

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS
(LESSON SEVENTEEN)
“GOD’S POWER TOWARD US”

EPHESIANS 1:1-23 (KING JAMES VERSION)

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 this Lesson, we will continue our examination of the section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians which begins at verse **15** of chapter 1, and ends at verse **23**. As we have previously stated, verses **15–23** of chapter 1, form one sentence in the Greek.

In verse **16-17**, Paul writes, *"I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God"* (**New Living Translation**).

Paul's desire and prayer for the Christians to whom he was writing, was that they would grow in their knowledge of the God who had blessed them *"with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."*

We have explained that the word *"knowledge"* here, is a translation of the Greek word **epignōsis**, which refers to "knowledge that is true, accurate, and thorough." It means, "full knowledge." It is both the privilege and the responsibility of every Christian to grow in their knowledge of God. A growing knowledge of God is a most healthy feature of Christian life, as **2 Peter 3:18** clearly indicates: *"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."*

We must grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. The Greek literally means, “Be constantly growing.” Our growth need not be explosive but it should reflect a constant experience of development.

We must grow “*in grace*.” This grace is the grace for daily Christian living. It is worked in and through us by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. As we yield to Him, He produces the Christian graces in our lives.

Growing in grace often means experiencing trials and even suffering. We never really experience the grace of God until we are at the end of our own resources. The lessons learned in the “school of grace” are often costly lessons, but they are worth it. As we grow in grace, we become more like the Lord Jesus Christ, from whom we receive all the grace that we need (**John 1:16**).

We must also grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is possible for us to grow in knowledge but not in grace! Many persons know far more Bible than they live. Peter challenges us to grow, not merely in our knowledge of the Bible, but “*in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.” It is one thing to “know the Bible,” and another thing entirely, to know the God of the Bible.

Christians must constantly be *growing* in grace and knowledge. This requires diligence! It demands discipline and the establishing of priorities. We do not automatically drift **into** spiritual growth and stability, but it is not too difficult to drift **out** of them. “*So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it*” (**Hebrews 2:1, New Living Translation**).

The importance of an increasingly intimate knowledge of God is emphasized in verse **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.*”

The words, “*the eyes of your understanding being enlightened,*” speak to the results of the act of God giving the saints the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the sphere of a full knowledge of Him. In other words, when God grants to us the spiritual wisdom and revelation that facilitates a full and accurate knowledge of Him, the light of God will illuminate the eyes of our hearts, flooding us with light, to the extent that we will experience the full revelation of the hope of His calling and the wealth of the glorious inheritances that we find in Him and that He finds in us.

In this regard, Paul wants the Ephesian Christians to know three things. The first thing he speaks of is, “***the hope of his calling***.” The hope of His calling takes in all of God’s eternal purposes and plans in Jesus Christ.

The Greek word translated as “*calling*” here, is used particularly of the divine call to partake of the blessings of redemption. The word was used in the first century as a technical word in legal practice, and meant “an official summons,” as in the case of the summoning of a witness to court.

The word means more than a mere invitation. It is a divine summons. The ones summoned are made willing to obey the summons, not against their will but with their free will and consent. It is an effectual call. The one called always responds.

The hope of God's calling is firmly grounded in God's infallible promises. This is the argument of the author of the epistle to the **Hebrews** in chapter **6:13-20**, which we looked at in our previous **Lesson**.

We noted that the hope of our calling is secure because God's purposes are unchanging. It is secure because He has confirmed it with an oath and it is impossible for Him to lie. It is secure because it is guaranteed not by our faithfulness, but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. It is secure because it is fastened to the Mercy Seat in heaven. It is secure because of the continual, never-ending High-Priestly ministry of Jesus Christ, including His intercession for us. Therefore, we have a confident expectation, and we wait patiently for the fulfilment of God's promises. We have a full Christ-centered assurance that these promises will indeed be realized and that assurance serves as an anchor to our souls!

The second thing Paul wants the Ephesian saints to know in regard to the eyes of their understanding being enlightened is ***"the wealth of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."*** We expressed the view that Paul is referring to two things here. Firstly, he refers to the fact that the saints have received an inheritance from God. The saints are the recipients of all the blessings of salvation, some of which will not be experienced by them until the great consummation of all things. These blessings are called an *"inheritance"* because they are the gift of God's grace, and once He has bestowed them, they will never be taken away again.

Secondly, and even more wonderfully, Paul is referring to the truth that the saints are God's 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 splendours of creation.

We will now look at the third thing that Paul speaks of in connection with the enlightening of our understanding. This is ***"the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward."*** He introduces this to us in verse **19**, and expands the argument in verses **20-23**:

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 these three clauses, (the hope of His calling, the wealth of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward), Paul leads us firstly to the hope which became ours by virtue of our being called of God. Then, he leads us from the hope itself, to the splendor of the inheritance to which the hope points. And now he leads us from the splendor of the inheritance to which the hope points to the power resident in God, which makes the fulfillment of the hope and the possession of the inheritance certain. The exceeding greatness of God's power is needed as a link between the hope and the inheritance.

The power of God is necessary in order that the hope may be realized and the inheritance obtained. The words "*to us-ward*", clearly indicate that this power is exerted in the interest of the saints, and not in the interest of any others. It is the saints alone who have been called into this blessed hope and it is they alone who are and receive the inheritance.

The **New Living Translation** renders verses **19-20** as follows: "*I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.*"

Brothers and sisters, it is critical for our spiritual growth and development that we know and believe that the incredible greatness of God's power is available to every child of God! This power of God that is working on our behalf with reference to our salvation, is not thought of here as operating only in the future, but Paul is informing us that it is working for us at present also.

Let us examine in greater detail the nature of the power of God that is available to the saints. Paul refers to it as "*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.*"

The word "*exceeding*" is a translation of the Greek word **Huperballó**, (**hoop-er-bal'-lo**), which means "to throw over or beyond," thus metaphorically, "to surpass, excel, exceed, transcend." It speaks of power that is beyond measure, power that is more than enough, power that is greater than anything that may confront it. This power is described as "*according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.*" The word "*working*" is a translation of the Greek word **energeia** from which we get our word "energy." It speaks of energy put forth, in operation. This exceeding power which God exerts in ministering to our spiritual needs, is in accordance with, and equal to the divine energy of His mighty power.

Paul uses two Greek words in this verse, which are translated "power." He speaks firstly of "*the exceeding greatness of his power.*" The Greek word translated here as "*power*" is **dunamis**, which speaks of "(miraculous) power, might, strength." It refers to "natural ability, general and inherent."

He also refers to *“the working of his mighty power.”* The Greek word translated as power in this instance is **Ischus**, (**is-khoos**,) which means “strength, might.” It is used to refer to “strength (absolutely), power, might, force, ability.”

By his use of all these words, Paul wants every Christian to know *“what is the surpassing greatness of his power (displayed) with respect to us who believe, as seen in that manifestation of his infinite might.”*

Brothers and sisters, this is the power that God has made available to 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.

The main thought expressed by these words is this: the apostle prays that God will give to the Ephesians enlightened eyes, or understanding hearts, so that they may fully appreciate that in order to ensure that the *“hope of their calling”* is fully realized and that they receive their full inheritance, He will exert as great a power as he demonstrated when he raised His Son from the dead and set Him at His own right hand. It is as if the apostle were saying, “Do not despair. You can rely on God’s infinite power. Because of that power, one day the inheritance held in store for you will be fully yours.”

I am of the view that Paul is making a connection here between the power displayed in Christ’s resurrection and ascension, and the power exercised in bringing the saints to their ultimate victory. I believe that he has in mind the fact that Christ’s resurrection and His ascension to the Father’s right hand, are a type of what happens to every Christian. In the same way, and by the same power, the saints, too, will conquer death when they arise gloriously from their graves to live and reign with Christ forevermore. And even at the present time, the resurrection of Christ is a type of the spiritual resurrection of the saints, and of their gradual victory over sin. Indeed, I believe that Paul is implying that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not only the proof of our justification but it is also a guarantee of our eternal glory.

Perhaps the great apostle, as he writes these words, is thinking of God as creator and warrior in the Old Testament tradition. Passages such as **Exodus 15:1-11**, **Deuteronomy 3:24**, **Isaiah 40:25-31** and others may have been in His mind. It is as though Paul wants to shake his readers into an awareness that the power at work for them is nothing other than the power that has created, sustains, judges, and saves the universe, and that raised Jesus from the dead.

Brothers and sisters, do we really believe that this power is available to us and is working on our behalf right now?