

# **THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS (LESSON EIGHTEEN)**

## **“GOD’S POWER TOWARD US” (PART TWO)**

### **EPHESIANS 1:1-23**

*1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:*

*2 Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:*

*4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*

*5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.*

*6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

*7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*

*8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;*

*9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.*

*10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:*

*11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*

*12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

*13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,*

*14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

*15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,*

*16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;*

*17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:*

*18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,*

*19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,*

*20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,*

*21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:*

*22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,*

*23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

In **Lesson Fourteen**, we commenced our study of a new section of Paul's letter to the **Ephesians** which begins at verse **15** of chapter **1**, and ends at verse **23**.

In this second section, Paul, on account of all that is true of the Christians in Ephesus, which is stated in verses **3–14**, unceasingly gives thanks to God for them and prays for them. He prays that the Ephesians may be enlightened so that they may know three things: **1.** what is "*the hope of His calling,*" or the hope to which they have been called; **2.** what is "*the wealth of the glory of His inheritance in the saints;*" and **3.** what is "*the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward,*" or the power of God which He exerts to ensure that our hope is realized and that our inheritance is fully secured.

In **Lesson 17**, we began to look at the third thing that Paul wanted the Ephesians to know namely "*the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places*" (Verses **19-20**). In this **Lesson**, we will continue our examination of this clause.

**Dr. John Phillips**, in his commentary "*Exploring Ephesians and Philippians,*" makes the following remarks regarding "*the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe:*"

*“We see something of the surpassing greatness of God’s power when we turn our giant telescopes toward the sky. Our sun for instance is rated a star of only the fifth magnitude. It shines with a mild, yellow light and is 100,000 times less luminous than its brightest neighbor. Nevertheless the sun evokes our awe. It is 864,000 miles in diameter, consists of some 335 quadrillion cubic miles of violently hot gases, and weighs more than 2 octillion tons. It orbits the center of our galaxy, the Milky Way, once every 200 million years.*

*With the naked eye we can see only about 7,000 stars. The Milky Way, however, contains about 100 billion orbiting stars and is 100,000 light-years in diameter-an inconceivable 600 million billion miles of stars!*

*Astronomer Edwin Hubble calculated that there are as many galaxies outside the Milky Way as there are stars in it. Since the galaxies are moving farther and farther away from the earth, the entire visible universe is expanding in every direction....Such is the exceeding greatness of God’s power in the macrouniverse.*

*We see something of that power, too in the microuniverse. Atoms are less than one-millionth of the thickness of a human hair. In the nucleus of the atom, numerous protons and neutrons are packed together in an inconceivably small space. Each proton and neutron consists of three even smaller particles called quarks. If a hydrogen atom were four miles in diameter, the nucleus would only be the size of a tennis ball! The remainder of the atom is mostly empty space in which electrons travel around the nucleus, making billions of trips each millionth of a second. Their incredible speed makes the atom behave as though it were solid. Facts such as these make our minds reel, but such is the exceeding greatness of God’s power.*

*We see the exceeding greatness of His power **skyward** and **earthward**. In the redemptive process we see the exceeding greatness of His power **‘us-***

*ward.’ It took as much power to effect our redemption as it did to effect creation. To create, God only had to speak. To redeem, He had to suffer. A seemingly endless universe is the demonstration of the one; an empty tomb is the evidence of the other. Paul reminded us here of the direction of God’s immeasurable power. It is to ‘us-ward who believe.’ There’s no excuse for any child of god to live a defeated, discouraged life. All the power of the godhead is directed toward us.’’*

In verse **20**, Paul informs us that the power that he is writing about, is the very same power which God “*wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.*” The power of God that operated in Jesus Christ, when God raised Him from the dead, is the same power that God makes available to us in order to guarantee our salvation.

When Jesus Christ breathed His last and surrendered His spirit to the Father, the powers of darkness believed that they had triumphed. Jesus Christ the Son of God was dead and God’s great eternal purpose and plan had been thwarted. That’s what they thought. Soon He would be buried and the natural process of corruption would begin its decaying work. The three days that He had prophesied about concerning His resurrection would soon be past. After that, Jesus would not only be dead and buried, He would be forgotten also, and His story would be confined to the scrap heap of history.

But on the third day, the exceeding greatness of God’s power was manifested in Christ Jesus. It burst the bands of death and caused Him to rise bodily. The grave clothes could not hinder him. The sepulchre could not imprison Him for the great stone was rolled away.

*“Up from the grave He arose,  
With a mighty triumph o’er His foes  
He arose the victor from the dark domain,  
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.”*

The empty tomb is the evidence of the working of God's *"mighty power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places."*

Paul wants us to know that it is this same power that God makes available to even the weakest of the saints in order to guarantee that the *"hope of His calling"* is realized and that *"the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"* is obtained. As we noted in our previous **Lesson**, the words *"to us-ward"* clearly indicate that this power is exerted on behalf, and in the interest of the saints only. It is made available exclusively to God's elect because it is they alone who have been called into this blessed hope and it is they alone who, at one and the same time, are God's inheritance and will receive an inheritance from God.

The working of God's mighty power in Christ is demonstrated in God's raising Him from the dead and setting Him at His right hand in sovereign power. The resurrection and exaltation of Christ was the sign and pledge of the triumph of the Christian as the verses outlined below clearly indicate. The quotations are from the **New Living Translation**.

### **Romans 8:11**

*"The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you."*

### **2 Corinthians 4:14**

*"We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you."*

### **1 Peter 1:21**

*"Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God **because** he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory."*

In verse **21**, Paul informs us that God’s mighty power not only raised Jesus Christ from the dead and set Him at God’s right hand in the heavenly places, but that it exalted Him to a position that is, *“Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.”*

Paul speaks here of principality, power, might, dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in the world to come. I believe that he is referring to earthly and heavenly authorities-to angels, demons and men and women who exercise authority on earth. What Paul is saying is that there is no being, either in heaven or on the earth that has any power apart from Christ. Whoever and whatever they are, by whatever name they are called, far above them all reigns the Lord Jesus Christ. Let any name be uttered, whatever it is, Christ is above it.

Paul says that our Lord has been exalted *“far above”* them. The words *“far above”* are the translation of the Greek word **huperanō, hoop-er-an’-o**, which means “over above, upward, i.e. greatly higher (in place or rank.)” The Lord Jesus is enthroned far above all the earthly and heavenly seats of power. Satan and his demons are no match for Him, neither are the earthly rulers who are controlled by them. Whatever forms of government there are and whatever the names or titles of those in power may be, all of them are subject to Christ.

Our Lord’s position of majesty and dominion will last forever, for He has been exalted above all others not only in this world, or this present dispensation, but also in the coming dispensation-the one that will be ushered in at the consummation of all things.

In verses **22-23**, Paul informs us that not only has God’s mighty power operated to raise Christ from the dead and exalt Him to the heavens, but that same power has invested Him with universal sovereignty. He is even now the Head of His Church on earth. He writes, *“and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”*

God manifested his infinite might when he raised Christ from the dead and made him to sit at his right hand and put everything in subjection under his feet, or under His authority.

The words “*Put under*” is a translation of a Greek military term, which means “to put in subjection under one.” As it is used here, it refers to God’s gift to Christ of absolute dominion, following on His resurrection and exaltation. The raising of Christ to God’s right hand was followed by the placing of all things under His feet and the making of Him to be sovereign over all. The feet that once were pierced by His enemies are now on the necks of those same enemies!

When Paul says that all things are in subjection under the feet of Christ, he is not limiting the “*all things*” to all things in the church. Paul means for us to understand that Jesus Christ exercises a universal sovereignty, a dominion from which absolutely nothing that exists is excluded.

Therefore, since everything in the universe is subjected to the sovereignty of Christ, **nothing** can prevent the realization of the Christians’ “*hope*.” **Nothing** will be allowed to stand in the way of their possession and enjoyment, to the full, of that glorious “*inheritance*” of which they have a foretaste even here and now.

Paul goes on to tell us that God’s power is not now lying dormant. It is operating in Christ for the government of the universe in the interest of the church. The **New Living Translation** renders verse 22 as follows: “*God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church.*” What a remarkable statement! God has put everything in the universe under the authority of Jesus Christ **for the benefit of the church!** What more does God have to do to demonstrate how much He loves us?

Jesus Christ is the head of the church. He is God’s gift to the Church. The word “*church*” is the translation of the Greek word **ekklēsia**, **ek-klay-see´-ah**, which is used by the writers of the New Testament to refer to “a body of called out individuals.” It refers to the **invisible** Church,



composed of only saved individuals, not to the **visible**, organized Church on earth.

The Church is described in verse **23** as that “*which is His body.*” The church is the “body of Jesus Christ.” The word “body” is the translation of the Greek word **sōma, so'-mah**. The **Expositors Bible Commentary** informs us that the word is frequently used in the New Testament to refer to the church. It observes that the word speaks of the church as “*The mystical body of Christ, the fellowship of believers regarded as an organic spiritual unity in a living relation to Christ, subject to Him, animated by Him, and having His power operating in it. The relation between Christ and the Church, therefore, is not an external relation, or one simply of Superior and inferior, Sovereign and subject, but one of life and incorporation. The Church is not merely an institution ruled by Him as President, a Kingdom in which He is the Supreme Authority, or a vast company of men in moral sympathy with Him, but a Society which is in vital connection with Him, having the source of its life in Him, sustained and directed by His power, the instrument also by which He works.*”

The church consists of all persons who have been saved by the grace of God alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. They have been baptized into the body through the operation of the Holy Spirit and are now indwelt by Him. Its members are found in all parts of the world and in all parts of Christendom. The church knows no denominational boundaries. It is not limited to any creed, colour or class. It is a great spiritual fellowship, which is one, in spite of the differences in external forms and constitutions which its various constituent groups may display and conform to. Its unity is not an organizational unity, but an organic unity. The church is universal, it is mystical and it is invincible.

By the use of this **head-body** symbolism, Paul is emphasizing the closeness of the union and the unfathomable character of the love and relationship that exists between Christ and His church. In chapter **5** and verses **25-33**, he stresses the point:

*25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*

*26 that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,*

*27 that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

*28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:*

*30 for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.*

*31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.*

*32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*

*33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”*

One of the features of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is his highlighting of God’s great love for His people, and the love that they owe to Him and to one another in return. Indeed, we shall discover that there is not a single chapter in which this theme is not stressed. This is a point that we must grasp if we are to understand this letter.

Paul desperately wants the Christians in Ephesus to understand that the church is Christ’s body, with which He is organically united. He loves the church so much that He exercises His infinite power to cause the entire universe and everything that is in it to work for the benefit of “His body,” whether willingly or unwillingly.

As a further description of the church as the body of Christ, Paul adds: “*the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*” The word “fulness” is the translation of the Greek word **plērōma**, **play'-ro-mah**; which means, “completeness, fullness, a total quantity.” It speaks of that which “fills something up.” I believe that Paul uses it here to refer to the church as a body of believers who are filled with the presence, power and riches of God and of Christ.

The church is in-dwelt and filled with Christ. In other words, the Church is not only Christ's body but it is that which is filled by Him. All of Christ's wealth of divine power and authority is made available to His body. The church is charged and saturated with His presence. The church is activated and energized by His life. The church is filled with His gifts and graces.

Jesus Christ is the Head of the universe and it is He alone who supplies it with all that is needed for its preservation and order. Jesus Christ is also the Head of the Church and He supplies it with all that is needed for its preservation, order and effectiveness.

But it is also possible that Paul's reference to the church, which is the body of Christ, “*the fulness of him that filleth all in all,*” may imply that the church is Christ's complement. This implication does not in any degree or manner detract from the absolute majesty or self-sufficiency of Christ. As to his divine essence Christ is in no sense whatever dependent on the church nor is He capable of being completed by the church. But in His role as bridegroom, He is incomplete without His bride; as the vine, He is incomplete without the branches; as shepherd, He is incomplete without His sheep; as head, He is incomplete without His body.

We will conclude this **Lesson** by reading verses **15-23** of **Ephesians** chapter **1** from **The Passion Translation**:

*15 Because of this, since I first heard about your strong faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your tender love toward all his devoted ones,*

*16 my heart is always full and overflowing with thanks to God for you as I constantly remember you in my prayers.*

*17 I pray that the Father of glory, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, would impart to you the riches of the Spirit of wisdom and the Spirit of revelation to know him through your deepening intimacy with him.*

*18 I pray that the light of God will illuminate the eyes of your imagination, flooding you with light, until you experience the full revelation of the hope of his calling—that is, the wealth of God’s glorious inheritances that he finds in us, his holy ones!*

*19 I pray that you will continually experience the immeasurable greatness of God’s power made available to you through faith. Then your lives will be an advertisement of this immense power as it works through you! This is the mighty power*

*20 that was released when God raised Christ from the dead and exalted him to the place of highest honor and supreme authority in the heavenly realm!*

*21 And now he is exalted as first above every ruler, authority, government, and realm of power in existence! He is gloriously enthroned over every name that is ever praised, not only in this age, but in the age that is coming!*

*22 And he alone is the leader and source of everything needed in the church. God has put everything beneath the authority of Jesus Christ and has given him the highest rank above all others.*

*23 And now we, his church, are his body on the earth and that which fills him who is being filled by it!*