

**Text:** Ephesians 1:20-23

**Title:** God's Power Displayed in Christ

**Truth:** God's power working in believers was also displayed in Christ.

**Date/Location:** Sunday March 24<sup>th</sup> & April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at FBC

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## Introduction

Last time we ended in v.19 where Paul speaks in his prayer of God's mighty power that is available to believers to enable us to live godly lives and protect us from worldly living, the satanic powers that be, and our own flesh (3:20). We see exactly what this power can accomplish in chapters 4-6 regarding godly conduct. Although v.19 ends Paul's specific requests for the believers to know God better, since vv.20-23 are grammatically subordinate to v.19, we must consider the relationship of these verses to the rest of the prayer, especially v.19.

Vv. 20-23 include an extended set of illustrations of God's power at work in Christ. These displays of God's power at work in Christ are there to demonstrate the extent of that same power available to believers. We see in vv.20-23 four examples of God's power displayed in what God has already done in Christ.

Transition: Look now at Ephesians 1:20-23 where we can find four illustrations of God's power at work in Christ.

### I. God Displayed His Power by Resurrecting Christ (v.20a)

- A. The first illustration of God mighty power at work in Christ that Paul references is Christ's resurrection. Paul's focus is not so much on the temporal aspect ("*when* he raised him from the dead"), but how God displayed this power. That is, God demonstrated the incomparable greatness of His power *by* raising Christ from the dead.<sup>1</sup>
- B. The Apostles ascribe the act of raising Christ from the dead to God the Father (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10; 10:40; 13:30, 37; Rom 4:24; 10:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 1 Peter 1:21), although the Son and the Holy Spirit were also involved in the act as well (Jn 2:19-21; Rom 8:11).

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<sup>1</sup>The Gr. participle ὑποτάσσω is identified as an adverbial participle of means. All Scripture is from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

- D. The ability to raise someone from the dead is nothing less than extraordinary. There are only a few instances in Scripture of a person being raised from the dead. When Jesus was on the earth, he raised only a few people from the dead. He raised the widow's son in the village of Nain (Luke 7:15). He raised the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue (Mark 5:42). He raised Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha in Bethany after he had been dead four days (John 11:44).
- E. The power at work to raise Christ from the dead serves as a guarantee of the future resurrection of believers (1 Cor 6:14; Phil 3:20). Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:23, "Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ," indicating that the resurrection of believers is to come. But the resurrection power is not limited to just our resurrection, it is accessible to us for living out the Christian life now (Eph 1:19-20; 3:20).

Transition: Paul goes on to share a second illustration of God's at work in Christ. In vv.20b-21 we see...

## **II. God Displayed His Power by Exalting Christ (v.20c-21)**

- A. We see God's power displayed by seating Christ at His right hand. The "right hand" language in v. 20 is an allusion to Psalm 110:1, "The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." In Matthew 22:41-45, Jesus explains that David was prophesying of His Messiah, who was both a Son of David and the Son of God (Rom 1:3, 4). In Acts 2:34, Paul proclaims that Ps 110:1 is about Jesus the Messiah, who fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 110:1 at his session to the right hand.
- B. The timing of this was forty days after his resurrection at his ascension (Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9-11). Note that Jesus didn't take this position for himself; rather, He *was* seated by the Father (cf. Heb 1:3; Mark 16:19). Some propose this means that Christ is reigning over His Kingdom now (realized eschatology). However, that is not the case. Christ "seated at the right hand" is not a reference to the future reign of Christ on the Davidic throne for two reasons. Scripture indicates that Christ's reign on the Davidic throne is in

the *future* (Matt 25:14-30) and *on the earth*. Ephesians 1:20 indicates that Christ is *presently* at the right hand and that it is “*in the heavenlies*.”

- B. *Just because Christ is not yet ruling on the Davidic throne does not mean he is not in a position of honor or authority.* The “seated at the right hand” language is a sign that Christ presently has honor (Phil 2:9-11) and authority (1 Pt 3:22; cf. Heb 1:3-4, 13; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2). Jesus, crowned with glory and honor (Heb 2:6), presently sits with the Father on His throne (Rev 3:21). There, Jesus presently makes intercession for us and ministers as our High Priest (Rom 8:34; cf. Heb 7:25).
- C. Christ’s exaltation to the right hand means he is superior in rank and power to the spiritual forces that be. This is what “above” means in the immediate context. The terms principality, and power and might and dominion traditionally refer to evil spiritual forces of great rank and might. Whatever levels of power or hierarchy there are in the demonic realm, none are superior to Christ. In Western “scientific culture,” the idea of demons, angels, Satan is largely rejected. On the other hand, there are still people in our society and around the world who practice witchcraft, black magic, etc. In fact, the largest and oldest chapter of a Satanist organization in the US is located in Detroit, MI. These spiritual forces that Paul references stand behind many of the human institutions today that promote immoral and wicked agendas (1 Jn 5:19).
- D. Although we recognize that demonic activity and worship is real, Paul’s point is that Christ high above these spiritual forces in rank and power. This is significant because Paul later reveals that believers are presently in a spiritual warfare against these spiritual forces (Eph 6:12). We commanded to put on the armor of God in order to resist the schemes of the Devil (Eph 6:11).
- E. Christ also has a name which is above all other names. *Name* has more to do with title than a personal name. After just naming four specific (evil) authorities (v.21a), Paul declares God has bestowed upon Jesus a name that is above every other name (cf. Phil 2:9; Heb 1:4), indicating all other names are inferior to Christ. He is

above all names, titles, ranks, levels, powers, and jurisdictions in the universe. Christ's position is not limited to the *this* age, but his exaltation continues into the coming age as well. The "age to come" that Paul has in mind is the future Kingdom of God, which is yet to come.

Transition: We have seen that God has displayed His power by resurrecting Christ, by exalting Christ, and now, in v.22...

### **III. God Displayed His power by Subjecting Everything to Christ (v.22a)**

- A. We could call this the counterpart to what Paul has just described in vv.20-21. Christ *above* all things; therefore, all things are *subject* to Christ. This does not eliminate a future time in which all things will be made subject to him openly (1 Cor 15:20-28).
- B. "All things," includes all of creation. There is an allusion here mankind's initial role in creation as vice-regents over creation (Gen 1:26-28). Psalm 8:6 references humanity's role as vice-regents when it says, "You have put all *things* under his feet." He put Adam in the garden not only to tend it but to rule creation well (Ps 8:6). Adam failed this role when sin entered the world; thus, collectively speaking, humanity has failed at fulfilling their God-given role. Jesus, as the Last Adam, has authority over creation as firstborn of creation (Col 1:15-20). Paul purpose in alluding to Psalm 8:6 is to reveal that Jesus will accomplish what humanity was unable to do (Phil 3:21; Heb 2:8), which is to rule over creation.
- C. The subjection of all things under his feet entails the complete subduing of his enemies (Ps 110:1; 1 Cor 15:28; Phil 3:21), which is yet to occur. So, while Paul can say that "all things have been put under his feet" in the sense that he is superior to all things, the full exercise of that power and complete fulfillment of the subjection of all things to Christ will not be evident until Christ destroys death and God is all in all (1 Cor 15:24, 27). This will take place at the end of the Millennial Kingdom. In other words, while these powers and authorities may still be active today, they are subordinate to Christ's authority, which will be manifest in the Kingdom.

Transition: We have seen that God has displayed His power by resurrecting Christ, by exalting Christ, by subjecting all things to Christ, and finally...

#### **IV. God displayed His power by giving Christ to the Church (v.22b-23)**

- A. We have already been told that Christ has authority over the cosmos, so it makes sense now closely tie this to God's purpose for Christ in relation to the Church. Note first that God gave Christ. Some suggest that God "appointed" Christ as head to the Church, rather than "gave" him. However, the regular sense of "gave" should be maintained. Perhaps such a distinction may appear trivial, but the concept of "gave" underscores God's grace towards the church, which has already been an emphasis of the letter, as we saw in vv.3-14.
- B. Christ as "head" indicates preeminence. Christ's headship or preeminence is over all things. Paul is not limiting the metaphor to just Christ's headship over the church. The implication is, however, if Christ is head over all things, He is also head over the church (Eph 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18). Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 5:23-24 that the church is under the headship of Christ. We can also deduce from this passage that Christ has authority.
- C. In this specific capacity as head over all things, God has graciously given Christ to the Church as its head. Here Paul is speaking not of local assemblies, but of the universal Church. This includes all believers from the time of Pentecost to the Rapture. The Apostles commonly describe the Church metaphorically as a body, whereas Christ is described, metaphorically, as the head of that body (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:15; 5:30; Col 1:24).
- D. The meaning of the phrase "the fullness of Him who fills all in all" at the end of v.23 is admittedly hard to understand. It seems that the idea, though difficult to be certain, is that the Church, described here as Christ's body, is an expression of Christ, who is himself as expression of the Father (Col 1:19; 2:9-10). The idea is that Christ expresses himself through the Church as believers draw upon Christ's strength to grow in Christlikeness (Eph 4:13; cf. 3:19).

## **Conclusion**

Vv. 20-23 included an extended set of illustrations of God's power at work in Christ. These displays of God's power at work in Christ are there to demonstrate the extent of that same power available to believers. The power available

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