

Ephesians 1c The Greatness of His Power in Christ

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Overview

1:19 introduces 1:20-2:10. The main thrust of the passage can be seen in the parallel between 1:20 and 2:4-6.

- God raised Christ and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places.
- God has raised us up and set us at his own right hand in heavenly places, together with Christ.

	God's work toward Christ	God's work toward us
The Action	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:	4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised [us] up together, and made [us] sit together in heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus:
The Motive toward Creation	22 And hath put all [things] under his feet,	7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in [his] kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.
The Motive toward the Church	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	8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

The table suggests a possible parallel between 1:22-23 and 2:7-10.

The remaining material in this section, 2:1-3, simply characterizes our condition before God wrought this great work of grace on us.

In 1:20-23, God is the subject of three finite verbs describing what he did with Christ:

- 20, wrought his power *in* Christ: Christ's relation to the Father.
- 22a, put all things *under* Christ: Christ's relation to creation.
- 22b, gave Christ *to* the church: Christ's relation to the church.

20-21, God wrought his power *in* Christ: Christ's relation to the Father

Here we see God's power demonstrated in his direct relation to his Son. Two participles amplify the main verb: (*as in 1:4,5, aorist participle amplifies aorist finite verb*)

Raising him from the dead

To humans, the greatest power imaginable is the power to kill:

- John 19:10, “Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power (*exousia*) to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?”
- Matt 10:28, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able (*dunamai*) to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Contrast our Lord’s power:

- John 10:17f, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. 18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power (*exousia*) to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”
- 1 Cor 6:14, “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power (*dunamis*).”

This is in fact the thrust of Hannah’s prayer, 1 Sam 2:6, “The Lord killeth and maketh alive.”

Recall the reaction of Jehoram, the King of Israel, when the King of Syria asked him to heal Naaman’s leprosy, 2Kin 5:7, “And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, [Am] I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.” There is no question that he could kill, but killing and making alive was another matter.

Seating him

How does this show God’s mighty power?

The idea of Christ’s session at the right hand of God comes from Psa 110:1, “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” This OT verse is cited more often in the NT than any other, and surely lies behind Paul’s thought here.

The reference to “power” is because of what God is doing while Christ is at his right hand: subjugating his enemies. Like a scene in a cowboy movie. The hero and heroine are surrounded by angry men. The hero says to the heroine, “Stand aside, miss, until I take care of a few details.” He sets her off to the side, then cleans up the opposition single-handed. So here God invites his Son to watch while he, in demonstration of his sovereign power, subdues every foe, and then delivers the kingdom to Christ.

Three descriptions of the place to which he is raised:

at his own right hand.—The place of honor and influence. Cf. 1 Kings 2:19.

in heavenly places.—As in 1:3 and throughout the NT, the word *epouranios* refers to the abode of God.

- God is our “heavenly father,” Matt 18:35.
- Cf. the contrast with “earthly” in John 3:12; 1 Cor 15:40, 48, 49; Phil 2:10.

God has granted the Savior’s request of John 17:1-5, restoring him to that heavenly glory that he knew before the incarnation.

far above....—This position is already far superior to that held by any creature that could claim power. Paul asserts the superiority of the LJC in two ways.

First, he compares him with various claimants to exalted position. The four names here were assigned by gnostic writers to various grades of angels that were supposed to intervene between the uncreated God and the earth. In addition to the four grades mentioned here (principality *arxh*, power *ecousia*, might *dunamis*, dominion *kurioths*), the NT knows of thrones *qronoi* Col 1:16 and rulers *kosmokrator* Eph 6:12, the latter passage showing that these include evil as well as good spirits. The list here is not meant to be exhaustive; Paul adds “every name that is named” to take care of any omissions. The point is that our Lord’s session at the Father’s right hand places him above every spiritual or other power that anyone can suggest.

Second, he anticipates the objection that in the future age new authorities might arise superior to Christ. No, he is superior to everything “not only in this world [age], but also in that which is to come.”

22a, God put all things *under* Christ: Christ’s relation to creation

Now we learn that God’s power is also demonstrated toward the rest of creation in his dealings with his son.

From Ps 110:1 we pass to Ps 8:7. Note the shift in tense.

- Ps 110:1 looks *forward* to the *practical* subjection of all of Messiah’s enemies.
- Ps 8:7 looks *back* to the *positional* subjection of the creation to Adam.

Paul’s emphasis on the position over the practical sequence reflects his general concern in this epistle with our position in Christ; with hope as our present possession rather than the future advent of Christ.

	Ps 8:7 (MT 6)	Ps 110:1
MT	Kol \$attAh taxat-raglAyw	(ad-)F\$iyt)oybeyka hadom l:raglEyKF
LXX	Panta hupetaxas uhupokatw twn podwn autou	Hews an qw tous exqrous sou hupopodion twn podwn sou
Tense	Past	Future
Object	Creation in its natural form	Enemies; those who oppose him
Time	Creation; Gen 1:28, “have dominion over...”	Ascension.

1 Cor 15:25,27 brings the two directly together. He must reign until all his enemies are under his feet (15:25, Ps 110:1) because it is written that he has put all things under his feet (15:27, Ps 8:7). The positional statement gives assurance that the practical will be realized.

How does this show God’s power? In two ways.

1. It shows his power over all things, in that he can order their relation to his son.
2. It shows his power over time, in that he can declare the son’s position now, and then realize it in the future.

This side of the resurrection, the Son can look forward confidently to the future subjection of his enemies. But think of how difficult it must have been for him in the time of his earthly humiliation, bearing the promise of Ps 8:7 but not yet the assurance of Ps 110:1. Yet God was faithful to him, and will be faithful to us.

22b-23, God gave Christ to the church: Christ's relation to the Church

Finally, we observe God's power toward his son as it affects the church. Paul uses two pictures. To understand them, we must realize that the last verb in the verse is not active (as in AV), but passive. The church is not the fulness of him who fills everything, but the fulness of him who is being completely filled. So we have a chiasm, Christ:Church::Church:Christ. Each panel presents a different picture of the relation.

1. In the first, Christ is the head, and the church is the body.
2. In the second, Christ is a vessel, and the church is the contents.

The picture of head and body

The syntax is quite dense. Unravel it piece by piece:

1. God gave him as head. "Give" with two objects describes the transformation of one into the other. Christ holds this position, not out of his own ambition or strength, but as a demonstration of the power of God. Cf. Heb 5:4-6, "No man taketh this honor unto himself. ... So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee."
2. God gave him as head to the church, which is his body. This is the central metaphor.
 - 4:15,16; Col 2:19; the head is seen as the source of supply for the body.
 - 5:23, the head saves the body, and the body submits to the head.

Cf. Matt. 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." We must never forget the centrality of Christ in the church. How wrong it is to name a church after some mere saint, or to establish someone else (e.g., the pope) as "head" of the church.

3. God gave him as head "over all." The point is not that he is head over all things (see note below, though he is head of all principality and power, Col 2:10), but that this one whom God has made head of church is in fact exalted above everything else. He is "the head, higher than all, of the church." In other words, he is higher than anything else that could claim the church's allegiance. We must have no higher lord; cf. the words of Peter before the council in Acts 5:29, "we ought to obey God rather than men."

How does this picture show God's power? The syntax shows that Paul views this installation of Christ as head of the church as a demonstration of God's power. How is that the case? The power demonstrated in making someone the head of something depends on the importance of that of which one is made the head.

- It takes more power to make someone head of General Motors than to make him head of Joe's Machine Shop.

Ephesians 1c The Greatness of His Power in Christ

- It takes more power to make someone president of the United States than to make him president of a single-island nation in the middle of the Pacific somewhere.

Here we are invited to contemplate the power that God demonstrated when he gave Christ to be head of the church. This says a great deal about the importance of the church in God's plan. Headship over the church is not something trivial. It is headship over God's most cherished possession, his jewels (Mal. 3:17). This ought to show us

- encouragement, that we are so precious to God;
- warning not to let anyone else usurp this position of headship.

Background notes

Double accusatives with *didwmi*

Matt 20:28 = Mark 10:45, 1 Tim 2:6 "give his life a ransom for many"

Eph 4:11 "he gave some, apostles ..."

2 Thes 3:9 "make ourselves an ensample unto you"

Use of *kefalh huper*

Sir 25:15, *ouk e)/stin kefalh\ u(pe\r kefalh\n o)/fews, kai\ ouk e)/stin qumo\s u(pe\r qumo\n e)xqrou^*, "there is no head above the head of a serpent, and there is no wrath above the wrath of an enemy." This is the only other instance I have been able to find in either NT or LXX.

Apparently *kefalh* governs noun indicating the body of which it is the head in the genitive; *uper x* indicates relative greatness rather than organic connection.

The picture of vessel and contents

Recall the observation at the beginning of this section: the last verb in the verse is not active (as in AV), but passive. The church is not the fulness of him who fills everything, but the fulness of him who is being completely filled.

We are perhaps more familiar with the concept that Christ fills us: cf. 4:10, "that he might fill all things"; 3:19, "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God"; Col 2:9,10, "9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 10 And ye are complete in him".

But there is a complementary concept, attested in Col 1:24, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up [*antanaphrow*] that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." Describing us as the body of which Christ is the head is another way of saying that Christ is incomplete without us. God has committed the stewardship of the fulness of time to his Son, and that Son is pleased to execute his work through us.

Cf. the hymn by Annie J. Flint:

1) Christ has no hands but our hands
To do His work today,
He has no feet but our feet
To lead men in His way;
He has no tongues but our tongues
To tell men how He died,

He has no help but our help
To bring men to His side.
2) We are the only Bible
The careless world will read,
We are the sinner's gospel
We are the scoffers' creed;

Ephesians 1c The Greatness of His Power in Christ

We are the Lord's last message
Given in deed and word,
What if the type is crooked?
What if the print is blurred?
3) What if our hands are busy
With other things than His?
What if our feet are walking

Where sin's allurements is?
What if our tongues are speaking
Of things His life would spurn,
How can we hope to help Him
And welcome His return?

How does this picture show God's power? Once more, we marvel at the exalted and responsible position in which God has placed the church. He deems it a work of his power to set Christ over the church and make the church the agent of his son's fulfillment.

Background note—Meaning of ta panta en pasin plhroumenou

1. Christ as subject, verb is middle with active sense (Hendriksen, Salmond)

This is the common understanding. People usually quote various classical authors who sometimes use the middle with active meaning. Problems:

- The authors cited (with their dates) are Xenophon (434-353 BC), Plato (427-347 BC), Demosthenes (385-322 BC), Plutarch ("Alcibiades 35," 1C-2C AD), and Pollux ("1 99", 2 AD). The most common references are from Xenophon; apart from the last two singletons, these are all in the classical period, not the Hellenistic, and one would not expect Paul to be acquainted with them.
- The NT has about 60 instances of the middle/passive form, but none of the others is understood as active.
- There is no justification for the middle in this case. Why not use the active, as in Christ does not fill all things for his own sake, but for the Father, 1 Cor 15:28.

2. Father as subject, verb is middle with active sense (Alford)

This avoids the problem with the middle, but does not solve the grammatical puzzle.

3. Christ as subject, verb is passive (Robinson)

This seems by far the most straightforward reading, aligning with Col 1:24. Then "ta panta en pasin" is taken adverbially, see Robinson for examples. (2017:) Alternatively, following Hoehner (and Lightfoot's note on Colossians), we must also take πληρωμα as passive: the church is being filled by him who in turn is being completely filled [by the Father]. He is the channel by which the Father's fulness flows to us.