

# The Power of the Resurrection<sup>1</sup>

## April 16, 2017

In Matt 24:30, our Lord promised to return with power *δυναμεις*, and said that his generation would see these things happen, referring to links in the chain of manifold fulfillment. In Ephesians 1, Paul explains one of these links, the resurrection of our Lord from the dead.

### Overview of Ephesians

The structure of the entire book (Figure 1, chart) is organized around Paul's prayer in 1:15-19 that his readers would know three things:

- The hope of our calling → practical principles in ch. 4-6, a section that reminds us of the other two themes as well.
- The riches of God's inheritance in the saints → the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church, 2:11-3:21
- The greatness of his power *δυναμεις* toward us, 1:19-2:10.

Each of these themes governs a major section of the book. Paul's explanation of God's power has two parts: its demonstration in Christ, (1:20-23), and its application to us (2:1-10). We focus today on the first of these.

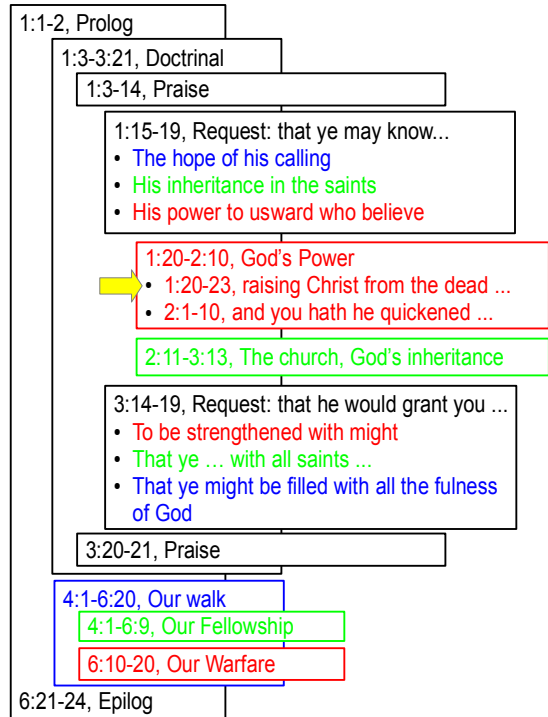


Figure 1: The Structure of Ephesians

### 1:18-23, God's Power toward his Son

Paul wants his readers to know

Eph 1:19 what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power

Paul develops this theme of “the working of his mighty power” with four clauses (Figure 2, chart) that show how his power is demonstrated.<sup>2</sup>

### 20, God's power in raising Christ

Eph 1:20 Which he **wrought** in Christ, ~~when he raising him from the dead,~~--The first demonstration of God's

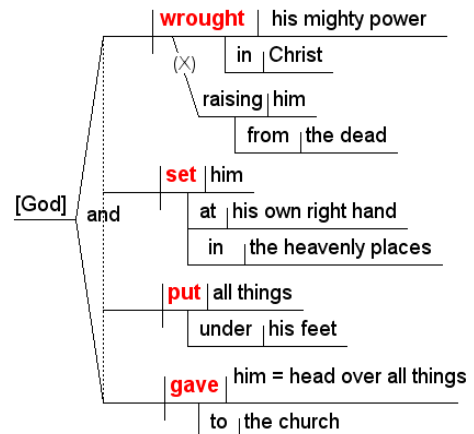


Figure 2: God's Power toward Christ, Eph 1:19-23

1 This study draws heavily from the one I presented on 5/19/1999 in the course of our studies on Ephesians, though it differs in some conclusions..

2 The structure becomes clear only when we realize that “raising him from the dead” is participial, in contrast with the other four verbs, which (in the MT) are finite (all aorist indicatives).

## The Power of the Resurrection

power is our Lord's resurrection from the dead. His return from the grave is a picture of his powerful return from heaven, and the source from which the other three demonstrations flow.

The most powerful thing humans can do is to kill the body (chart):

Matt 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able (δυναμις) to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

But God's power is shown in resurrection, something far beyond human capability. Recall the response of the king of Israel when the king of Syria sent Naaman to be healed of his leprosy:

2Ki 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?

### **20-21, God's Power in Christ's Session at his right hand**

The second demonstration of God's power in the risen Christ is our Lord's ascension.

**20b [God] 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:--**To see the link to God's power, we must recognize that Paul is alluding to Psalm 110 (chart):

Psa 110:1 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

The point of this Psalm is not that the Messiah has been taken out of action, but that he preparing for a victorious return:

Psa 110:2 The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. ... 5 The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.

God establishes Messiah's authority over his enemies in heaven so that he may send him back in victory, as pictured in Revelation 19.

The place to which he is raised is described in three ways.

**at his own right hand.**—This is the place of honor and influence. Cf. Solomon's treatment of his mother Bathsheba:

1Ki 2:19 Bathsheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat **on his right hand**.

**in heavenly places.**—Throughout the NT, the word “heavenly” *επουρανιος* refers to the abode of God, and is often contrasted with “earthly,” as when those who bow to our Lord are described as being “*things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth [heavenly things, and earthly things, and sub-earthly things]” (Phil 2:10).<sup>3</sup>

**far above....**—This position is already far superior to that held by any creature that could claim power. Paul asserts the superiority of the Lord Jesus in terms of *whom* and *when*.

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3 Cf. similar contrasts with “earthly” in John 3:12; 1 Cor 15:40, 48, 49.

## The Power of the Resurrection

First, he lists those to *whom* he is superior. In addition to the four titles mentioned here (principality αρχη, power εξουσια, might δυναμις, dominion κυριοτης), the NT knows of thrones θρονοϛ Col 1:16 and rulers κοσμοκρατορ 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 NT uses these titles in two ways. On the one hand, they refer to human rulers:

Tit 3:1 Put them in mind to be subject to **principalities and powers**, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,

On the other, they sometimes refer to angelic beings:<sup>4</sup>

Eph 6:12 For we wrestle **not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers**, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.

The ambiguity is intentional. Ezekiel 28 (the king vs. the prince of Tyre) and Daniel 10 (the princes of Greece and Persia) show that earthly governments are empowered and directed by angelic beings, and conflict among nations reflects angelic conflict. Our Lord’s session at the Father’s right hand places him above every spiritual or other power that anyone can suggest. This superiority now, in his *position*, will one day result in his superiority in *practice* when he comes to “put down all rule αρχη and all authority εξουσια and power δυναμις” (1 Cor 15:13), the same Greek terms that lead the series in our verse. He will then be recognized as “king of kings and Lord of Lords” (Rev 19:16).

Second, he answers the *when* question. Might new authorities arise who are superior to Christ? No, he is superior to everything “not only in this world [age], but also in that which is to come.”

So the second demonstration of the Lord’s power is appointing him forever to a position far superior to every other authority, a position that he could not occupy except through his death and resurrection.<sup>5</sup>

### **22a, God’s Power in subjecting all things to Christ**

The third demonstration of God’s power in the risen Christ is his rule over the physical creation.

**22 And hath put<sup>6</sup> all things under his feet,**--From Ps 110:1 we pass to Ps 8:7.

Psa 8:6 Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all *things* under his feet: 7 All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; 8 The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, *and whatsoever* passeth through the paths of the seas.

Both texts refer to things under Messiah’s feet, but note the differences (Table 1, chart).

- Ps 110:1 looks *forward* to the *practical* subjection of all of Messiah’s *enemies*.

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4 Gnostic writers use the four terms in Eph 1:21 to refer to various grades of angels that were supposed to intervene between the uncreated God and the earth, but it is not clear that these ideas were in circulation at the time Paul wrote. See R.A. Johnson, “The Old Testament Background for Paul’s Use of ‘Principalities and Powers,’” DTS ThD thesis, 2004, who argues that they are the אלהים of the OT.

5 The connection is seen in Phil 2:8-9, “wherefore God also hath exalted him...”

6 Better translated simply “put,” an aorist indicative like the other three verbs that outline this section.

## The Power of the Resurrection

- Ps 8:7 looks *back* to the *positional* subjection of the *physical creation* to Adam.

Psalm 8 recalls God’s declaration at the time of creation,

Gen 1:26 And God said,  
Let us make man in our  
image, after our likeness:

and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

	Ps 8:7 (MT 6)	Ps 110:1
<b>MT</b>	כל שְׁתֵּה תַחַת־רַגְלָיו	אֲדָ־אֲשִׁית אֵיבִיךָ הַדּוֹם לְרַגְלֶיךָ
<b>LXX</b>	Παντα υπεταχας υποκατω των ποδων αυτου	Εως αν θω τους εχθρους σου θποποδιον των ποδων σου
<b>Tense</b>	Past	Future
<b>Object</b>	Creation in its natural form	Enemies; his opponents
<b>Time</b>	Creation; Gen 1:28, “have dominion over...”	Ascension & Return

Table 1: Psalm 110 and Psalm 8

Through sin, man failed to achieve this dominion. Even before his passion, our Lord demonstrated his ability to control the creation in ways that Adam never could, calming the sea, healing disease, and multiplying food. But after his resurrection, his power was even greater, passing through closed doors (John 20:19, 26) and ascending into the air (Acts 1). The risen Christ is the perfect man, able to subdue the created world as God intended.

### **22b-23, God’s Power in giving Christ to the Church**

The fourth demonstration of God’s power in the risen Christ is his relation to the church. This is a transitional claim, preparing us for the “usward” demonstration of God’s power in 2:1-10.

**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 [that which is being filled up by him who in turn is being completely filled].**--Finally, God’s power toward his son affects the church.


	Head and Body		Contents and Container
Christ	[God] gave him to be the head over all things		
Church	to the church, 23 Which is his body,		that which is being filled up

Table 2: Chiasm in 1:22b-23

Paul uses two pictures. The second is clearer if 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 (Table 2, chart).

- In the first picture, Christ is the head, and the church is the body that he leads.
- In the second, Christ is the contents, and the church is the container that he fills.

### **The Picture of Head and Body**

The syntax is quite dense. Let’s unravel it piece by piece (chart):

- God gave him as head. Christ holds this position, not out of his own ambition or strength, but as a demonstration of the power of God.

Heb 5:4 No man taketh this honor unto himself. ... 6 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.

## The Power of the Resurrection

2. God gave him as head to the church, which is his body. Paul develops this metaphor in greater detail in chapter 4, and also in 1 Corinthians 12.

Eph 4:14 That we ... 15 ... may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

The metaphor emphasizes that Christ, not some religious leader, is the head of the church.

3. God gave him as head “over all.” The point is not that he is head over all things (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.<sup>7</sup> We might better translate, “God gave him as head, higher than all, to the church.” 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.”

The syntax shows that Paul views this installation of Christ as head of the church as a demonstration of God’s power. 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.
- 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.

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 *encourage* us that we are so precious to God, and *warn* us not to let anyone else usurp this position of headship.

### *The Picture of Contents and Container*

The second picture is that Christ is the contents that fills the church as a container.<sup>8</sup> I would prefer to render “his body, that which is being filled up by him who in turn is being completely filled.” The church finds its completion in him, and he in turn is completed by someone else. Both ideas are documented elsewhere in the NT.

The idea that we are filled up with Christ recurs in chapter 4 (chart),

Eph 4:10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, **that he might fill all things.**) 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, **for** unto the work of the ministry, **for** unto the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come **in** unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, **unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:**

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7 The only other instance of κεφαλη υπερ in the Greek Bible is Sirach 25:15, where it denotes, not organic connection, but superiority.

8 This understanding differs from my exposition in 1999-2000, in which I understood Christ to be the container. See Hoehner’s commentary for exhaustive discussion. Col 2:9 is a concise summary of the same relation, presented in the opposite order.

## The Power of the Resurrection

Notice that this filling takes place through the operation of the Spirit's gifts *in the church*. The gifts are focused on the church: church planters (apostles and evangelists) and church feeders (prophets, pastors and teachers). The idea is not that we as individuals are filled with Christ, but that he fills the church, which is his body. If we want to enjoy the resurrection power of Christ in our lives, we must be connected to the church.

In the metaphor of the body, we learned that Christ is the head, not on his own initiative, but because "God gave him as head to the church." The same dependency on the Father governs this image as well. The one who fills us is himself being filled. The Son is subject to the Father, and works under his direction and with his enabling. Colossians makes this point:

Col 1:19 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

God's power is made available to us, as a local church, through the Lord Jesus. He is the God-given head over the body. He is the God-empowered contents that we deliver to the world. The flesh makes it difficult for believers in these mortal bodies to live together in love and mutual care, and to face unbelievers with patience and compassion. But the power that raised our Lord from the dead flows through him to us to strengthen our life together.