

EPH. 1:15 – 2:10

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III. Prayer report and elaboration on it in light of Christ's exaltation (1:15-23) –

¹⁵For this reason, I for one,¹ since hearing of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease giving thanks for you when making mention [of you] in my prayers. ¹⁷[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you [the] Spirit of wisdom and revelation regarding knowledge of him, ¹⁸so that you, by the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, may know what is the hope of his calling, what [are] the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what [is] the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe, [a power] in accordance with the working of his mighty strength ²⁰which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from [the] dead and seated [him] at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above every ruler and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the coming one. ²²And he put all things in subjection under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all things in all ways.

A. Paul tells them that, because they have been included in Christ, with all the blessings that entails (1:13-14), he does not cease giving thanks for them when mentioning them in his prayers (1:15-16).

1. The depth of Paul's gratitude is reflected in the fact he continues to give thanks for their inclusion in Christ.

2. He thanks God because he knows that God is responsible for their being Christians. God conceived the plan of blessing, he made it a reality by sending his Son to die on the cross, and he offered them the gift of life through the Spirit-empowered message of the gospel (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:14). All they did was to accept God's gracious rescue by responding in penitent faith. Certainly that provides them no basis to take credit for or boast about the rescue. That would be like a man who had been pulled from a well by a rescuer boasting that he aided in his release because he allowed the rescuer to take hold of him.

3. Paul knew of their inclusion in Christ when he heard about their faith *and* their love for all the saints (that is why he has been giving thanks ever since).

a. Love for other Christians is the flip side of love for God. The two go together. As John says in 1 Jn. 4:20 – 5:1:

¹ One of the meanings of *καὶ* is "I in particular" (BDAG, 487). A more popular option is to consider the *καὶ* in *καὶ* redundant in this context and simply leave it untranslated.

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.

b. Of course, Christians are to love all people, but there is a bond between them that is very special. We have the same Father, Savior, and Spirit. That is why Paul says in Gal. 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers."

B. His intercessory prayer for them (1:17-19a)

1. Paul is praying that God may give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation regarding knowledge of him, so that they, by the eyes of their hearts having been enlightened, may know certain things (1:17-18a), which he then enumerates. With most commentators and with the NIV and TNIV, I think the reference here is to the Holy Spirit, in part because it is very difficult to understand the human spirit as a spirit "of revelation." If that is correct, Paul is praying that the Spirit of God who lives in them will impart to them wisdom and revelation concerning God, that he will effectively manifest himself in their lives as the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

a. Fee writes (*God's Empowering Presence*, 676, fn. 55): "[T]he prayer is not for some further Spirit reception, but for the indwelling Spirit whom they have already received to give them further wisdom and revelation. The emphasis, therefore, is not in receiving the Spirit as such, but on receiving (or perhaps realizing?) the resident Spirit's gifts."

b. Hoehner likewise comments (p. 258): "Paul is not praying that they be given the Holy Spirit for he has already been imparted to them. Rather, he is praying for a specific manifestation of the Spirit so that the believers will have insight and know something of God's mysteries as a result of the Holy Spirit's revelation." See also, O'Brien, 132; Best, 162-163; Lincoln, 57.

2. The goal of this enlightening from the Spirit for which he is praying is that they may grasp at a heart level the truths of God specified in 1:18b-19a. He is praying that they may understand more deeply: what is the hope of God's calling (1:18b), what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints (1:18c), and what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe (1:19a).

a. The relationship of the three "what is/are" clauses is uncertain. The fact there is no conjunction between the first two clauses is contrary to Greek style if the intent was to provide a list of three parallel items (see Fee, 676 n. 56). Though Paul still may have intended the three clauses to be parallel, as most commentators think, I am with Fee (and others) in thinking it is more likely that the second "what is/are" clause is

an expansion on the hope that is mentioned in the first clause. In other words, "the first two [clauses] form a pair, which together are paired with the third" (Fee, 677).

b. Paul wants them to comprehend the glorious hope into which God has brought them by calling them to Christ through the preaching of the gospel. He wants them to understand deeply what is in store for them, what is the content of their hope, which he describes in the next clause as the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints. O'Brien states (p. 135), "This hope to which God has called them is linked with 'the summing up of all things in Christ', which is the final purpose of God's saving activity in his Son (1:10)."

(1) As noted in 1:11a, those in Christ have been allotted an eternal inheritance in the consummated kingdom of God, in the renewed cosmos of perfect love, peace, and harmony that was accomplished through Jesus Christ. See Rev. 21:1-5. He is the one through whom all things are brought together, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth (1:10). We will live forever in the new heavens and new earth in resurrection bodies that are imperishable and immortal (1 Cor. 15:50-57). As Paul writes in Rom. 8:23-24 (ESV): "[W]e ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved."

(2) The inheritance is called "his" (God's) because Paul is emphasizing that God is the one who provided it for us (see, e.g., Num. 27:8-11). It need not refer to an inheritance obtained by God (through full possession of his people).

c. In addition to comprehending the glory of their future, Paul prays that they will grasp at a deeper level God's work in their past and present. He wants them to appreciate in a new way the surpassing greatness of God's power directed toward believers (1:19a), as that power has been exercised on our behalf in rescuing us and exalting us in Christ and as that power is available currently for our living to his glory.

C. His elaboration on his prayer in light of Christ's exaltation (1:19b-23)

1. That power is in accordance with, is similar or analogous to, the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (1:19b-20).

a. God by his power took Jesus from the ignominy of death by crucifixion (crucifixion being the known manner of his death did not need to be specified) and raised him to a position far above every ruler, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name, in both this age and the age to come (1:20-21). God raised him from the lowest depth of human experience to the greatest height imaginable, a position far above every ruling power in heaven or on earth, both good and evil. Now that's power!

b. The supremacy to which Jesus was exalted by God's power is permanent, something that encompasses both the "now and the not yet." O'Brien (p. 143)

states: "The distinction between 'this age' and the 'coming age' is drawn from Jewish apocalyptic. With the first coming of the Lord Jesus the new age has already broken in upon the present, so that the two ages now overlap. The age to come has been inaugurated but not yet consummated, and it is in this future sense that Paul refers to it here."

2. God directed analogous power toward Christians in that, as he says in 2:1-6, we were dead in transgressions and sins and God made us alive in Christ, raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms! And he directs that power toward us not only in our initial deliverance and exaltation but also in the ongoing spiritual warfare that is part of life in this overlap of ages (see 6:10-17).

3. Paul adds (1:22) that the one under whose feet God has subjected all things was given in that position to the church! "Christ's dominion over the cosmos is for the benefit of believers" (O'Brien, 145). The church therefore will not be defeated by any power in the sense of God's purpose for it being thwarted. As Jesus told Peter in Mat. 16:18, not even the gates of death (*Hades*) can overcome it.

4. Paul also says (1:23) that the church is the body and fullness of Christ.

a. He is head over all things in terms of authority, but only the church is his body. The church has a unique relationship with the Lord Jesus. It is characterized not only by dependence and subordination on the part of the church but also by a special fondness and concern on the part of the Lord (Eph. 5:29).

b. The glory of the church is expressed in the statement that it is the fullness of Christ, meaning it is that which is filled with and by Christ (fullness given a passive sense). It is the community which he fills supremely with his presence and dynamic rule. It is true that Christ fills the cosmos in every way in the sense that, as God is said to "fill the heaven and earth," he pervades all things with his sovereign rule as he directs them to their divinely appointed goal. But he fills the church in a special sense with his Spirit, grace, and gifts, so that only the church *is* his fullness.

D. Paul wants their hearts to be enlightened regarding these matters because he knows it will strengthen them for life today. Knowing at a heart level what ultimately is in store for us as Christians and truly appreciating the power of God that has worked in our lives and that is available to us now invigorates us spiritually. It fuels our determination and courage to keep the faith and to live nobly and sacrificially to the Lord's glory.

IV. God's power toward them in the grace of salvation (2:1-10) – *And you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you once walked, according to this worldly age, according to the ruler of the domain of the air, the spirit now working among the sons of disobedience. ³We all also once lived among them in the lusts of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and we, like the rest, were by nature children of wrath. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love [with] which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in transgressions, made us alive with Christ*

– by grace you have been saved –⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that he might show in the coming ages the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you, [it is] the gift of God; ⁹[it is] not from works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his product, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared in advance in order that we should walk in them.

A. Dead in transgressions and sins (2:1-3)

1. As Christ had been dead physically as a result of having been crucified, they had been dead spiritually, meaning they were alienated or separated from God, as a result of having committed transgressions and sins. To *sin* is to violate the will of God; to *transgress* is to violate the will of God *as revealed in an express commandment*. As Douglas Moo puts it in *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 277, "'Transgression' denotes a specific kind of sin, the 'passing beyond' the limits set by a definite, positive law or command. While every 'transgression' is also a 'sin,' not every 'sin' is a 'transgression.'" The combination conveys the fullness and variety of their sinful past.

2. Their living that way was in conformity with "this worldly age" (lit. "the age of this world"), in conformity with the ruler of the domain of the air, the spirit now working among the sons of disobedience.

a. To live in conformity with "this worldly age" is to follow the attitudes, habits, and preferences of this fallen world, which are alien and hostile to God and his standards.

b. It is, as the next clause clarifies, to live in step with or under the influence of Satan, who is here called the ruler of the domain of the air, the spirit now working among the sons of disobedience.

(1) Satan is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), the god of the old, fallen order which, though still present and evil (Gal. 1:4), is already doomed and expiring. The Apostle John says "the whole world," in the sense of everything opposed to God, "lies in [the power of] the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19). John elsewhere calls Satan the ruler (or prince) of this world (Jn. 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

(2) He is called "the ruler of the domain (or realm) of the air" because he is the chief demon and "the air" was understood in both paganism and Judaism to be the abode of evil spirits.

(a) The "air" is the lower reaches of the heavenly realms, what would be called the "first heaven" in the threefold division of heaven that Paul seems to use in 2 Cor. 12:2. So Paul also can say that the spiritual forces of evil occupy the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12).

(b) Whatever else is meant by the notion of demons inhabiting the air, it says something about their proximity and access to mankind and probably something about their mobility and invisibility.

(3) Satan also is said here to be the spirit who is now at work among the sons of disobedience.² He is actively influencing mankind to act contrary to the will of God. Thus, Paul can say in 6:12 that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-controlling powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

(a) Satan does not overpower Christians so that we have no choice or control over our actions. Jas. 4:7 says "but resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Rather, his *modus operandi* is deceitful scheming and temptation. Eph. 6:11, for example, refers to the "schemes of the devil." This method is illustrated by how Satan worked on Eve in Gen. 3:1-6. He duped her; he did not take away her ability to resist. (Demonic possession is another subject that raises other questions.)

(b) His subtle training or conditioning leads people so far from God that his reality and the truth of the gospel seem like a fairytale. It just seems counter-intuitive. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 4:4, "the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so that [they] do not see the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." In 2 Tim. 2:26, after telling Timothy to correct the opponents with gentleness, he says "God may perhaps grant them a change of mind leading to a knowledge of [the] truth and they may come to [their] senses [and escape] from the trap of the devil, having been captured by him for that one's will."

3. Paul and all the other Christians³ also once lived in disobedience, carrying out the desires and thoughts of their fallen natures, desires and thoughts that were contrary to God's will.

a. As a result of disobedience, they were, like the rest of mankind, under God's righteous judgment; they were justly due his wrath.

b. Paul says they were children of wrath "by nature" because the disobedience that rightfully earned God's wrath flowed from a nature that was bent on sin, which nature is in some way is traceable to Adam's sin (see esp. Rom. 5:17-19). In Alexander Campbell's words, as quoted by Jack Cottrell in *The Faith Once for All* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 180, "our nature was corrupted by the fall of Adam before it was transmitted to us; and hence that hereditary imbecility to do good, and the proneness to evil,

² See the discussion at O'Brien, 160 n. 29 of the different ways in which the genitive τοῦ πνευμάτος can be understood.

³ For this understanding of the contrast between "you" (vv. 1-2) and "We all also" (v. 3), see Lincoln, 88 and Hoehner, 317-318, *contra* O'Brien, 161.

so universally apparent in all human beings." We are all "greatly fallen and depraved in our whole moral constitution . . . in consequence of the sin of Adam."

B. But God in his mercy made us alive in Christ (2:4-7)

1. As God raised Jesus from physical death and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (1:20), so he, in his rich mercy and great love for us, exercised analogous power toward us by raising us from spiritual death and seating us with Jesus.

a. When we entered into union with Christ (became "in Christ"), we in God's sight entered into union with what he had done for Christ (see Lincoln, 108). We were made alive together "with Christ" and raised and seated together "with him."

b. We share in Christ's resurrection and exaltation, but our experience of that exercise of power is subject to the tension of the already and the not yet. The firstfruits of our sharing in Christ's resurrection and exaltation, the foretaste of that event that we experience in this overlap of ages, is the restoration of spiritual life in reconciliation with God and our exalted status as children of God; the fullness of that event will be experienced in our bodily resurrection and our position in the new heavens and new earth.

c. Paul stresses that this is all God's work; it is because of his great mercy, love, and grace that we have been blessed in this way.

2. God's amazing rescue in Christ of those who were dead was so that "the church, this society of pardoned rebels," would throughout time and eternity serve as a witness to the surpassing riches of his grace (see Bruce, 288). O'Brien writes (p. 173):

The apostle's thought in vv. 4-7 has gone full circle: he began by speaking of God's mercy and love as the motivation for his initiative in saving his people (v. 4); Paul then drew the readers' attention to the mighty rescue which arose out of God's gracious action (v. 5), and he concludes by declaring that God's lavishing his mercy on rebels is to serve as a demonstration of his grace for all succeeding ages. What God has done for those in Christ is a reality, but only in the coming ages will it be fully seen for what it is. In the light of God's gracious saving work, believers point men and women from themselves to the one to whom they owe their salvation.

C. Saved by grace for good works (2:8-10)

1. Paul again emphasizes that their move from death to life and their exaltation with Christ was not due to any human effort. We have been saved by grace, by God's unmerited favor, which we simply accepted through faith. Our salvation is not something we achieve in any way; it is a gift of God pure and simple. We in no way gain it

by our efforts, so we have absolutely no grounds for boasting about it. We are *God's* product, the result of *his* work.

2. "God has created us anew in Christ and through Christ" (O'Brien, 179). We are part of the new creation that has already invaded the present age in the person and work of Christ. And God's intention is that we, as participants in the new creation, should live in accordance with that status. We are to exhibit the godly behavior that God planned for our lives, regarding which he will elaborate in chapters 4 – 6. O'Brien concludes (p. 181):

There are important ethical consequences of our being God's new creation, created in Christ Jesus. The divine intention, forcefully expressed by the purpose clause, is that we should walk in good deeds. We have a responsibility to live in the world so as to please him. There was a time when we walked in disobedience and sin, *followed the ways of this world*, were in terrible bondage to the devil, and were destined for wrath. But now because of God's mighty salvation in which a glorious change has been effected, we are expected, through the agency of his Holy Spirit, to demonstrate a changed life-style. Our attitudes and behaviour are to show all the hallmarks of the new creation. And when we walk in these ways which are according to his purpose, it is he himself who is powerfully working in our lives (Phi. 2:12, 13).