paul calls the “word of wisdom” – and in 1 Corinthians 12:31, Paul tells the Corinthians to “earnestly desire the greater gifts” (prophecy being one of the greater gifts) – meaning that they should desire that people with these gifts be given to the church for its instruction and edification. It is possible that – at this time in the early Church – this prayer in Ephesians would include Paul’s desire that these spiritual gifts be manifested in the Ephesian church - so that they would be given more revelation and through that be able know more about God. In fact – in Chapters 2 and 3 of Ephesians, Paul reveals to them something new - the mystery of the Church.

Here’s another thing to consider about this passage. Look at the beginning of verse 18 – in the NASB translation, it says *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...”*. According to Harold Hoehner, among others, this is not the best translation. If you notice the words “I pray that” are in italics – which means that these words are not in the Greek text, but are supplied by the translators in an effort to clarify the meaning. If you have an NASB Bible with you, you may also see a footnote by the word “may”, and if you look at the footnote, it provides an alternative reading. In this case the alternative reading is “being” – so, instead of “may be enlightened”, the alternative would read “being enlightened”. “Being enlightened” is the translation of the Greek word “**φωτίζω**”, and the form of this Greek word used in this passage is a perfect, passive participle – the perfect form of a word denotes something that occurred in the past, but that has continuing results. So – the enlightening has already occurred and the continuing result of this enlightening is that they now have the capacity to receive this wisdom and revelation, whereas before they didn’t. So – this clause is better translated **“the eyes of your heart having been enlightened”**. Meaning that they have already been made capable of understanding the truth about God. In believers – this kind of enlightening – the opening of our eyes so that we are capable of understanding the truth about God - occurs the moment we believe and is a work of God through the Holy Spirit.

So – with this phrase – “the eyes of your heart having already been enlightened – Paul is referring to something – that believers have been made capable of understanding the truth about God. They are not like unbelievers who do not have this capability. Believers have the ability to learn truth – but we don’t automatically know and understand the truth – it’s not saying that all truth has been immediately zapped into our heads – God must first reveal the truth, and then it must be taught and it must be learned.

And this gets us to something else to consider when thinking about this verse - the Illumination or Teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has many roles to play in the life of a believer – a good acronym you can use to remember the basic ones is RIBS:

R = Regeneration

I = Indwelling

B = Baptism

S = Sealing

Now, one aspect of the Holy Spirit's Indwelling is His ministry of illuminating the Word of God – the teaching and enlightening of the understanding of the believer within whom the Spirit dwells. We could spend a lot of time – many lessons – talking about this; but for our purposes today, we need to just summarize it. First, Illumination is different from Inspiration – Inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture – getting the Word of God into written form. Illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit that causes believers to understand the Word of God. Since the canon of Scripture was closed with the writing of the Book of Revelation, the Holy Spirit's work of Inspiration was finished at that point. However, His ministry of Illumination is still available to every believer - because every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and every believer has had his or her eyes opened and is capable of understanding the things God has revealed.

Notice I said **“available”**. We all have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, and He is always available to teach us and give us understanding of Scripture. However, we have our responsibility to fulfill – it is our responsibility to (i) diligently study the Word of God, and (ii) accept what it says as the truth in faith, and (iii) apply it in faith – basically, walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh – otherwise, we will hinder this ministry of the Spirit. And this teaching ministry is progressive – not only is it required for our spiritual growth – but it depends on our spiritual growth. It's like the way we progress in school – first you learn the basics – of math, for example – and then you move on to deeper and more complex curriculum. Everything builds on what was learned before. So there are some things new believers are able to understand – some basic Bible doctrine - and there are some things that cannot be understood until a believer spiritually matures to the point where he or she has enough of the prerequisites to begin to understand them. This is described in I Corinthians 3:1-2:

¹ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,

1 Corinthians 3:1–2 (NASB95)

So, putting all this together, I think Paul's request in verse 17 – that God ***“give to them a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him”*** – is for God to work in their lives to deepen their knowledge of Him – through the revelation He gives through the Holy Spirit – Scripture – and through the work of the Holy Spirit to illuminate it and give them understanding. Implicit in this prayer is the desire that the Ephesians would do their part and make the effort to hear, study and learn.

Kenneth Wuest says this:

The word pneuma (πνεῦμα) has among its various uses the meaning, “a disposition or influence which fills and governs the soul of anyone.” What Paul is praying for is that God might so work in the lives of the Ephesian saints that they will have the spiritual wisdom and a revelation from Him that is the result of the Holy Spirit's work of energizing their human spirit. That spiritual disposition should characterize these saints.

Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 52.

Now – let's move on to verses 18 and 19 – these verses tell us three things the Ephesians will be able to know and understand as they deepen their knowledge of God - – I'm going to call these **The Three Whats** :

¹⁸ [the eyes of your heart having been enlightened], so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might..

Ephesians 1:18–19

The Three Whats are:

1. *What is the hope of His calling*
2. *What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints*
3. *What is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe*

Let's talk about **the first "What"** – "**What is the hope of His calling**". What is this talking about? Let's break it down a little – start with the word "hope". This is the English translation of the Greek word "ἐλπίς" – which means "the looking forward to something with some reason for confidence respecting fulfillment" – hope, expectation^{iv} – I know you have all heard this before – when the term "hope" is used of a Christian's hope, as it is here – it is best defined as "confident expectation". Hope is not used in the same sense we tend to use it – like "I hope it rains today" or "I hope I get the job" – the way we use it, we use it more as a wish or desire that may or may not happen. This definitely is not the way it is used of a Christian's hope – because our hope is based on the faithfulness and power of God who does what He says and who fulfills every promise He makes. So our hope is something we expect – we know it will happen. We have hope precisely because we know that what He says He can and will do.

And this verse tells us that our hope is something that comes from God's calling. The word "calling" means an "invitation to experience of special privilege and responsibility". So, God's call is God's invitation to a person to an experience of special privilege and responsibility. In one sense this calling is an offer to the entire world to believe and be saved – which immediately changes a new believer from a child of wrath to a child of God. Then, as a child of God, we have the special privileges and responsibilities – all the blessings - described earlier in Chapter 1 – in verses 3-14. According to verse 3 - we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. Verses 4-14 go on to describe those blessings. In particular, verses 4-5 tell us what God has called us to be – those who are in Christ, which means all believers, have been chosen by God to be holy and blameless and through Christ have been adopted as children of God into God's family. That's a pretty special position of privilege. There is much more in the later chapters in Ephesians that describe our special calling as believers. For example, after telling us that we have been saved by faith through grace (not works), Chapter 2, verse 10 tells us that "**we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**" We weren't just saved, we were saved for a purpose. We have a job – to do the works He prepared for us to do. And Chapter 3 describes the mystery of the Church – that Jew and Greek – all believers have been joined together in one new creation – a new man, which is the body of Christ. We are members of Christ's body.

God has called believers to an incredible position of privilege and responsibility. And the better we know God – which is the crux of what Paul is asking for in verse 17 - the more we know about God’s calling – God’s work in us, God’s blessings toward us, our special privileges and our responsibilities - And the more we know about God’s calling, the greater and greater our confidence in God in grows. He doesn’t change – He has and always be faithful to His Word. But we change, we doubt, we are tempted; however, the better we know God and His calling, the less likely we are to give in to temptations to doubt Him.

Now, the second **“What”** – **“What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”** – what does this mean? Let’s first talk about “His inheritance in the saints”. “Saints” is referring to believers. Inheritance is just what it sounds like – the Greek word means “property, possession, or inheritance.” And it doesn’t say “our inheritance” – so it is not referring to our future in heaven – other verses tell us about our future inheritance – verse 14 is an example - but not this verse. This verse is talking about an inheritance that is God’s inheritance – His possession – His property. What this is telling us is that we – believers – are God’s inheritance. And it is not just the fact that we are God’s inheritance that we should know – we need to grow in our understanding in something about that inheritance – that we are very very very valuable to God. We are valuable to God because we are a manifestation of His glory – His name, His reputation, His essential character – not because of what we do, but because of what He has done for us and will do for us - and the work He does through us. We are the recipients of His love, mercy and grace and this reveals His glory. He sent His Son – Jesus Christ - who paid an infinite, immeasurable price for our redemption through His death and resurrection. He has blessed us with all the other blessings described in earlier part of this Chapter. His work reveals His glory, and we are His work. Wuest says this:

In verse 18, Paul prays that we might know how precious the saints are in God’s eyes as His inheritance. He is glorified in His saints, and this glory is valuable. It is part of the wealth that God possesses, dearer to Him than all the splendors of creation.

Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 53–54.

Now let’s talk about the third thing – the third **“What”** - the Ephesians will know more about as they grow in their knowledge of God – Look at verse 19 –

19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might..

Ephesians 1:19 (NASB95)

Before we start breaking this one down, I need to make a comment about the NASB translation in this verse. If you have an NASB Bible, you will notice that the words “these are” are in italics and they begin a new sentence. Once again, these are words supplied by the translators to try to better bring out the meaning for English readers. However, this is not the end of the sentence; and these words are not in the Greek text and, in this case, we may have lost a bit in the direction of the text when they made this change. If you leave out the words, you get:

19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe in accordance with the working of the strength of His might..

By leaving out the two words, you see that the phrase – “in accordance with the strength of His might” – is connected with the first part of the verse “what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe” and is expanding on the power of God that He makes available to all believers. We will cover that in a minute.

For now, let’s talk about the first part of the verse – what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. What does this mean? First, it describes God’s power. The word “power” is the Greek word “**δύναμις**” – this word describes power in the sense of “ability or capability of acting”. Our word “dynamite” comes from this Greek word. The Greek word translated “surpassing” means – in our manner of speaking – to go way beyond something. The word “greatness” - in this context - is referring to magnitude – great in size or amount. Paul is describing God’s power – His ability – as something that far exceeds anything. God is omnipotent and His power is beyond measure.

You are probably thinking that this is Theology 101 – God is Omnipotent. Every baby believer gets that. And that basic attribute of God is Theology 101 – though even the subject of God’s omnipotence is deeper than we can ever image. But the next part is the amazing part that isn’t Theology 101 and is something that, in my own life, I don’t really take to heart most of the time. Here’s the amazing part – God’s power – His immeasurable power that far exceeds anything and everything – is directed towards us believers. His power works in us and through us. Not that it’s something we control – we don’t – but if we are walking by the Spirit – living by faith – His power energizes us.

This next phrase – “in accordance with the working of the strength of His might” – relates this same power that God directs toward us all the way back to its source – which is God’s inherent power. The surpassingly great power He directs toward us is in accordance with – meaning it measures up to, corresponds to, is commensurate with – a standard – which is the active application of the force of His strength that comes from His inherent power – the standard of the power directed toward us is God’s inherent power in operation. We should note that there are four words for power used in verse 19. We already talked about “**δύναμις**” which in this context we can view as God’s capacity or ability – His potential power. There are three other words for power used in this verse – “working” is the Greek word “**ἐνέργεια**” and it is referring to power that is in actual operation – active power. The word “**strength**” is the Greek word “**κράτος**” and it has the idea of “the ability to express or exhibit resident strength”, and can have a nuance of dominion or mastery. “Might” is the translation of the Greek word “**ἰσχὺς**” which is “inherent strength or power”. How do all these words work together in this verse? Harold Hoehner says this:

“How do these words for power relate to each other? All four terms are closely related and overlap with one another. First, ἰσχὺς speaks of the inherent strength or of power possessed. Second, κράτος is close to ἰσχὺς but denotes even more emphatically the presence and significance of the strength or force of power, or the ability to overcome resistance, or more at the visible aspect of strength, perhaps its supremacy.³ Third, ἐνέργεια stresses the activity of power, namely, it is power in action. Fourth, δύναμις, found earlier in this verse, denotes capacity in view of its ability or potential power.

By way of illustration, a bulldozer has the ability, capacity, and potential of routing out trees (δύναμις). By looking at it, one senses its inherent strength (ἰσχὺς) but when its

engine roars and it begins to move, its power of mastery becomes obvious (κράτος). However, when it comes to a tree and knocks it over one sees the activity of its power (ἐνέργεια). Similarly, Calvin illustrates the use of these words by stating that ἰσχύς is like the root, κράτος the tree, and ἐνέργεια the fruit. It seems that δύναμις is the more general term and that the other terms support it, as is the case in this passage. Again these words overlap and the point of using all of these words is not so much to emphasize their distinctiveness but to enforce the idea of God's abundant power available to all believers."

Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 271.

Just so we don't lose the forest for the trees, remember that we are talking about something the Ephesians will know more about as they grow in their knowledge of God. Remember that Paul's prayer is that God will give the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him so that they will know **the Three Whats** – **what** is the hope of His calling, **what** are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and now this third **thing** – **what** is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. Hoehner summarizes this third **What** like this:

In conclusion, Paul states that the end of knowing God intimately is that we might know what is the surpassing greatness of his ability or potential power which is according to the mighty activity of power derived from his inherent strength. This power is directed to all who believe. It is this kind of power that is needed to survive the satanic hostile powers and worldly system that surrounds us.

Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 272.

So, God is directing His power toward us believers, and this power corresponds to the active working power that is derived from His inherent might. And in verse 20, Paul shows us that this same power has been manifested in history, space and time, when God raised Christ from the dead, seated Christ at His right hand in the position of authority over the entire created universe, subjected everything in the universe under Christ's feet, and gave Christ to the Church.

Look at verses 20-21:

19 in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Christ is THE example of the inherent power of God and what He is capable of doing, and what He **IN FACT** did. When we talk about God's power, we aren't talking in abstract, theoretical terms. We aren't projecting what we want God to be. We aren't worshipping a God who doesn't act. We aren't worshipping a God who makes promises He is not able to keep. We aren't worshipping an impotent creation of the human mind. We worship the only true God – God Almighty - who is all-powerful and has demonstrated His power to mankind over the course of history in many, many ways that human beings could see, touch, feel, and experience - with the ultimate demonstration being the manifestation of His power through Christ – His power over sin,

death, Satan and the angelic powers – everything. That’s the power of God and that’s the same power that the same God directs toward us.

This passage describes four acts of cosmic significance to show what God’s power is like. First, the resurrection of Christ. Christ was crucified, dead and buried. He wasn’t “mostly dead”. He wasn’t just unconscious. He was 100% dead – just like every other human being who died before Him. This wasn’t just a resuscitation – like Lazarus – Lazarus died again, poor guy – he had to die twice. Christ was bodily resurrected never to die again. That is the power of God at work. And since God was able to resurrect Christ, we know He has the power to resurrect us as He has promised. Death is subject to God’s control and God will, in the end, totally abolish death.

Next, God demonstrated the surpassing greatness of His power by seating Christ in the heavenlies. This is talking about the ascension and session of Christ. Not only did God raise Christ from the dead, but He exalted Christ in the position of authority over the entire universe. It says God “seated Christ at His right hand”. Hoehner says that **“To sit at the right hand of God is a “symbol of divine power.”** The phrase “in the heavenly places” describes where God dwells – so – Christ is in heaven, with God, sitting in the position of power over the entire universe.

Verse 21 gives us the extent of Christ’s position of authority – it tells us that Christ is **“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”** That’s comprehensive – Christ is over everything in the universe. “All rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named” is a list of every kind or type of rule and authority. Christ rules over all of them.

Notice verse 21 says that Christ’s exaltation applies not just in this age – the present – but in the age to come – the future. This tells us that Christ’s rule and authority is permanent. It’s not temporary – just for the Church age – it continues permanently. Christ is there to stay. In **Revelation 22:3**, He is enthroned with God in the new earth after the Millennial Kingdom.

Now, remember that that God is Trinity – one essence in three persons – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Also remember that Jesus Christ is the God/Man – fully God and fully man. This is saying that God the Father seated Christ, His Son – in His humanity, in His physical resurrected body – at the right hand of God the Father. Christ - a human being is sitting as ruler and authority over all creation. This is something we can’t see until we die or are raptured. But Acts 2:9-11 tells us that Christ’s bodily ascension was witnessed by the apostles – they saw Him taken up into the clouds and we know He physically went somewhere. Our passage in Ephesians is one of the passages that tell us where Christ went. And Paul is using the fact of this event to show that this same power and authority that God exercised in this way towards Christ is also directed toward us. God is sovereign. No one rules over God, no one can take authority away from God. God exalts who He wills and God exalted Christ to His right hand, with authority over all the universe, and Christ will be there permanently. That’s the kind of power God directs toward us.

Let’s move on now to verse 22:

22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,

Ephesians 1:22 (NASB95)

Two other cosmic events that demonstrates God’s power - first, He put “all things in subjection under His feet”. This is a reference to **Psalm 8:6**, which describes what man was created to do – rule over the earth. When Adam sinned at the Fall, he lost this position to Satan and Satan had been in control of the earth ever since. This verse tells us that Christ is now in control.

“All things” means everything in the universe – all of creation – not only in our material realm, but also including the angelic spiritual realm. “In subjection” means subordinate to. “Under his feet” is an expression of victory over enemies – like putting a “boot on the neck” of an enemy. So – God has given Christ victory over all enemies in the universe and they are now subject to His control. God has the power to do this, it’s been done, and this is evidence of the power of God that also is working through us.

Now, you might say – it sure doesn’t look like Christ is in control over things right now. However, we have to keep in mind the difference between having the right and power to exercise control - and actually doing it. We have to also keep in mind that God has a plan for “summing up all things in Christ” as verse 10 puts it - and Christ is following that plan. That plan does not include putting an end to Satan, evil, sin and death right now. That will happen later according to God’s plan. But that doesn’t mean Christ is not actively using His power now – He certainly is – He is using the power He has to carry out the plan. Which at this point in time involves making disciples and building the Church.

Here’s what Hoehner says:

However, Christ is exercising control without it being obvious to humankind. Without his control, things would be much worse. Hence, he has the right to exercise his control but chooses not to fully exercise it immediately in every instance of violation against God’s holy character. Certainly, a basic and important illustration of his present use of authority is his current ability to rescue sinners from the most despicable powers of all, Satan and sin, To summarize, God does have a plan and everything must follow according to that plan which will culminate at Christ’s return where the exercise of his control will be very evident.

Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 284.

So, God’s power – the same power that He works in and through us – is demonstrated not only through His resurrection, ascension and session of Christ at His right hand – the ultimate position of rule and authority over the entire creation – it is also demonstrated by the fact that God has given Christ the victory over all enemies and they are now subject to His control – He has His boot on their necks.

Finally, the fourth cosmic event - God’s power has been demonstrated through us - the Church – verses 22 and 23 say:

22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:22–23 (NASB95)

What does Paul mean when he says God gave Christ as head over all things to the church? In this context “head” means authority. “Church” is talking about the universal body of believers – all

believers from the beginning the Church at Pentecost until the Rapture are members of the universal Church. We have already been told that Christ has the authority and power over all things and that all things have been subjected to His control. That would include the Church. Why does Paul now emphasize that this Person – Christ – who is head over everything – has been given by God to the Church? It is because Christ has a different relationship with the Church than He does with the rest of the universe. Just look at the next phrase – “which is His body”. The Church is special. It has a special relationship with Christ. It is His body. Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to describe the Church in many verses. Certainly Christ is the head of the Church, but that relationship is more than that, it’s more intimate and connected - it’s like the relationship of the head to the rest of the body.

Here’s another quote from Hoehner:

One good reason to use the human body as an analogy is that it conveys the idea of an organic unity that is animated by the head. It is not like a corporation where the employees may have no relationship with the head and/or other employees. On the contrary, the body depicts that each member is integrally bound to the head and to each other. This is appropriate for this context because of the contrast it presents. God subjected all creation under his feet, including friends and enemies alike. On the other hand, he gave Christ, the head of everything, to the church whose members have an integral relationship with Christ. The members of the body of Christ are bound to each other and are related to Christ as our redeemer, sustainer, and head.

Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 292.

Ok, now let’s tackle the rest of verse 23 – it describes the Church as “the fullness of Him who fills all in all”. What does this mean? “Fullness” is the Greek noun – “πλήρωμα” – which means the “state of being full” or “complete”. It can have an active sense “that which fills” or passive sense “that which is being filled”. “All in all” means “wholly, entirely, in every way”. Now this gets a bit complicated. There is a debate about how this verse should be translated. There are at least six views – and we don’t have the time we need to get into it. Hoehner interprets the language to mean that the Church is being filled by Christ and Christ is being filled in every way by God, and he makes a good case for his interpretation^{vi} – so I’m going with that. We know from Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 that God is the One who fills Christ – God is the ultimate source of the filling. So - Church is being filled by Christ and Christ is being filled in every way by God.

What is being filled? Remember that this part of our passage is talking about how God has demonstrated His power through Christ. So – in context, this filling is at the very least talking about God’s power. Hoehner says the “fullness” is the moral excellence and power of God and goes on to quote J.B Lightfoot:

Lightfoot summed it up well when he wrote, “All the Divine graces which reside in Him are imparted to her; His ‘fulness’ is communicated to her: and thus she may be said to be His pleroma (1:23). This is the ideal Church.”

Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 300.

So – God’s power has been demonstrated by the fact that He gave Christ – who has all right, power and authority over the whole universe – to us – the Church – in a special, intimate relationship – like the head of a body is over the body – and Christ fills the Church with all His fullness – which is the same as God’s fullness - His moral attributes and power. This is the kind of power that we have working in us – the unlimited power and authority of God – who not only makes claims to such power, but has demonstrated His power in these four cosmic acts, among many others.

So to sum up Paul’s prayer. He prays that God will give to the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. This insight and revelation will allow them to grow in their understanding of three things:

1. What is the hope of His calling – What does this do for us? The more we know God, the more we know about His calling of us. And the more we know about His calling, the greater and greater our confidence in God grows.
2. What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints – The more we know God, the more we realize how precious and valuable we are to Him as His possession. What does this do for us? If you know that you are precious to someone and that they place great value on you because you are theirs, you are loyal to them and have confidence to do the hard things they ask you to do, even though it doesn’t look so good to you.
3. What is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe – The more we know God, the more we understand His power that can work through us. What does this do for us? If we know that when we walk by faith, God’s immeasurable power works through us to accomplish the works He has for us to accomplish, we will not be timid but we will be courageous. It’s like **2 Timothy 1:7** says –

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

Observations/Implications

Now, to finish up, let’s briefly talk about a few of the things we can take away from this today. These are not all of them, just a few to get us thinking about it:

First, I have already mentioned this earlier – this is a prayer – something Paul is asking God to do – and the things that Paul is asking that God do for the Ephesian church are also things that are important and needed in the other churches – Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, knows what the churches need and he is praying for it. All of us – each of us individually and our local church – need what Paul is asking God for in this prayer.

Next, notice the sequence of how things happen – Paul’s desire for the Ephesians is that they grow in their understanding of God and through this greater understanding of God, that they grow in their understanding of three things – the hope of God’s calling, their value as God’s inheritance, and God’s power that can work through them as they live by faith. But what do they need to be able to grow like this? – verse 17 – wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. Where do we get this wisdom and revelation? Paul is asking God to provide it – so this is a work of God. God works this in our lives. He provides what we need – He provides the revelation – Scripture – that we need to understand what He wants us to understand about Him. When we believe, He gives us

new life in Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, He opens the eyes of our heart – as verse 18 says – so we become capable of understanding the things He has revealed to us. He also gives us the Holy Spirit to indwell us, illuminate the Scripture so that we will understand it and have the wisdom to apply it – and convict us when we don't - so that we can walk by the Spirit and live godly lives and do the work He has prepared for us to do. God gives us all this and much more. He provides us with everything we need. Which leads to the next thing:

God has provided everything, and He is the one who gives us this spirit of wisdom and revelation – so the whole thing is a work of God in us – we don't do it for ourselves. But – we have to understand this – it doesn't just happen – we have a responsibility – He gives us the Bible, but we must do the work to read and study and think about it – so that we have the correct information about Him. If we don't, we will just make up what we think God is like and that wrecks us. It's the old saying – garbage in/garbage out. Also, we need to pray – like Paul did – that God help us understand the things that He has revealed to us in the Bible, and He will – through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. And then there's one more thing – we must walk by faith and apply what God through the Holy Spirit teaches us. It's a cycle – the more we learn, the more we apply, the more we understand, and then we can learn more, apply more and understand more. That's how we are transformed by the renewing of our minds – as Romans 12:2 says. That's how we mature spiritually.

Finally, if we don't fulfill our responsibility, God will not do this work in us, we will not grow in our knowledge of Him, we won't grow in our understanding of the hope that is in us, our value as His inheritance, or the mighty power that He directs toward us. We will not grow spiritually - we will not be able to stand against Satan and the “rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” – as Ephesians 6 puts it – and we will be timid and afraid because we will not understand the immeasurable power that God supplies to do His work. So – God has given us everything we need, we just need to make sure we do our part.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, Page 256

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ This is an area where good, solid theologians have differed in their interpretations. Those who think Paul is referring to the human spirit, interpret the verse to be a request that God grant the Ephesians “an attitude or spiritual disposition toward insight and openness to revelation”. One of the main arguments in favor of this view is that believers already have been given the Holy Spirit at the time of belief – so Paul would not be asking for God to give the Ephesians something that they already have. Those who think Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit, interpret the verse to be a request that God grant the Ephesians special manifestations of the Holy Spirit – special manifestations of insight and revelation. One of the main arguments for this view, is that the revelation Paul is talking about here is new – something that was previously unknown to them – and new revelation does not come from the human spirit – it comes from the Holy Spirit.

^{iv} William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 319.

^v William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 549.

^{vi} Harold W. Hoehner, [*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 296-300