
The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XI : THANKSGIVING, INTERCESSION AND CONFESSONAL MATERIAL IN PRAISE TO GOD — 1:15-23

Paul gives thanks for the readers

¹⁵ Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you,

intercessory prayer-report

making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know

what is the hope of His calling,

what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe,

confessional material in praise of God's power in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, leading into the next section

according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰ which He worked in Christ

when He raised Him from the dead

and seated Him at His 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 age but also in that which is to come.

²² And He put all things under His feet,

and gave Him to be head over all things to the [congregation],

²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (NKJV)

FORM AND STRUCTURE — Prior to discussing details, it would be beneficial to note the over-all structure of this portion of scripture. Removing some of the points on which Paul expands, here is a break-down of what Paul wrote:

making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ... may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ ... *that you may know*

what is the hope of His calling,

what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

¹⁹ and *what is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe,

according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰ which He worked in Christ

when He *raised Him from the dead*

and *seated Him at his right hand* in the heavenly places, ...

²² And He *put all things under His feet*

and *gave Him to be head over all things to the [congregation]*

Note Paul prays the Ephesians would have a greater understanding of God regarding three things: *the confidence we have in our calling, the peace of knowing we are God's inheritance, and the power of God*. Paul then elaborates on the power of God towards us, but why only upon God's power and not the first two items? One possibility could be how the power of God related to the occultism which was widespread in the Ephesian territory. But more than that would be the practical application of that power in the lives of believers over the realms of darkness, as evidenced in Paul tying together the resurrection of Christ with the

‘resurrection into new life’ of the believer in chapter two:

^{19b} according to the working of His mighty power

²⁰ which He worked in Christ *when He raised Him from the dead*

and *seated Him at His right hand* in the heavenly places (1:19b-20 NKJV)

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses,

made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

⁶ and *raised us up together*,

and *made us sit together* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (2:4-6 NKJV)

Thanksgiving with Prayer for the Believers’ Knowledge of God and Their Awareness of the Significance of the Assembly (1:15-23)

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; 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: 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, and what is 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, 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: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. (KJV)

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like 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, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (NIV)

Because of this I also, having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and the love to all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of the glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the recognition of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, for your knowing what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us who are believing, according to the working of the power of His might, which He wrought in the Christ, having raised him out of the dead, and did set [him] at His right hand in the heavenly [places], far above all principality, and authority, and might, and lordship, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in the coming one; and all things He did put under his feet, and did give him — head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of Him who is filling the all in all, (Young’s Literal Translation)

A PRAYER TO APPROPRIATE WHAT IS ALREADY OURS — *“Having completed the magnificent eulogy, Paul prays for the Ephesians. It could be called the prayer for those who have everything because the believers have every spiritual benefit for their spiritual welfare, including election, predestination, adoption, grace, redemption, forgiveness, insight, understanding, knowledge of the mystery of his will, and sealing with the Holy Spirit. Paul’s desire is for the Ephesian believers to deepen their relationship with the God who has enriched them with every spiritual benefit and to experience those benefits in a deeper way.* Normally Paul gives his introductory thanksgiving immediately after the greeting. In this epistle he includes the greeting (vv. 1-2), a pæan of praise for what God has done for the believer (vv. 3-14), and now the thanksgiving and prayer (vv. 15-23). As usual, Paul begins the prayer with commendation (vv. 15-16a) and then he presents his supplication before God on behalf of them (vv. 16b-23).” [Hoehner, 247] *“His prayer, which echoes several themes in the eulogy, is that they may comprehend what God has already done for them in Christ and which is set forth in vv. 3-14. He has already blessed them in Christ with every spiritual blessing; Paul now prays that he will open their eyes so that they will fully grasp the implications of all these privileges. Unlike many contemporary Christians, the apostle does not pray for fresh spiritual blessings, as though he is unaware of the fact that God has graciously given them every spiritual privilege in Christ.”* [O’Brien, 129f] *“[Paul] does not ask God to give them what they do not have, but rather prays that God will reveal to them what they already have....* On January 6, 1822, the wife of a poor German pastor had a son, never dreaming that he would one day achieve would renown and great wealth. When Heinrich Schliemann was seven years old, a picture of ancient Troy in flames captured his imagination. Contrary to

what many people believed, Heinrich argued that Homer's great poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were based on historic facts and he set out to prove it. In 1873, he uncovered the ancient site of Troy, along with some fabulous treasure which he smuggled out of the country, much to the anger of the Turkish government. Schliemann became a famous, wealthy man because **he dared to believe an ancient record and act on his faith**.... Too many Christians have never 'read the bank book' to find out the vast spiritual wealth that God has put to their account through Jesus Christ. They are like the late newspaper publisher, William Randolph Hearst, who invested a fortune collecting art treasures from around the world. One day Mr. Hearst found a description of some valuable items that he felt he must own, so he sent his agent abroad to find them. After months of searching, the agent reported that he had finally found the treasures. They were in Mr. Hearst's warehouse. Hearst had been searching frantically for treasures he already owned! Had he read the catalog of his treasures, he would have saved himself a great deal of money and trouble." [Wiersbe, 14]

THE SECOND OF EIGHT LONG SENTENCES IN EPHESIANS — As mentioned in previous lessons, **this is the second of eight long sentences within the book of Ephesians (1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-7; 3:2-13, 14-19; 4:1-6, 11-16; 6:14-20) with 169 words. So as we finish the first chapter, we are only on our third sentence (vv. 1,2 — vv. 3-14 — vv. 15-23). Very unique.** "Eph 1:15-23 constitutes an extended thanksgiving which, like the preceding *berakah*, forms one long sentence. In terms of its overall structure this pericope can be divided into three major elements: (1) the thanksgiving proper in vv. 15, 16a, followed by (2) an intercessory prayer-report in vv. 16b-19, which shades into (3) confessional material in praise of God's power in Christ's resurrection and exaltation and the use of this material to highlight the role of the Church in God's purposes in vv. 20-23.... **In comparison with other thanksgiving sections, the actual elements of thanksgiving for the recipients is relatively brief in Ephesians and betrays no personal knowledge of their specific situation. This supports the view that the writer has intended to write a letter of general interest to a number of churches.**" [Lincoln, 47, 49]

Thanksgiving (vv. 15,16a)

v. 15 — **therefore, for this reason** — Διὰ τοῦτο [dia touto] Most of the commentators I read believes this refers back to 1:3-14, especially vv. 13-14. "In light of all of the spiritual benefits that God has given to believers (especially since the Ephesians heard and believed the gospel and were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit), Paul has reason to give thanks and prays on their behalf." [Hoehner, 248] Ernest Best however down-plays the backward reference: "Διὰ τοῦτο [dia touto, 'for this reason'] forms the transition from the eulogy. It could point forward but more probably refers back to the eulogy as a whole or to some part of it. The recipients of the letter have heard the Gospel and responded (vv. 13f) and so there is reason to give thanks for their response, yet vv. 13f relate to all Christians and cannot therefore be the basis for the particular thanksgiving of vv. 15f. The precise nature of the connection between the eulogy and vv. 15ff is not clear, but the eulogy certainly supplies grounds for the thanksgiving. Διὰ τοῦτο [dia touto, 'for this reason'] is **probably little more than an indication of a new paragraph with new subject-matter**; it is used elsewhere as a transition to a new paragraph: Mat 6.25; Rom 5.12; 2 Cor 4.1; Col 1.9; 1 Th 2.13; the final two of these are in prayer contexts; Col 1.9 in particular is very similar to Eph 1.15." [Best, 158]

I also — κἀγώ [kagō] Emphatic, making a strong contrast between God's actions in vv. 3-14 and Paul's prayer. Paul is saying that because of all that has happened to the believers at Ephesus, he now has something to say.

after I heard, having heard — ἀκούσας [akousas] "Traffic by sea was brisk in those days; visitors were allowed to see the famous prisoner in Rome; the bond of Christian fellowship was very strong. For all these reasons it is not surprising that although about four years had now elapsed since the apostle carried on his labors in Ephesus — labors from which the people of the surrounding territories also benefitted (Acts 19:10, 26) — he had been kept well informed." [Hendriksen, 95] "The statement that news had reached the apostle does not, of itself, tell against the Pauline authorship of Ephesians as a circular letter, or of a letter sent to Ephesus. Paul may have been receiving occasional reports about those already known to him and, if Ephesians was a circular letter, then he may have been personally unacquainted with other members of congregations in western Asia Minor." [O'Brien, 127] "In contrast to Col 1.8 and 1 Cor 1.11, AE's (Paul's) informants are not identified; the absence of a reference accords with the general nature of the letter; since it was directed to more than one church it would have been necessary to name several informants." [Best, 158]

ONE OF THE MAJOR REASONS SOME REJECT THE PAULINE AUTHORSHIP OF EPHESIANS — One of the major arguments used by those who deny Pauline authorship of Ephesians is the comment '*after I heard, having heard.*' The thinking is that Paul spent a minimum of two and possibly three years in Ephesus, why are there no personal references and why did he respond when he '*heard*' of their faith? Paul does use similar language when he addresses those with whom we believe he was not personally acquainted: "*We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints*" (Col 1:3,4 NKJV) **But Paul also uses similar language with reference to Philemon, whom he clearly did know: "I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints"** (Phile 4,5). Plus as we will see below, the faith spoken of here is not just the initial saving faith but includes their walk in faith. **Any believer who sees someone come to faith in Christ and then separated is overjoyed when they later hear the convert is growing and walking with Christ.** Therefore to take this verse as evidence that Paul did not write Ephesians is short-sighted. "After (or because) he had heard about them, he continually gives thanks. Since there is only hearsay acquaintance with the readers' faith and love, some suggest that this letter could not have been written by Paul who spent nearly three years in Ephesus and would have personally known the believers. **However ... Paul had not been in Ephesus for five or six years, and there were probably many new**

believers with whom he had no personal acquaintance. Also, this was probably a circular letter and he may have been personally unacquainted with many in the satellite churches in western Asia Minor.” [Hoehner, 248]

Here are some of the arguments against Pauline authorship using this verse: “According to Acts 19:1ff Paul spent a considerable time in Ephesus on his main visit, though there had been a brief initial visit, 18.19-21. The inference from our verse that the author had never visited the recipients cannot be countered by arguing that AE only refers here to the faith of those who have been converted since he left Ephesus (so Hodge) or that a long period had elapsed since his final visit and that therefore he needs to be updated; nothing in the text implies he had fresh converts in mind and, though in every church Paul had founded new converts would have appeared after he left, in no letter does he address himself to them; moreover nothing in the text implies the lapse of a long period of time. Theodoret appears to have been the only [Church] Father aware of this problem but he does not offer a reasoned solution; the ancient commentators were much more concerned to understand the use of God and Father in v. 17! AE’s phrases are stereotyped and sufficiently general to fit a circular or general letter. If AE implies Paul has not heard of their faith, does he really mean that he himself has not had that information or is it just a part of the framework of pseudonymity?” [Best, 158f]

of your faith in the Lord Jesus — τὴν καθ’ ὑμᾶς πίστιν ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ [tēn kath’ humas pistin en tō kuriō Iēsou] literally “the faith with regards to you” or more simply, “your faith.” *“They had placed their faith in the Lord Jesus. This is not only the initial act of faith mentioned in verse 13, but a continuing faith in the Lord Jesus. The fact that this was an ongoing faith is evidenced by the reports Paul had received and by their continued love for one another mentioned next. This is new for the Ephesians, for they had originally placed their trust in Artemis and now their faith is in the Lord Jesus.”* [Hoehner, 249]

and your love for all the saints — καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην τὴν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους [kai tēn agapēn tēn eis pantas tous hagiōus] Paul not only had heard about their vertical relationship but also their horizontal relationship. “This love is not to the whole world but to the saints. The believers are to love one another in order to show the world that they are disciples of the Lord (John 13:35).” [Hoehner, 250] *“Faith, if it be genuine, and love go together, for the Magnet that draws sinners to himself draws them together also. Or, to change the figure, as the spokes of a wheel approach the hub they at the same time approach each other.”* [Hendriksen, 95f] “Loyalty or faithfulness towards fellow Christians could be important in many difficult situations; fellow members must be upheld.... [A] dual reference is present: *to be a Christian involved being related both to Christ and to fellow Christians.*” [Best, 160]

v. 16a — **do not cease to give thanks for you** — οὐ παύομαι εὐχαριστῶν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν [ou pauomai eucharistōn hyper humōn] This relates back to “for this reason” at the beginning of verse 15. **Giving thanks** = eucharistōn, occurring in the NT 38x, denoting “to thank, to give thanks, to return thanks” more often than “to be thankful.” More exactly, “the outward expression in word or deed of the interior sentiment of gratitude for a favor received.” “He not only gives thanks for the Ephesians because they had received all spiritual benefits and more particularly had been sealed with the Spirit when they heard and believed, but he also gives thanks because of their continuing faith in Christ and love toward the saints.... ‘Never ceasing to give thanks’ may be hyperbolic, for this was the common style of ancient letters and it simply means that Paul did not forget the believers at his regular time of prayer.” [Hoehner, 250] “AE says that he does not cease (not to be taken literally) some activity; is it giving thanks (the thanks would be directed to God and not to the readers) or interceding? Elsewhere Paul in his opening sections, expressing himself in a variety of ways, continually prays for his readers (Rom 1.9; Phil 1.3f) or gives thanks for them (1 Cor 1.4; 1 Th 1.2; 2 Th 1.3; Philem 4); either alternative would then accord with his practice.” [Best, 160f] *“Such an attitude of thankfulness for others is all too often neglected.* The genuine concern of the apostle is obvious. Thus, he never ceased to give thanks for progress in their faith and love and to entreat God on their behalf. However, *he not only continued to give thanks but, as seen in the following text, he prayed for them.*” [Hoehner, 252] *Do we emulate this? Do we give thanks and pray for those God has blessed us with? (Pastor, teachers, other Christians even those who rub us the wrong way)*

GIVING THANKS TO WHOM IT IS DUE — To whom is Paul giving thanks? It is obvious that Paul is thanking God for the Ephesians’ walk with Christ... but we do not thank someone who does not have anything to do with the gift we received. If someone gives me a gift, it would be rude to not be thankful but it would be more rude to thank someone other than the person responsible for the gift. In like manner, *Paul thanks the Lord for the Ephesians because ultimately it is God who is the Author of that faith / love.*

Intercession (vv. 16b-19)

WHERE DOES PAUL END HIS PRAYER? — Bible students debate as to where Paul’s prayer ends and his narrative begins. Hoehner suggests Paul’s prayer goes to 1:23: “[S]ome think that the prayer ends at verse 19 and that verse 20 begins a new hymn of praise. However, this is not likely because grammatically the following relative pronoun would indicate that the prayer is continuing. Furthermore, Paul picks up on [energeia, power] and uses the verb form in verse 20, showing continuity between verses 19 and 20. Also, verses 20-23 are a very fitting conclusion to his request for their knowledge of God’s power on their behalf. *It is one thing to state the concept of power, but it is quite another to show how this power operates. That is what he is going to do in verses 20-23. God has directed toward the believers that same power that he exercised in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand, that subjected all things under his feet, and that gave him to the church as head. There is a continuity between what God worked in Christ and what he is working in believers through the centuries up to and including the present time. As suggested by a previous illustration, there is a difference between describing what a*

bulldozer can do and seeing what it can actually do.” [Hoehner, 272f] However I tend to agree with Ernest Best who believes the prayer begins here in 1:16b-19, transitions into a narrative and begins again in 3:1, interrupted by a parenthetical thought and then concludes the prayer in 3:14-19. He also continues to make the following point which would be good to remember:

WE SHOULD NOT RESTRICT PASSAGES TO OUR PRE-DETERMINED ANALYSES — “It is probable that the prayer ends here, to be briefly resumed at 3.1 and then, at length, in 3.14-19. *Scholars enjoy defining passages as eulogies, thanksgivings or intercessions and then drawing precise boundaries for what they have identified; it is by no means certain that NT authors kept in mind the desire of scholars for clear boundaries. One theme or form often drifts unconsciously into another.*” [Best, 170]

REQUEST: “that God ... may give to you the Spirit of insight and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (v. 17)

PURPOSE: “in order that you might know ...” (v. 18b)

CONTENT:

(A) “what is the hope of his calling” (v. 18b)

(B) “what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (v. 18c)

(C) “what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe” (v. 19)

v. 16b — **making mention of you in my prayers** — *μνείαν ὑμῶν, ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου* [mnēian humōn poioumenos epi tōn proseuchōn mou] **making mention** = used 7x in NT, exclusively by Paul. It has the idea of “remembrance, memory” of someone (Phil 1:3; 1 Thes 3:6; 2 Tim 1:3). **Prayers** = in classical literature this word had the idea of a prayer or vow. It occurs in the NT 36x, always with the idea of prayer or supplication to the eternal God or the place of prayer. **Note not one of the things Paul prays for is material wealth or goods.** “Dr. Kenneth Chafin, a well-known Baptist author, tells about the pastor and deacon who were visiting prospective members and drove up to a beautiful suburban home surrounded by a velvet lawn and gorgeous landscaping. Two expensive cars stood in the driveway, and through the picture window, the men saw their prospect, lounging in an easy chair and watching color TV. The deacon turned to his pastor and said, ‘What kind of good news do we have for him?’ How prone we are to confuse prices and values.” [Wiersbe, 15]

v. 17 — **that** = *ἵνα* [hina] “in order that,” it could indicate purpose or result, but often in the case of prayer it denotes content. “At times it is difficult to distinguish between purpose and content, for when praying for God to perform his purpose in one’s life, that request is also the content of the prayer.” [Hoehner, 254]

HISTORICALLY, THIS WAS A VERSE USED BY THE ARIANS — **the God of our Lord Jesus Christ** — *ὁ θεὸς τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* [ho theos tou kuriou hēmōn Iēsou Christou] *Arianism* denies the deity of Christ and the Trinity, teaching that even though Christ was the greatest of all created beings, He was still a *created* being. This teaching is perpetuated today by Jehovah Witnesses and the Way International. “The one who is addressed in prayer is ‘the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ This is similar to verse 3 (‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’; cf. also Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Col 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3) although there are some differences. The form in the present context is unique. The Arians misconstrued it to mean that Christ was not the eternal Word but was the created Son of God who prayed and worshiped his Creator. **The Arians failed to distinguish between the subordination of the Son to the Father, and the unity of essence of both the Son and the Father.**” [Hoehner, 254f]