

**EXEGESIS AND EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS 1.3-23**

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## Introduction

In the following paper we will examine the text of Ephesians 1.3-23 (which has been provided here along with a translation). First, we will begin by exegeting the text while adding some expository comments. Second, we will attempt to portray how this text contributes to Pauline Pneumatology.

## Text and Translation

<sup>3</sup> Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ,

Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who has blessed us in every Spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ,

<sup>4</sup> καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ,<sup>1</sup>

Just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

<sup>5</sup> προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ,

predestinating us unto adoption through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the desire of his will,

<sup>6</sup> εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ.

unto the praise of the glory of his grace which he “favored” us in the Beloved.

<sup>7</sup> Ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων, κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the release of trespasses, according to the riches of his grace

<sup>8</sup> ἧς ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς ἡμᾶς, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει,

Which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight,

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<sup>1</sup> The KJV and the NET translate “in love” as modifying “before him”/ “in his sight”. The ESV, NASB, and NIV translate “In love” as the opening phrase of the next sentence (v.5).

<sup>9</sup> γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ

making known to us the mystery of his will according to his desire he purposed in him

<sup>10</sup> εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ.

unto the administration of the fullness of time, to bring everything together in Christ, the things in heaven and the things in earth in him.

<sup>11</sup> Ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκληρώθημεν<sup>2</sup> προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργοῦντος κατὰ τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ

In whom also we were called (to an inheritance) having been predestined according to the purpose of the one working all things together according to the counsel of his will

<sup>12</sup> εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ τοὺς προηλπικότας ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ.

in order that we who were first having hope in Christ would be unto the praise of his glory.

<sup>13</sup> Ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν, ἐν ᾧ καὶ πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ,

In whom we also are hearing the word of truth, *which is* the gospel of your salvation, in whom also believing you were sealed in the Holy Spirit of promise,

<sup>14</sup> ὃ ἐστὶν ἄρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως, εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.

which is a pledge of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, unto the praise of his glory.

<sup>15</sup> Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ γὰρ ἀκούσας τὴν καθ' ὑμᾶς πίστιν ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην τὴν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους

Because of this, I also hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and the love, the one unto all of the saints

<sup>16</sup> οὐ παύομαι εὐχαριστῶν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν μνησίαν ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου,

I do not cease to give thanks on behalf of you, making remembrance in my prayers,

<sup>17</sup> ἵνα ὁ θεὸς τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ πατὴρ τῆς δόξης, δώῃ ὑμῖν πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως ἐν ἐπιγνώσει αὐτοῦ,

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2 There are various translations of this phrase. In the ESV and KJV it reads “in whom/him we have obtained an inheritance”. In NASB closely reads, “In him also we have obtained an inheritance”. The NET departs making us the inheritance of God reading, “In Christ we too have been claimed God’s own possession”. The NIV reads, “In him we were also chosen” with a note saying “or were made heirs”.

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, who gave to us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge of him,

<sup>18</sup> πεφωτισμένους τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς καρδίας [ὑμῶν] εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι ὑμᾶς τίς ἐστὶν ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς κλήσεως αὐτοῦ, τίς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις,

having had the eyes of [our] heart enlightened in order for you to know that which is the hope of his calling; which is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints;

<sup>19</sup> καὶ τί τὸ ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ.

and what is the surpassing greatness of his power unto us, the ones believing according to the working of the power of his strength,

<sup>20</sup> Ἦν ἐνήργησεν ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐγείρας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ καθίσας ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις

Which he in Christ waking him from death and seating *him* at his right hand in the heavenlies

<sup>21</sup> ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου, οὐ μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι·

above all the rulers and authorities and powers and lords and all names named, not only in this age but also in the one to come,

<sup>22</sup> καὶ πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ,

and all he subjected under his feet and he gave him as head over all the church,

<sup>23</sup> ἣτις ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου.

which is his body, the the fullness of the one filling all in all.

### **Exegesis and Exposition**

The Apostle opens his letter in a format that reads like a doxology<sup>3</sup>. It begins by blessing God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Inherent in this statement is a high Christology in that Paul refers to Jesus and the Father in the same breath. It is Christ who is the means by which the Father has first blessed us.

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<sup>3</sup> Rodney Thomas says it is a form of the Hebrew *berakah* in “The Seal of the Spirit and the Religious Climate in Ephesus” *Restoration Quarterly* 43/3 (2001). 161.

These blessings from the blessed Father are “Spiritual blessings”. It should be noted that it is difficult to read Paul as saying something is divinely “spiritual” without reference to *the* Holy Spirit. Therefore, our first reference to anything related to the Holy Spirit is those things that God gives to us in the realm of the Holy Spirit (cf. v. 13).

These blessings take place in “the heavenlies” or “heavenly places”. It is apparent that Paul is preparing for his statement later where he informs his reader that in Christ God is uniting all things in heaven and earth through Christ. It could be suggested that here we see another way of expressing “already, but not yet”. Already we are blessed and this occurs in heavenly places (v. 3).<sup>4</sup>

Now Paul unfolds the content of this “Spiritual blessing”. First, “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (v. 4). We could spend a lot of excessive space arguing the merits of various Calvinistic and Arminian readings of this text but it is preferred to let the mysterious nature of this statement remain. God knew who his holy people would be even before the world was created. Likewise, he determined that we would be “holy and blameless” which indicated that he knew the means of our present and eventual salvation.

The second thing mentioned further unfolds from the first: God “predestined us for adoption” (ESV). Again, we maintain the mystery in that Paul says this was done “through Jesus Christ”. Likewise, it was done “according to the desire of his will”.<sup>5</sup> We can derive from these

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4 The aorist tense of εὐλογήσας presents us as being blessed in the heavenly places already. This is a “realized eschatology” that begins with what theologian Gary Tuck calls the “inner man” in preparation for the redemption of the “outer man”. While we are not currently resurrected we are regenerated and therefore we enjoy redemption, in part, already.

5 ESV “according to the purpose of his will”; NASB “according to the kind intention of his will”; NET “according to the pleasure of his will”; NIV “in accordance with his pleasure and will”.

first two statements that believers were chosen/predestined in Christ for adoption to be holy and blameless before creation (vv. 4-5). This results in “praise of the glory of his grace”. It is in this grace that he “favored us in the Beloved” (v. 6).

Twice Paul makes it known that our predestination is in Christ. There is no hint that Paul could conceptualize salvation outside of Christ. It is fairly evident that he equated Christ with the means by which God has saved. He says that our redemption came through his blood (= death). This redemption is defined as “the forgiveness of sins” or “the release of trespasses”. We have a couple straightforward statements that present the death of Christ as being the means by which our sins/trespasses have been absolved. Again, it is by the “riches” of the grace of God that this occurs (v. 7). The grace of God is not something that can be defined outside of the work of Christ.

Paul emphasizes the “abundance” of the work of God saying that God has “lavished” his riches upon us. These riches are displayed through the wisdom and insight God has given believers by revealing “the mystery of his will” which comes through Christ (v. 9). While this statement is vague it seems apparent that contextually it is here that Paul says we who have experienced salvation through Christ are also the ones who realize this to be true. The picture of this salvation is the reuniting of heaven and earth in Christ (v. 10).

One who has read Rom 8.18-25 cannot help but hearing echoes of Paul’s statements there regarding the renewal of creation along with the children of God by the Holy Spirit at the end of

time. In fact, it seems that Paul unpacks these statements even more so in this epistle.<sup>6</sup> It is in Christ that we can pray “your Kingdom come *on earth as it is in heaven*” (Mt. 6.10; cf. Lk. 11.2).

Again, this concept of sonship is presented is further developed (as we continue to keep Rom 8.18-25 in mind) in that we are called to an inheritance (cf. 14). Again, Paul emphasizes that this was by the determination of God (v. 11) while emphasizing that this is not arbitrary but it is related to having hope in Christ (v. 12). This is because we believed in Christ and those who believe in Christ have been given the “promised” Holy Spirit as a seal (v. 13).<sup>7</sup>

It is the gospel that brought these people from hearers to believers. The gospel is equated with the “word” or “message of truth”. It is the gospel “of salvation”. Inherent in the proclamation of the gospel appears to be the need for faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. These are aspects of our being saved.

The Holy Spirit is the “pledge” of our inheritance. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the first installment of what is to come at the end of the age. If one harkens back to v. 3 one quickly comes to understand that being with Christ in the heavenlies is a “Spiritual blessing” and here we see that the one who brings us into this realm is none other than the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who begins the redemption process than is fulfilled at the resurrection (cf. Rom 8.13, 23). The Spirit is the “first-fruits” or “down-payment”. For Paul we are being changed/redeemed from the inside-out.

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6 N.T. Wright has noted on various occasions that the Pauline authorship of Ephesians would be less in doubt if people would read it as a lens for reading Paul, especially Romans. It appears to me that part of the problem with the critique of Pauline authorship is that scholars think Paul’s cosmology and ecclesiology have expanded to quickly in this letter for it to be authentic. This ignores so much of what is said in Romans regarding the new Adam (Christ), the work of the Holy Spirit, the adoption of the children of God, and the redemption of the entire created order in Romans 6-8.

7 It is likely that Paul has *at least* Ez. 36:22-38 and Jer. 31:31-34 .

As in v.11, so in v.14, there is some confusion over whether the redemption is God's or our own (as regards the one possessing the redemption). Either way the point stands that the Holy Spirit is the foretaste of what is yet to come. Again, we find "already, but not yet", inaugurated-not-consummated eschatology.

After Paul says all this about the work of the Triune God he says it is "for this reason"<sup>8</sup>, and "because" he heard of their faith in Christ and the love of his readers for "all the saints" (v. 15), that (1) he says he does not cease giving thanks for them and (2) making "remembrance" or "mention" of them. He sees they are becoming the type of people who are destined to inherit all he has written about and now he must pray for this to be so (v. 16).

The specific content of his prayer to God the Father is that (1) that God would give them the Spirit of revelation and wisdom<sup>9</sup> and (2) this would occur in receiving knowledge of the Father (v. 17). Paul prays that the "eyes of their heart" would be able to see ("enlightened") so that they could understand the "hope of your calling" which is equated with their eternal inheritance (v. 18). Furthermore, he prays that this would lead them to see the "surpassing greatness of his power" and "the power of his strength" (v. 19). It seems that Paul's primary concern is that they would realize what God is doing in them through the Spirit so that they can understand the end reward realizing God is more than able to save them.

Paul appeals to the resurrection and ascension of Christ as evidence that God is powerful enough to save them. If God could raise Jesus from the dead God can make sure that we receive

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8 Διὰ τοῦτο

9 I capitalized "Spirit" here because (1) I do not see Paul separating the reception of the Holy Spirit from receiving wisdom and revelation and (2) because I do not think we should press his wording too far here as to equate this "reception" with the receiving of the Spirit as a seal that he mentioned in v. 13.

our inheritance in full. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us is only the beginning. God will do for us what he did for Christ by resurrecting us from the dead (v. 20; cf. Rom 8.23, again).

The ascension of Christ placed him above all earthly and spiritual “rulers”, “authorities”, “powers” and “lordships”. Lest one think this only applies to the age to come Paul, once again, provides another “already, but not yet” statement: Christ rules not only in the present age but also the age to come (v. 21). We may think that Christ will rule in the age to come, but it seems that he does not rule now. Paul understands Christ to already be ruling. Heaven and earth have already been being brought together in Christ. In this age Christ has everything placed under his feet—signifying he has conquered his enemies—and he is the head of the church, who is his body on earth (vv. 22-23).

### **Conclusion: Pneumatological Aspect**

The Holy Spirit is the means by which believers enter Spiritual blessings in the heavenlies *in this age* (v. 3). We who participate in Christ via the Spirit are the ones the Father predestined to adoption (v. 5 [which we know elsewhere it a work of the Spirit, e.g. Rom. 8.14-15]). It is through Christ that believers can experience the Holy Spirit (vv. 5-7a; cf. 2 Cor 3.14-18; Gal. 3.13-15) which allows believers in return to participate in Christ who is bringing heaven and earth together (vv. 7b-10; cf. Rom. 8.19-23). This is our inheritance as believers which we experience, in part, through the indwelling Holy Spirit because of the power of the gospel which we have believed (vv. 11-13 “the seal”; cf. Rom. 8.23 “first-fruits”). As we wait for the rest of our inheritance our prayer should be that of the Apostle who asked the Father to give us the “Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation” so that we can see full inheritance which awaits us (v.18).