

Ephesians 1:15-23: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Ephesians chapter 1 verses 15 to 23 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the 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, 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.

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. After the initial address, Paul's epistles commonly begin with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Ephesians, however, has an extended blessing of God in chapter 1 verses 3-14. The prayer of thanksgiving follows this in verses 15-23. In the initial blessing, Paul declared the centrality of Christ in the entire work of God in the cosmos, in history, and in salvation.

Now he expresses his thanks to God for the faith of the recipients of the letter, and his prayer for their growth in understanding of the truth of Christ. If this is an encyclical, Paul is probably writing both to churches that he has visited or planted, alongside churches like the church in Colossae, of which he has only heard through men like Epaphras.

However, whether he knew the believers in the churches personally or not, the news of the faith of the Christians in the region had reached him in prison. Both their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love towards the saints have been reported to him, and along with the incredible work of God in Christ that he has explored in the opening blessing, this provokes him to thanksgiving and prayer for them.

[2 : 04] The expression faith in the Lord Jesus could be read either as faith with the Lord Jesus as its object, or as a reference to faith exercised in the realm of the Lord Jesus. I believe that it is more likely to be the latter, in large measure on account of Paul's more regular usage.

If we are to trust God and be faithful in difficult days, we must do so on the solid rock of Christ. Our faith does not just look to Christ, it is built upon Christ.

Their love for all of the saints has also reached Paul's ears. Love, as seen elsewhere in Paul, is paramount. It's the virtue that holds everything else together. The love toward all the saints, more particularly, is the glue that will hold the people of God in unity.

Paul's prayer is, like so much of his teaching, deeply shaped by a Trinitarian grammar. The underlying structure of salvation, and of God's work more generally, is from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

To be saved is to be brought into fellowship with the Triune God. Whether there is a direct reference to the Holy Spirit in verse 17 can be debated. It is possible that we should read this as a spirit of wisdom and of revelation, referring to the human spirit that is illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

[3 : 16] However, we might think of the description of the Messiah in Isaiah chapter 11 verse 2. The Spirit of the Lord rests upon Christ, and those in Christ receive the Spirit of Christ.

The wisdom that we have is focused on the understanding that we receive of the work of God in Christ. It grants us a knowledge of the hope to which we have been called, and of his glorious

inheritance.

When Paul talks about the Spirit, he so frequently talks about the Spirit in relation to God's promised future. The Spirit is the down payment of God's future. He is the guarantee of our inheritance.

The Spirit is the Spirit of adoption, anticipating the adoption that we await in the resurrection. The Spirit is the one who opens our eyes to the hope to which God has called us. The Spirit is the one who seals us for future redemption.

In the work of the Spirit in our midst, we have a reality-filled promise of God's future. The Spirit will draw us to reflect upon and to long for God's future. The Spirit is the one by whom we groan inwardly with birth pangs of the new creation.

[4 : 27] The Spirit is the one who summons people into the future that God has prepared for them. If we have the Spirit within us, we will be yearning, we will be moving towards God's future.

The Spirit of wisdom that God gives us helps us to recognize the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us. It helps us to recognize that we have been caught up in the purpose of our Creator, determined in Christ before the foundation of the world.

The Almighty God's plan from before all of the ages is playing out right now in our midst, bringing us salvation and new life. We aren't in some neglected backwater of the cosmos with a God who is unmindful or forgetful of us.

We have, by a remarkable work of His grace, been made partakers of the central purpose of everything, Jesus Christ. God's power was most clearly manifest in the resurrection and the ascension, by which Christ was raised from the dead and placed above all other powers.

The point here is not just one about their power. One could argue that God's might is more clearly seen in the act of creation. What in particular do we see in Christ? We see the character of God's might and we see the purpose of God's might.

[5 : 38] Many people worry about the hiddenness of God, especially when we talk about things such as election, as Paul does in this chapter. We can wonder whether God's will is really a threatening reality, relative to which we can never know where we stand.

God is veiled and capricious and we don't know what His purpose for us is. However, God's true face is seen in the Lord Jesus. Much as a child can trust her parents with many things that she does not yet understand, because she knows their loving intentions and their good character.

So in Christ, the shape of God's great purpose and His face towards us are unveiled. Do you want to know what God's purpose is for humanity? Look at Christ. Christ has been raised from the dead and seated above all earthly powers in the heavenly places.

This is what God intends for us as His people. And in Christ, we also see His power to carry this out. The power of death could not contain Christ. No rule, authority, power or dominion stands over Him.

Whatever type of thing to which you could attribute might or rule, whatever category you could employ, Christ is supreme over them all. He is above every name that is named. Names have power, but Christ's name is the greatest name of all.

[6 : 51] Philippians chapter 2 verses 9 to 11. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Nor is there any temporal limit. Christ's supremacy is not just in this age, it is also in the age that is to come. All things are placed under His feet. But the clincher here, the chief point, is that the one who has all of this authority, power and dominion, has been given as head over all things to the church.

Paul's point here is not so much that Christ is also the ruler over all things within the church, much as He is over every other thing in the creation. Rather, it is that as the ruler over all things, Christ is given as head to the church.

As head of the church, Christ is acting in a way that renders the church the special beneficiary of all of His work, of all of His authority, of all of His power and dominion and might, that is exercised in a way that blesses and builds up His church.

Paul's point is that Christ is the Lord of all, and the church is His body. He rules all of these things in a way that leads to our good. Indeed, as Christ's body, the church is the realm where the fullness of Christ is to be found.

[8 : 26] The church is the realm where the life of Christ is most fully being realised. and expressed by the work of His Spirit. Christ operates over all things in the world, but He is present in a unique way within His church.

A question to consider. The meaning of the term head is often debated, as Paul speaks about the husband as the head of the wife. How might consideration of how Paul speaks of Christ as the head of the church help us better to understand what this could mean?

