

**COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS
PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS**

4.

**B. [THE PURPOSE FOR PAUL'S PRAYER]
EPHESIANS 1:17-23**

In these verses Paul explained to the Ephesians what he was going to ask God to do for them in his prayer that is recorded in Ephesians 3:14-21. Before he prayed the prayer, he wanted them to understand the significance of his prayer, so they would understand what a great request he was making to God for them. He revealed that the purpose of his prayer was to ask God to grant them two great blessings. The first one was the ability to understand. The second was to use that ability to know the ultimate goal of salvation.

1. *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, will give you* (1:17)
 - a. *A spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge about Him* (1:17b),
 - b. *The eyes of your mind being enlightened* (1:18a),
2. *That you may know* (1:18b-23)
 - a. *What is the hope of His calling* (1:18c),
 - b. *And what are the glorious riches of His inheritance for the saints* (1:18d),
 - c. *And what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe* (1:19-23),
 - (1) *According to the working of His vast strength* (1:19b),
 - (2) *Which He worked through Christ* (1:20-23):
 - (a) [By] *raising Him from the dead* (1:20b),
 - (b) *And He seated Him at His right hand in the heavens* (1:20c-21),
 - [1] *Far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion* (1:21a),
 - [2] *And [above] every title [that is] given* (1:21b-21d),
 - [a] *Not only in this age* (1:21c),
 - [b] *But also in the coming one* (1:21d),
 - [3] *And He put everything under His feet* [Ps. 8:6] (1:22a),
 - (c) *And He appointed Him as head over everything for the church, which is* (1:22b-23):
 - [1] *His body* (1:23a),
 - [2] *The fullness of the One filling all things in every way* (1:23b).

Verses 17-18a. That God may grant you wisdom to understand revealed truth. Paul's desire and prayer for the Ephesians was that God would grant them wisdom to understand God's ways. He knew that what he was requesting could not be gained by study, reason, or research. It could come only by revelation from God. Even though he could and would explain to them the truth he wanted them to understand, his explanation was not enough for them to be able to grasp it. God would have to give them the ability to receive it, just as God had given him to ability to discern it by revelation. Paul expressed the request he was going to make to God in two ways:

(1) Paul first expressed his request by asking God to give them "a spirit of wisdom and revelation

in knowledge about Him." By asking for "a spirit," Paul was requesting an ability to discern that is beyond human insight and reason. He was asking for them to have an ability that comes from the spirit realm and cannot be obtained by study or normal reasoning processes. By asking for "wisdom," he was requesting for them insight that is beyond knowledge that is gained by experience or study. He was asking for them to be able to have discernment that comes from an intangible ability to understand the unreasonable. By asking for "revelation," he was requesting for the ability to receive truth that is gained only from contact with God and cannot come from any natural human ability. By asking for them to have those abilities "in knowledge about Him," he was asking for them to be able to use those God-given abilities to accept

knowledge about God and His working with people. He was asking for them to be able to know and accept truths about God and His word that are outside the realm of the normal and the natural. He wanted them to know about the supernatural, the things that God will do that no person could imagine for himself.

(2) Second, Paul expressed his request by asking that those abilities would result in “the eyes of your mind being enlightened.” He was asking for them to be able to see truths that physical eyes cannot see. He asked for their minds to be able to see into truths that are beyond the realm of physical discernment. They come discerned only by an enlightenment that comes directly from God. Paul knew they could discern the truths he wanted them to understand in no other way, so he prayed for God to enable them to see the glorious truth God had revealed to him. After they had the ability of spiritual discernment, then they would be able to grasp the second request he was going to make for them. His second request was what he really wanted God to grant them, but first they had to have the indefinable ability of spiritual discernment.

Verses 18b-23. That you may know the ultimate hope, inheritance, and power of God's salvation. What Paul wanted the Ephesians to use their God-given spiritual discernment to know was the mystery he had just briefly described. He wanted the mystery to become plain and clear to them, as it had become to him. He wanted them to grasp the wonder of God's intention to eventually bring all things together into one great united harmonious whole. Paul described that unity toward which God was working in three ways:

(1) He called the ultimate uniting of all things “the hope of His calling.” By “hope,” Paul did not mean a vain or doubtful wish. He meant a sure expectation, a promise God had made and absolutely was going to fulfill. Paul wanted them to understand that the ultimate unity of all things in Jesus was an expectation they could hold onto and in which they could find encouragement and a sure hope. It was the ultimate expectation to which they were called. When God called them to salvation, He called them to live in the sure expectation that

they were going to share in the ultimate harmony that will engulf the whole of creation at the End.

(2) Paul also called the ultimate uniting of all things in Christ “the glorious riches of His inheritance for the saints.” He wanted them to know that the ultimate unity of all things was a richness beyond every other wealth and blessing God can give. It is a glorious expectation that should keep believers faithful while we wait for the promised hope to be fulfilled. He said it was an “inheritance,” which means it is a rich blessing God has set aside for believers to receive when He sets the whole universe right. Jesus died to purchase that inheritance for believers and now lives to give it to us as an inherited gift at the End.

Some understand Paul's words to mean that Jesus will inherit the riches of having many believers share heaven with Him. That interpretation removes the phrase from the context of the passage. The inheritance is Jesus' inheritance, not that he will receive, but that he will give to believers at the day of fulfillment.

(3) Third, Paul called the ultimate uniting of all things “the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe.” Restoring all things to complete harmony and unity is the ultimate demonstration of God's limitless power. Only His mighty power can accomplish such a remarkable achievement, but the God who was powerful enough to create the cosmos is also powerful enough to restore the cosmos. The ultimate unity of all things in Christ will be accomplished by God's unlimited power.

Then Paul burst forth in a torrent of words to describe the awesome and powerful works that God is performing to bring about that unity at the End. He described three powerful achievements through which God is working to accomplish that ultimate purpose.

(a) The first achievement is that He raised Jesus from the dead (v. 20b). God demonstrated His overwhelming power through the ultimate miracle of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Jesus' resurrection is unmatched in all history. Others have been raised from the dead by God's power, but they also died again. Jesus arose with

triumph over death, so it can never touch Him again. He uses that power, not just to enjoy it, but to share it with others. On Resurrection Day, He will give that same bodily resurrection from the dead to a life that will never end with all those who have trusted Him through the ages.

(b) He seated Jesus at His right hand in the heavens, far above every other power (vs. 20c-22a). Jesus arose from the dead and then ascended into heaven to be restored to His position on the right hand of God's throne. After His ascension, the difference is that HE sits there not just as Son of God but also as son of man. He became God/man when He was born in Bethlehem. He lived as God/man on earth. As God/man He died. As God/man He arose and ascended. As God/man He sits now at the Father's right hand and is God's first assistant in ruling the cosmos. The One who is both God and man is in constant contact with Father God, possessing in Himself all the power and authority of God, but also all the understanding and compassion of what it is to be human. He is using His human experience and His divine power to intercede with the Father for us and to apply His blood as a covering for our sins. He obtains mercy and grace to cover our sins every time we commit one, and he will continue to obtain that covering until we are taken to heaven and cleansed completely by His blood.

As He sits on the throne beside the Father, He is God's appointed Agent to rule the cosmos. The Father gave Him first place among rulers, far above every other kind of authority in the whole cosmos. He has authority above every other ruler, power, authority, dominion, king, emperor, president, general, commander, mogul, czar or any other type of controller that has ever been devised.

When the Father restored Jesus to sit at His right hand and to be the ultimate authority over all things in the created cosmos, that appointment included the responsibility to subdue all authorities that rise up in rebellion against Him. The world is full of authorities trying to take control over the whole world or parts of it. They are continuing a rebellion that has been in existence since Satan rebelled before the creation of the world. None has

ever succeeded in replacing Jesus as the One in ultimate control of the world, and none ever will.

The Father not only gave Jesus authority over every ruler on earth but also over every power in heaven. Angels, cherubim, and departed saints all bow before Him in heaven. There His authority is unquestioned. All submit to Him willingly for their own good and for the good of the whole.

Jesus' authority extends not over all earth and over everything in heaven, it also extends over the full length of this age and also over the age to come. The coming age is when Jesus will have subdued all evil and reestablished the cosmic order that He created in the beginning. Jesus' authority will continue until it is established over the whole cosmos as perfectly as it is in heaven today. Eventually all resistance will be defeated, and it will cease forever. Jesus' authority then will continue to forever as He reigns supreme and unchallenged over all of the cosmos as heaven as well forever.

Some might wonder if this declaration creates a conflict between another astonishing statement of Paul that is found in 1 Corinthians 15:28, which says, "***And when everything is subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who subjected everything to Him, so that God may be all in all.***" However, the two passages do not conflict with each other but complement each other. The reason why, after Jesus will have subdued all resistance everywhere, He still will submit to the Father, because He/he will still be God/man. God must be the ultimate authority, including even over the one and only God/man. When Jesus submits to the Father, it does not mean He will give up His authority over the universe. It means He will rule the universe under the guidance of the Father, as indeed He does now. They are one, and nothing has ever existed between them but harmony. God the Father will be supreme, and God the Son/Jesus the man will continue to rule the universe under and in perfect harmony with the Father.

Paul summed up the authority God has given to Jesus with the statement, "***And He put everything under His feet.***" We might translate the clause, "***Indeed He put everything under His feet.***" It summarizes everything Paul said about Jesus'

authority. Those words are a quotation of Psalm 8:6. That Psalm was written by David and describes the majesty and wondrous works of God. As David considered those colossal works, he pondered what it is about man that God remembered him, that is, gave mankind his attention above everything else. Then David said, "**and the son of man that You look after Him?**" In addition, he wondered what it was about the "son of man" that God gave special attention to him. Paul understood that, when David spoke of "the son of man," he was referring to the long promised son whom God had promised to Eve in the Garden of Eden, the son who was going to crush Satan's head (Gen. 3:15). Perhaps most would not recognize that David was referring to that son when he spoke of "the son of man." Indeed, most readers and interpreters assume that he was continuing to be amazed at what God did for mankind as a whole. However, what David said about "the son of man" in the following verses is far too expansive to refer to mankind in general. David said God "put everything under his feet". Why should we question the inspired interpretation of that verse that God gives to us through Paul in Ephesians 1:22? After all, God had promised David, who wrote Psalm 8, that the long-promised son was going to be a descendant of his as well. David, the king, of all people would be sensitive to the even greater authority of the coming son, who had been promised to Eve, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and now to him. So God's promise in the Garden of Eden, David's inspired praise Psalm, and Paul's declaration in the Book of Ephesians all agree that Jesus is and always will be the ultimate authority over all without any exception.

(c) He appointed Jesus to be the Head over everything for the church (vs. 22b-23). Each powerful miracle Paul mentioned was a little more far-reaching and superb than the previous one. The third dynamic wonder is the most spectacular of them all. That miracle is that He placed Jesus as Head over the church, which means over the full number of all believers in all ages. By naming Jesus' headship of the church last, Paul showed that Jesus' work in the church is the greatest of all of His achievements, even greater than His rule over the whole cosmos. His leadership over the church is the greatest of all demonstrations of His power because the church is His body through which He

works to bring the whole world into His will. He eventually will fill and control all things everywhere in every way. When the believers who are God's church fill and take charge of the whole creation, through them Jesus will rule and bless all things, and no dissonance or rebellion will exist anywhere. The church will be His body carrying out His work and wishes everywhere. They will be the fullness through which He will fill all things everywhere forever for good and for God's glory.

The church has no human head. Every time some person seeks to assume the position of head of the whole church or a major part of it, more damage is done than good. When people desire a human head for the church, they make the same mistake Israel made when they demanded a king to rule over them. God told Samuel, "**Listen to the people and everything they say to you. They have not rejected you; they have rejected Me as their king**" (1 Sam. 8:7). When the Israelites chose a human king instead of trusting God to be their King, it started the downward slide of their nation that brought them increasing defeat and humiliation until it led to their being outcasts in a foreign land. When people choose a human leader for the worldwide church today, they also reject Jesus as their chief Leader, and they achieve the same result. The human leader they choose does not bring unity to the church. Instead he becomes a source of division. He does not preserve true doctrine. He inevitably becomes a defender of false doctrine, because no one man is wise enough to understand all of God's truth. He does not advance true Spirit power. Instead; he substitutes political authority. Leadership of the church is too great a task for any man. Jesus is the unequalled head over the church, and no one will ever be able to replace Him. For additional discussion of that topic, see comments on the meaning of "apostle" in Ephesians 1:1 in Chapter 2 of this commentary.

Paul said Jesus is the One filling all things, meaning He will occupy and control all things. He has not yet achieved full control over everything, because much of the world is still in rebellion against Him. The word "filling" is a participle, which indicates continuous action; but it does not have a time significance to indicate when that filling will be complete. It can only be that He will

achieve that filling when He overcomes all evil and becomes complete Master of the whole cosmos. That day is coming, and we need to be patient and faithful through the trials of today, awaiting the day of His complete triumph.

Paul further said Jesus He is the One filling "all in all." Some understand that expression to mean He will fill all things with all things. However, that statement has no real meaning and reveals nothing tangible. A better understanding of Paul's expression is that he meant Jesus will fill all things in all ways. Everything and every aspect of everything will be submissive to Him.

Paul's statement said even more. He said the church is "the fullness of the One filling everything in every way." In other words, the church will be the means by which He will fill everything in every way. The church will be the fullness through which He will fill up everything. He will achieve His control over all things through the church. He will guide and direct all things through His church. The church will be His body out there working to

accomplish His will in all places in the whole cosmos in every way. The members of His church, His body, will spread out over the whole creation and will be His instrument to bring all things into His divine and good will. When all bow before Jesus and acknowledge Him as the one and only true Head of the church and King of the universe, then the church will have power to rule over all. Peace and plenty will come to the whole cosmos without a break forever and forever.

Jesus' work through the church is the ultimate expressive on His power and of the power of God. Paul wanted the Ephesians and all saints to understand the magnificence of that power or at least stand in awe of it, so that they and we can conceive of the splendor of God's plan to eventually bring all things together in one harmonious whole that will never be broken ever again.

Paul explained to the Ephesians that his prayer for them was that they would be given the ability to understand that magnificent and amazing truth.