

**Ephesians 1:15-23<sup>1</sup>****C. Prayer for Wisdom and Revelation ([1:15-23](#))**

<sup>15</sup>Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, <sup>16</sup>I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, <sup>17</sup>asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. <sup>18</sup>I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

<sup>19</sup>I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power <sup>20</sup>that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. <sup>21</sup>Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. <sup>22</sup>God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. <sup>23</sup>And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

**Notes****[1:16](#)**

This first half of the verse continues the sentence begun in [1:15](#). The NLT shows this by its punctuation: A comma is placed at the end of [1:15](#), and a period is placed at the end of the first half of [1:16](#).

**[1:17](#)**

**God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**—The Greek reads, “God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.” “The Father of glory” (a unique expression in the NT), whom Paul addresses as “God, the glorious Father,” is a further description of God. It encompasses the idea that God is the source of Jesus' splendor and also that glory is his characteristic feature.

**spiritual wisdom and insight.**—Lit., “spirit of wisdom and revelation.” There are two problems with this translation. First, translating *apokalupsis* [<sup>TG</sup> <G602>, <sup>ZG</sup> 637] as “insight” rather than “revelation” is misleading because human understanding or ingenuity is not capable of discerning God's way. This can be accomplished only when God unveils it. Second, the word “spirit” may refer to the human spirit or the Holy Spirit. Those who prefer the human spirit think it refers to the attitude or spiritual disposition toward insight and openness to revelation. Others think it refers to the Holy Spirit because the qualities of wisdom and revelation cannot be generated by humans. The latter view is preferred because, though the “spirit of wisdom” may be defined as “a wise disposition,” the same cannot be applied to the “spirit of revelation,” for revelation (*apokalupsis* [<sup>TG</sup> <G602>, <sup>ZG</sup> 637]) is not the understanding of hidden things but the disclosing of them (Salmond 1903:273-274). The context of the book supports the idea that revelation comes by God's Spirit and not the human spirit ([3:3-6](#)), for as already stated, the human spirit cannot disclose the hidden mysteries of God. Furthermore, even those who think “spirit” refers to human

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1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 39-46.

spirit admit that the disposition is not self-generated but generated by the Holy Spirit. So ultimately the source is the Holy Spirit.

### 1:18

**I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light.**—This is translated as a request and means that Paul prayed that God might give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation and also that their hearts would be flooded with light. However, instead of a request, the structure of the original text, though difficult, may better support the idea that this is an ancillary thought to the request. Hence, Paul prays that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation since their hearts were flooded with light (presumably when they first responded to the gospel—see [1:3-14](#)).

**who are his rich and glorious inheritance.**—The verb for inheritance was used in [verse 11](#) and the noun for inheritance (*klēronomia* [<sup>TG</sup><[G2817](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>3100]) is used in [verses 14](#) and [18](#). The marginal reading in [verse 18](#), “the rich and glorious inheritance he has given to his people,” indicates that God has given believers an inheritance. The reading of the text is preferred.

### 1:19

**I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power.**—There are four words for power in this verse. First, is the word *dunamis* [<sup>TG</sup><[G1411](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>1539], which means “power, ability, capability of acting”—with the sense of being living and dynamic. This power is further described as “incredible greatness” to indicate that it is God’s active power or the ability of God himself. It is also defined by the other three words for power. Second, is the word *energeia* [<sup>TG</sup><[G1753](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>1918], from which we derive the word “energy”; it has the idea of power that is in actual operation—or as here, the active exercise of supernatural power. Third is *kratos* [<sup>TG</sup><[G2904](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>3197], which means “strength, might,” and has the sense of dominion or mastery—the ability to overcome resistance. Fourth, is the word *ischus* [<sup>TG</sup><[G2479](#)>, <sup>ZG</sup>2709], meaning inherent “strength” or “power.” In full force, God’s dynamic power consists of his inherent strength that is actively able to overcome resistance.

### 1:20

**seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms.**—This phrase refers to [Psalm 110:1](#) (“The LORD said to my Lord: ‘Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet’”), the OT passage most often quoted in the NT. In the present context it shows that God exercised his power in raising Christ and then seated him at his right hand. This is an exalted position with all authority (cf. [Matt 28:18](#)) and this same power is available to believers to appropriate in their lives.

### 1:22

**God has put all things under the authority of Christ.**—This is a good translation of the literal “put all things under his [Christ’s] feet.”

**has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church.**—This is a very difficult text to translate and understand. There has been much discussion as to whether “head” connotes “authority” (Grudem 1985) or “source” (Bedale 1954:211-215). The word itself seems to suggest “preeminence” or “prominence” (Cervin 1989), and the context determines its meaning. In this context “authority” is surely correct because earlier in the verse, Paul stated that God had put all things under Christ’s feet, which means he gave him authority over everything. The text reads literally, “he [God] gave him

[Christ] as head over everything to the church” or it could be read “he gave him (as the one who has authority over everything) to the church.” It can not mean “he gave him authority,” as if “authority” were the direct object; rather, “him” is the direct object, with “the church” as the indirect object: “he gave him to the church.” The verse does not specifically say that God made Jesus head of the church, but that Christ gave to the church the one who has authority over everything. However, having authority over everything implies that Christ also has authority over the church.

## [1:23](#)

**it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.**—Lit., “the fullness of him who fills all in all.” This is a complex passage to interpret because in the Greek text “fill” is used twice, once as a verb and once as a noun. Furthermore, the adjective “all” or “every” is used twice. To further complicate matters, the verb could be taken as passive or middle, the noun could be rendered in an active or passive sense, and “all/every” could be interpreted adjectively or adverbially. Of the many interpretations, two come to the forefront: (1) “the church fills or completes Christ who fills all things” (KJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, NRSV; Abbott 1897:35-38; Robinson 1903:42-45, 255-259), and (2) “the church is filled by Christ who is being filled [by himself or more likely by God] entirely or in every way” (JB, NEB, NJB; Westcott 1906:28; Best 1998:185, 188; O’Brien 1999:150-151; Hoehner 2002:298-300). The first interpretation is unlikely because it suggests that Christ is incomplete and that the church will make him complete. Such a concept is unknown in the NT. Furthermore, in the first interpretation it is difficult to know the import of the adjective “all.” The second interpretation, which states that Christ fills the church, accords with Pauline thought (cf. [3:19](#); [4:10](#), [13](#); [Col 2:9-10](#)). Moreover, this view allows sense to be made of the adjective “all.” It may well have the idea that the church is being filled by Christ, who is being filled wholly, entirely, or in every way by God. This appears to be the general interpretation taken by the NLT. One must take care not to interpret the NLT’s rendering “who fills all things everywhere with himself” as implying pantheism, which views God as existing in everything including inanimate objects. It is better to view it in terms of the church being filled with God’s divine attributes. The church receives its fullness from Christ, who is receiving complete fullness from God.

## Commentary

Having completed the magnificent eulogy, Paul offered a prayer for the believers—believers who had been given every spiritual benefit, including election, adoption, grace, redemption, forgiveness, insight, knowledge of God’s secret plan, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit. He prayed that they would deepen their relationship with God and that they would experience in a deeper way the spiritual benefits with which they have been enriched. As usual, Paul began the prayer with commendation ([1:15-16a](#)), followed by his supplication before God on their behalf ([1:16b-23](#)). This prayer is the second of eight long sentences in this epistle ([1:3-14](#), [15-23](#); [2:1-7](#); [3:2-13](#), [14-19](#); [4:1-6](#), [11-16](#); [6:14-20](#))—with 169 words. In Scripture it is not unusual to have lengthy sentences in prayers.

According to this prayer, the believers’ spiritual progress had developed in two ways ([1:15](#)). First, Paul noted their believing relationship with Christ—the personal pronoun “your” indicates a personal and active faith in their Lord Jesus. This is not speaking of initial faith but of continuing faith. Prior to Paul’s ministry among these believers, many had placed their trust in the gods—particularly, Artemis, a favorite goddess among the Ephesians and those in the surrounding area. Second, Paul noted their love for Christians everywhere. It is important to recognize that this love was not directed to the world in general but to Christians in particular who are throughout the world. True faith in God should result in love for fellow believers (cf. [1 John 2:9-11](#); [4:19-20](#)), thus showing to the world that they are disciples of the Lord ([John 13:35](#)). It was because of their ongoing faith in the Lord Jesus and their constant love for their fellow believers that Paul continually thanked God for them.

Paul's prayer was directed to "God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, God is the Father to whom all glory belongs (as stated in the NEB, "the all-glorious Father"). "Glory" speaks of the awesomeness of God, and "Father" signifies approachability. The one request that Paul makes here is stated with great elaboration. His one request is that the believers might be given "spiritual wisdom and insight." He was not praying for them to be given the Holy Spirit, for they already had the Holy Spirit; rather, he was praying for a specific manifestation of the Spirit so that they would have insight and know more of God as a result of the Holy Spirit's revelation. In fact, he stated that the object of the Spirit's insight and revelation is knowledge of God himself. This ministry of the Holy Spirit is necessary because humans lack the ingenuity to know God. Elsewhere, Paul states that the Holy Spirit searches the deep things of God and reveals them to believers ([1 Cor 2:10-16](#)). The deep things of God are God's wisdom and power to change individuals through the crucified Christ. Paul prayed that the believers would know him and, as a result, become acquainted with God's actions described in the following verses.

The goal, then, is to know God personally and intimately, not just to acquire facts about him. One can know many facts about the leader of a nation through the news media, but that is quite different from personally knowing that leader in the same way that his or her family does. Likewise, one may know facts about God by reading the Bible, but the only way to really know God personally is by the Holy Spirit's wisdom and revelation. In the end, philosophy exhorts "know yourself," whereas Christianity exhorts "know your God" through the Holy Spirit. This knowledge of God is available to all Christians and not just to the apostles, prophets, or a select group within the community.

### **Paul's Threefold Prayer Request.**

Was Paul's request that God would give the Ephesian believers the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God an impossible request? Not at all; their hearts were already flooded with light when they responded to the message of the gospel. What is the purpose of this request? It is threefold—that they might know (1) the wonderful future promised to those God called ([1:18b](#)), (2) the richness of his inheritance in the believers ([1:18c](#)), and (3) his mighty power for the believers ([1:19-23](#)). Paul was not asking God for these three items, for the Ephesians already possessed them. Rather, he was asking that the believers might grasp these concepts as a result of knowing God more intimately. The following explains each more fully.

The first thing to be grasped is the wonderful hope promised to those God has called ([1:18b](#)). Inextricably bound with this future hope is the reason for the hope, namely, God's call on their lives in the past. The promise of eternity future is assured only because of God's plan in eternity past.

The second matter to be comprehended is the wealth of God's glorious inheritance in the believers ([1:18c](#)). As mentioned in the notes, the marginal reading suggests that the "glorious inheritance" is God, whom the believers possess, but the reading in the text indicates that the "glorious inheritance" is the sum total of all the believers whom God owns. The two readings indicate the difficulty in interpreting the text. The context better supports the interpretation that the believers are God's inheritance. This corresponds to [1:11](#), where the believer is assigned as God's inheritance. Because he chose, redeemed, adopted, and sealed us, we are his possession. Not only do we have an inheritance ([1:14](#)), but God also has an inheritance ([1:11](#), [18](#)). This demonstrates that believers are valuable to God because he purchased them in order to inherit them. This inheritance will be fully realized in the future.

The third concept to be grasped is the greatness of God's power, which he gives to the believers ([1:19-23](#)). Whereas the first and second concepts concern the past and future respectively, the third concerns the power of God for his believers in the present time. Paul first pointed to the magnitude of God's

power and then to the manifestation of that power. He states that the extraordinary greatness of God's power is directed toward believers. The word that is used for power is *dunamis* [<sup>TG</sup><G1411>, <sup>ZG</sup>1539], from which the word "dynamite" is derived. However, there is no suggestion in the Bible that God's power is instantaneous or explosive, for dynamite was not invented until at least a millennium after Paul used the term. Rather, *dunamis* [<sup>TG</sup><G1411>, <sup>ZG</sup>1539] expresses a dynamic power or ability. This power is further described by three nouns: *ischus* [<sup>TG</sup><G2479>, <sup>ZG</sup>2709] depicts inherent strength, *kratos* [<sup>TG</sup><G2904>, <sup>ZG</sup>3197] portrays the force of power, and *energeia* [<sup>TG</sup><G1753>, <sup>ZG</sup>1918] delineates power in action. By way of illustration, a bulldozer has the ability, capacity, and potential strength of rooting out trees. One may sense its inherent strength (*ischus*), but when its engine roars and it begins to move, its force of power (*kratos*) becomes active (*energeia*) as it demonstrates its ability to topple trees in its path. Thus, an intimate knowledge of God enables believers to experience the incredible greatness of God's power available to them. This power is needed to survive the satanic and worldly systems that surround us.

### **The Manifestation of God's Power in Christ.**

It is one thing to understand the concept of power, but it is quite another to understand how this power operates. In [1:20-23](#), Paul explains that the power directed toward believers is the same power (1) God exerted in raising Christ from the dead and seating him at his right hand ([1:20-21](#)), (2) by which God subjected all things under Christ's feet ([1:22a](#)), and (3) by which God gave Christ to the church as head ([1:22b-23](#)).

First, the active exertion of God's power in Christ occurred in the past when God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (cf. [2:6](#); [Rom 8:34](#); [Col 3:1](#); [Heb 1:3](#); [8:1](#); [12:2](#); [1 Pet 3:22](#)). This same power is available to believers in the present ([Phil 3:10](#)) as a source of spiritual vitality and strength for living the Christian life ([Col 1:11](#)).

Paul then described the extent and duration of Christ's exaltation ([1:21](#)). Regarding the extent, Christ is "above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else." The references to ruler, authority, power, and leader are abstract and difficult to pin down. Although they could refer to human authorities, more likely they refer to angelic authorities. Other references to "powers" in this letter clearly affirm that they are angelic, as well as evil ([6:11-12](#), [16](#)). The last description "anything else" is literally "every name that is named." This is a comprehensive statement specifying that regardless of the designation or title a ruling power may have (whether in heaven or on earth), it is inferior to Christ, who is at the right hand of God. Christ's name is above every name ([Phil 2:9](#))—a further indication of his majestic power.

The duration of Christ's exaltation is defined by the words "in this world but also in the world to come." Christ is not only presently above all powers, but he will continue forever in his position at the right hand of God. His position is all-powerful and all-enduring. Therefore, to know God is to realize his power that raised Christ from the dead and placed him permanently in the heavenly realms above all powers. This same power is available to believers in their continuing spiritual warfare.

The second manifestation of God's power in Christ is demonstrated by the fact that he has placed "all things under the authority of Christ" ([1:22a](#)). In the previous verse, Paul stated that Christ was placed in the position of authority. This next statement further defines this role—he is allowed to exercise that authority. Adam lost his headship over creation when he sinned. Christ as the "second Adam" is now head over all creation. Some think that the full realization of this authority occurred at the exaltation of Christ. However, as Paul warns in [6:12](#), there are still evil powers that war against the believers, who must put on the armor of God. So it might be said that presently it is an "already/not-yet" situation.

Presently, the manifestation of Christ's control is not always evident to humanity, for there are many inequities, injustices, disasters, unholy actions, and evidence of outright defiance against Christ and God. However, Christ is exercising control even though it is not obvious to humanity; without his control, things would be much worse. The full realization of this authority will be in the future. This is in keeping with [1 Corinthians 15:24-28](#), which states that God presently has subjected everything under Christ. In the end times Christ will subjugate all God's enemies and will hand the Kingdom over to God the Father. Hence, Christ has the right to exercise his control but chooses not to do so immediately in every instance of violation against God's holy character. Nonetheless, his exercise of power is evident each time he rescues a sinner from the most despicable powers of all, Satan and sin. The full exercise of his control will be in the future, and it will be evident to all creation.

The third manifestation of God's power in Christ is demonstrated by the fact that God placed everything under the authority of Christ. Furthermore, God gave him, who has authority over everything, to the church. Although it is not directly stated, this implies that Christ has authority over the church ([1:22](#)). This power of God, which placed all creation under Christ's authority, is directed toward the believers. Giving Christ to the church demonstrates God's care for the church. First, he gave Christ as a sacrifice for their sins, and now he gives Christ to the church for her spiritual well-being. We learn from other passages that Christ, as head of the church, is our intercessor to help us in our weakness ([Rom 8:34](#); [Heb 7:25](#)), and he is our advocate ([1 John 2:1](#); [Rev 12:10](#)).

### **The Church Body.**

The word "church" *ekklēsia* [<sup>TG</sup><G1577>, <sup>ZG</sup>1711] ([1:22-23](#)) means "assembly," such as any group of citizens who gather for a specific purpose. It is used 114 times in the New Testament, 62 times by Paul, and 9 times in Ephesians. It can refer to a local church ([1 Cor 1:2](#); [1 Thess 1:1](#)), to several churches in a province or country ([Acts 15:41](#); [1 Cor 16:1](#); [Gal 1:2, 22](#)), or to the universal church ([1 Cor 12:28](#); [15:9](#); [Gal 1:13](#)), as it does in all occurrences in Ephesians. The church is composed of believers who transcend cultural, language, ethnic, gender, and geographical domains.

In [verse 23](#), a very difficult verse, Paul further defines the church by calling it Christ's body (see also [5:30](#); [Rom 12:4-5](#); [1 Cor 12:12-13, 27](#)). Two significant features about the body of Christ are revealed in Ephesians (as well as in parallel passages in Colossians). First, the body of Christ, referring to the whole assembly of believers, is specifically identified as the "church" in the singular ([1:22-23](#); [5:23](#); [Col 1:18, 24](#)). Second, and more importantly, Christ is named as the head of the body ([1:22-23](#); [4:15-16](#); [5:23](#); [Col 1:18, 24](#); [2:19](#)).

In regard to the "body" there appears to be a progression of thought in Paul's letters. In [1 Corinthians 12:21](#) when he refers to "head," it is not identified as Christ but as one of the members of the body. In [Romans 12:4-5](#) and [1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27](#) the church is the body, which is Christ. In Ephesians and Colossians, the church is the body and Christ is the head, thus making Christ both the body and the head. Such differences reveal a development of the theology of the church. In [Romans 12:4-5](#) and [1 Corinthians 12:14-27](#), the church is described as the body of Christ; by analogy of the human body, the utilization of gifts of all the members of the body conveys the sense of organic unity. In Ephesians and Colossians, this organic unity is animated by its head, Christ. Hence, each member is integrally bound and responsible to the head and to each other.

Finally, Paul expanded on the nature of this body. He declared that it is being filled with the fullness of Christ, who in turn is being filled wholly, entirely, or in every way by God—which most likely refers to God’s power and moral excellence. Later, in [3:19](#), Paul prays that all believers might be filled with God’s fullness, which comes by knowing the love of Christ. But in the present context, “power” is central. Therefore, believers are to be filled with the moral excellence and power of God by Christ, who in turn is being filled entirely by God with the same moral excellence. Believers are to appropriate this fullness in order to be more like Christ. They are to utilize this fullness at all times. When believers are attacked by those in the world or by satanic forces, the fullness of God’s power and moral excellence are needed. Also, in times of blessings and joy, Christians are to exhibit this fullness by reflecting Christlike qualities.

This marks the end of Paul’s first prayer. He prayed that the believers might know God more personally and intimately. The purpose of such knowledge was threefold: that they might know the hope of his calling (which looks at the past), the wealth of God’s glorious inheritance in the believers (which looks to the future), and the greatness of his power (which looks at the present time). The greatness of God’s power is not only described but also demonstrated in Christ by his resurrection and ascension into the heavens, by subjecting all things under Christ’s authority, and by giving him to the church. This prayer is built upon God’s enrichment of believers with every spiritual benefit for their spiritual well-being. Paul prayed that they might deepen their relationship with God by knowing him more intimately through being filled with his moral excellence and power. Believers who enjoy intimate fellowship with God will experience a life full of joy and power. They will enjoy the benefits of being God’s inheritance.