

# "The Exceeding Greatness of His Power to Us"

## Ephesians 1:15-23

March 23, 2008

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### Ephesians 1:15-23

*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 fullness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph 1:15-23)*

Last week I began the examination of the prayer of Paul for the church at Ephesus. It is a wonderful prayer, inspired by the Holy Spirit and necessary for us to understand if we are to know our inheritance as the children of God.

It is providential that we come to this place in our text concerning the resurrection of our Lord Jesus this is Easter, so that the sermon in the series exactly matches the day for an sermon on the occasion of this wonderful celebration. Christ rose from the dead, and the result of His resurrection is a new life, a new order, a new spirit, a new way of life for the people of God. Christ is risen. Alleluia. Amen.

Paul said that he prayed for the people, giving thanks for them. As I said last week, he prayed one general thing and three specific things. Last week we considered the one general thing and the first two specific things, and today we will consider the third specific thing which is directly related to the glorious resurrection of our Lord that we celebrate this Easter.

The one general thing: that the eyes of their understanding be opened: gospel things cannot be understood by the natural understanding for it is blinded by the curse that came upon mankind by Adam's sin. The flesh knows only what it knows naturally: you must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God.

The first specific thing is: to know the hope of his calling: why did Christ call you to faith; what is the hope that we have in Christ. We looked at that last week; and I hope that we looked in faith and understanding.

The second specific thing that Paul prayed for: the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. His calling and His inheritance are parallel phrases and mean that our calling and our inheritance is from Christ. It is the knowledge of him—Christ—that Paul prays for in verse 17, that their eyes of the understanding might be opened to know that the hope and the inheritance are in the saints because of Christ. They do not come by the law nor by the works of the flesh nor by the understanding of the flesh, but by the Spirit of God. This brings us to this great Easter theme: which is the third specific thing for which Paul prays.

The exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe.

- I. This power is the same power that raised Christ from the dead.
- II. This power is an exceeding great power in the saints
- III. This power is manifest in the three great gifts that flow to us from our Lord Jesus; the three things that are woven throughout this passage that begins in verse 1.

When Christ comes, His perfections sweep away the imperfections of all that came before He shines before us in His beauty and grace, as we read in I Corinthians 13. But what remains: Faith, hope, and charity [love] as the apostle says, and the greatest of these is charity, or love.

But let us look at these things.

I. The power that works in those who believe is the same power that raised Christ from the dead. The result is newness of life. The Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the dead reigns in you now as the gift of God, and his mighty power is for the purpose of renewing and conforming you to Christ.

A. It is this power working in you that Paul speaks of in Philippians 2:12-15:

“12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings: 15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;” (Php 2:12-15)

B. Because of this, we are commanded to put off the old man, and put on the new man. This “working out of salvation,” is because God works in you and me, for we could not

do good things if God did not work in us. But because God works in us, as our catechism says, it is impossible that we should not bring forth good works. We are to put off the old man:

“8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. 9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” (Col 3:8-10)

C. You do not have to live in these things, because Christ works in you; you must not live in them, for Christ works in you, and those who live after the flesh shall die—the flesh is the way of sin and death. The same spirit that brought you to Christ works in you to renew you and transform you from being ornery and vicious, selfish and hard-hearted, into the image of Christ, to which you have been predestined

II. This power is an exceeding great power in the saints. That power is very great in the saints: it is the same power that penetrated the tomb in which lay the body of Christ and called Him forth from the dead.

A. There are three words in verse 19 that emphasize the energy that is displayed here: “working, power, might.” Calvin says on these:

1. Might is the root; power is the trunk; working is the fruit.

2. Christ does not work in you in vain. The power in the saint is greater than that which created the heavens and the earth: there something was made out of nothing; in your new birth you were changed from darkness into light; new life after the image of Christ was implanted in you.

3. This is done because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

B. This power works in those who believe. Please note

“4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1Jo 5:4-5)

C. What is in the world: the lust of the flesh; the lust of the eye; the pride of life. You do not have to live in these things; By the power of Christ working in those who believe, the three most powerful forces of sin can be restrained and finally overcome at the resurrection of the dead: desires of the body—don’t make it the instrument of sin; the desire of the eye—covetousness and worldliness; the pride of life: the insistence on having your own way and destroying those who get in your way, and all the evil that comes from self-will and lust for power.

III. This power is manifest in the three wonderful gifts that endure through this life and unto eternity. They are spoken of in this chapter and we have mentioned them in our examination of the previous sermons. What is the manifestation of the mighty power of Christ that is in those who believe?

A. First of all, the faith itself. This power works in you who believe—the power of sin works in those who do not believe. Faith is the work of God.

1. “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1Pe 1:5)

2. “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:” (2Th 1:11)

B. Second, the manifestation of the power of God is hope. It is through hope that we maintain our faith. This is the reason that we are said to be saved by hope in Romans 1. Hope saves us because by faith we see the things that cannot be seen. We see heaven and the glories of God and the riches of his inheritance in the saints.

1. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;” (1Pe 1:13) It is by hope that we persevere and continue on. And this hope is the result of our faith: that we believe the promises of God and see things that cannot be seen.

2. By hope we endure tribulations and trials. Mother and Fathers endure the disobedience and sometimes willfulness of their children, because they have hope. Husbands and wives endure marriage problems because they have hope; Every four years we endure elections in this country of ours because we have hope—remember that—do not give up hope. I firmly believe that the process is always more valuable than the result when it comes to elections. We endure imperfections everywhere because we have hope. When we give up hope because of bitterness, anger, pride, or disappointment the fruit of Christ withers on the vine and our glory is turned to shame. Even in death, we sorrow not as those who have no hope because we look for the resurrection from the dead, and those who have this hope purify themselves, as we saw last week.

3. Hope is as much the work of the mighty power of God as is faith. And faith cannot exist without hope. Hope vanishes when faith vanishes, and hopelessness crushes faith under its feet.

C. Third: of the three only charity endures into eternity. Faith will pass away when we see those things which are invisible and sight replaces faith; Hope passes away in the

glorious fulfillment of the promises of God in the New Heavens and the New Earth, but love never passes away.

1. The end of faith and hope is that we know the love of God which passes understanding.

2. Love is the fulfilling of the law because that is the reason the law was given. My friends and I had it mixed up in the early days: we thought that if we kept the law that was the same as loving one another. How wrong we were: some of the meanest people I have met in my life were those who boasted in the law of God. No amount of obedience will produce love; but love will produce obedience. Where does this love come from? Let the Bible answer:

3. It comes from forgiveness of sins: Jesus said that those to whom much is forgiven, the same loves much. One thing all loveless people have in common is the lack of real awareness of the magnitude of their own sins: you cannot condemn another without implicitly thinking yourself superior to them, for every condemnation is an act of authority over another, the act of a judge, which is forbidden to us. Therefore those who seek to reclaim a sinner from his ways is reminded to consider himself, lest he also be tempted.

4. Only the mighty power of God, the same power that raised Christ from the dead, can plant the seed of love in our hearts for the people of God. In ourselves we are a scurvy bunch, but hope does not make ashamed, because of the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, as Paul tells us. 'Love of God' there means not only the love for God, but also the love of God in us that teaches us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

## Conclusion and Application

1. Let us pray diligently for one another that the eyes of our understanding would be opened to these things. We need them as much or more than the Ephesian Christians did.

2. In praying we recognize that the eyes of our understanding are under the rule of Christ himself: only He can open the blind eyes and cause us to see. "Once I was blind, but now I see," the blind man said who had been healed by Christ. But far greater was the miracle that opened the eyes of his soul so that he believed that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God. After he was cast out of the synagogue Christ came to him:

"35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

36 He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? 37 And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.

38 And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him." (Joh 9:35-38)

3. I pray that you will also see the power of God in your own life in faith, in hope, in love, for nothing else matters much in this life. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, that ruler of the Jews:

“14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” (Joh 3:14-21)

4. Your deeds are wrought, or are the work of God, if you are a believer. Your faith, your hope, your love is by the power of God, beyond your own power. The flesh can produce a caricature of faith, hope, and love and we see their shabby imitations everywhere, but love tends to expose our pretenses and show them for the shoddy imitations that they are. The true gold and treasure is the work of God Himself by His Spirit: faith hope and charity, but the greatest of these is charity, because it alone endures to eternity.

Jesus lives and so do we. Amen and Amen. May God bless you.

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