

Jim's Notes
August 8, 2007
The Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians
Ephesians 1:18-23

Ephesians 1:18

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

Let us understand that we arrive at the full mystery of God by two routes: We ourselves by rational insight may come to understand and discern something of the knowledge of divine things. But when there is a certain divine self-disclosure God himself reveals his divinity to us. Some may directly perceive by this revelation something remarkable, majestic and close to truth. . . . But when we receive wisdom we apprehend what is divine both through our own rational insight and through God's own Spirit. When we come to "know" what is true in the way this text intends, both these ways of knowing correspond. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.17-18)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

It is not without effort that we come to "know the hope of our calling and the riches of God's inheritance in the saints." This effort in fact comes in response to that renewing gift which God himself gives in the glorious resurrection of his own Son. This gift he gives not once but continually . . . Every day Christ rises from the dead. Every day he is raised in the penitent. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.18)

Ephesians 1:19

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

When the prophets had achieved nothing, nor angels nor archangels, nor the whole creation visible and invisible . . . he decided to appear himself in the flesh to show that this was a matter that required divine power. (Homily on Ephesians 3.1.20-23)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

Since he was speaking within the limits of human language and was unable to hymn the Lord as he wished and show the greatness of his gifts, the holy apostle brings together many things under one name, striving to reveal these as much as language permits. The name "Father of glory" embraces the hope of our calling and the riches of the glory of our inheritance, the exceeding greatness of his power and the good pleasure of his will, and all that goes with it. But the "immeasurable greatness of his power" ironically now comes to mind as he thinks of the dishonor of the cross and considers how much was achieved through it. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.19)

Ephesians 1:20a

Hilary of Poitiers (AD 300 – 367):

The language of the apostle, acknowledging the power of God, refers to future things as though they have already happened. For the things which are to be performed already subsist in their fullness in Christ, in whom is all fullness. Whatever is future is so by God's provident ordering, not as if it might exist on its own. (On the Trinity 11.31)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

It is clear that he says all this of Christ in his humanity. This is what inspires wonder. For it would hardly be remarkable to say that God sits by God, if fellowship in power is a corollary of their identity of nature as Father and Son. But that the human nature assumed from us should partake of the same honor as the one who assumed him, so that no difference in worship is apparent, so that the invisible Godhead is worshiped through the visible human nature, this exceeds all wonder! The holy apostle is overwhelmed. He first sings of the exceeding greatness of his power. Then he speaks of the working of his mighty strength. Then he looks for whatever he can say that might point to the extraordinary nature of his exaltation. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.20)

Ephesians 1:20b

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

He demonstrates the power of God through a human image. It is not that a material throne is set up and God the Father is physically seated on it and has the Son seated above with him. Rather he communicates with this metaphor because we could not understand his role as incomparable governor and judge except in our own terms . . . Being on the right or left of God is to be understood as meaning that saints are on his right but sinners on his left . . . The very word "sits" denotes the power of kingship, through which God confers benefits on those above whom he is seated. He has reined them in and has them in his service, guiding those who had previously strayed. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.21)

Ephesians 1:21a

Origen (AD 185 – 251):

Under one Lord there may be many subordinate powers and lordships, who may themselves delegate a portion of their own power, some operating in this age and some in that which is to come, But none of these has an authority equal to the Son's. All authorities must be subject to his authority. All subordinate powers are rightly exercised under that of Christ, since God's power is superior to every other power. (Epistle to the Ephesians)

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

Because he is the fount and the origin and the principle in everything that moves, Christ was therefore set “above all authority and above all power.” Authority is one thing, power another. Authority is expressed in action. Power is expressed in the capacity to act. A potential act may exist not as present fact but as the present possibility of something. But since Christ is himself the origin of all and is in all that is possible, he is “above all power.” Since he is the source of all acts and authority is expressed in actions, he is therefore said to be “above all authority.” (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.20-23)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

He says not merely "above" but “far above.” For God is higher than the powers on high. So he led him up there, the very one who shared our lowly humanity. He led him from the lowest depth to the highest sovereignty beyond which there is no higher honor. “Above every sovereignty,” he says: not merely compared with this or that . . . What gnats are compared with humans, so is the whole creation compared with God. (Homily on Ephesians 3.1.20-23)

Ephesians 1:21b

Origen (AD 185 – 251):

The One who is above all by definition has no one above him. He is not temporally following after the Father but eternally from the Father. This same thing is said of the Holy Spirit, according to the Wisdom of God, when it says “the Spirit of God has filled the world” (Wisdom 1:7). If therefore the Son of God is said to be above all and the Holy Spirit is said to contain all, while God the Father is the one far above all names, it is plainly demonstrated that the nature and substance of the Trinity is one, which is above all. (Commentary on Romans 7:13)

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

All names are secondary inventions. They primarily point to that which is in the created order, whether it be angels, human beings or temporal powers. By contrast only that is eternal in essence which has existence without dependency upon something else that exists, which lives by its own power. That which is eternal has no name in itself. Such "names" are added by us with our vocabulary and language. Christ receives these names from us (Son of God, divine, Spirit), yet he is still more than whatever these names convey. . . . Among names, the name that holds the chief place and that from which all names come is that which the Greeks call Being itself. But Christ is above this very being and is therefore above every name. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.20-23)

Ephesians 1:22a

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

God set him above so as to be honored before the rest, not merely to distinguish him but to make all things his servants. Truly this is an awesome reality, that the whole power of creation should finally bow before a man in whom God the Word dwells. For it is possible for someone to be on high without subjects but held in peculiar honor. Here, however, it is not so, but “he has put all under his feet.” And he has not only subjected them but imposed the most extreme subjection, below which there is no other. For this reason he says “under his feet.” (Homily on Ephesians 3.1.20-23)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

He says that the Father has subjected all creation to the Son, so that he may be the head and Lord of all on account of being the one through whom he made all things. He “made all things subject to him” when he generated him before all things, that through him all that had not been might come into being. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.23)

Ephesians 1:22b

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

By his foreknowledge he is celebrating what is to come as though it were done already, as I explained above when he says “he has blessed us” (Ephesians 1:3) . . . Either this interpretation, or a better one might be: If we are to take account of what has gone before, we should take this to mean that even those things whose will is not subject to him serve him because of their natural condition. So demons, Gentiles and Jews all serve him. Even if they do not freely serve Christ nor are they put under his feet, yet, because they have been created by him for good, they are unwillingly subject to his power, even if they strive against him with the volition of their free judgment.

Why “all things”? Why is it said that angels, thrones, dominions, powers and the other forces that were never opposed to God should be “put under his feet”? It seems obscure. But it could be said in reply that none is without sin. The “stars themselves are not clean in God's sight,” (Job 15:15) and every creature dreads the advent of the Lord . . . But another explanation refers the word “all” not to everything but only to those things that are in dispute. It is as if one says “all the citizens cried out,” not meaning that there was no one in the city who was silent but that what is said of the majority covers the minority also. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.22-23)

Ephesians 1:23a

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

In the same way as a hand has many members subject to it, of which some are diseased and weak, so too our Lord Jesus Christ, being the head of the church, has as his members the whole congregation of the church, the saints and also the sinners. But the saints ate in voluntary subjection to him, while the sinners are under compulsion. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.22-23)

Origen (AD 185 – 251):

The church is called the body of Christ. We inquire whether as the body is distinguished from the head so we should think of [the church] here as an organ of its Head. Or should we rather think of the head as an aspect of the body of a person, so the whole church of Christ is Christ's body in that he ensouls it with his Godhead and fills it with his Spirit. Or perhaps it should be interpreted in another way. But even if the second is true, the more human part of it is by itself a subservient aspect of the whole body, while the divinity that gives life to the whole church is, as it were; the divine power that enlivens it. (Epistle to the Ephesians)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

Oh, how high he has raised the church! For, as if he were lifting it by some stage machine, he has led it up to a great height and installed it on that throne. For where the head is, there is the body also. (Homily on Ephesians 3.1.20-23)

Ephesians 1:23b

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

Christ is the fullness of the church. This entire fullness is in process of being filled up. At one stage everything which is being filled is made empty. So Christ was emptied or emptied himself. Having recovered all things again through the mystery of salvation and saved the full number of souls, Christ is filling all in all.

All these statements about the magnificence and power of Christ have this purpose: To prove that nothing further is to be received, no other thought required to complete the revelation. The Ephesians are therefore in error if they add anything further and introduce anything from the teaching of the Jews or of the world. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.1.20-23)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

The fullness of the head is the body and that of the body is the head. Observe how skillfully Paul writes and how he spares no word to express the glory of God. The fullness of the head, he says, is fulfilled through the body, The body consists of all its members. He shows Christ using each member individually, not merely all in common. For if we were not many, one a hand, one a foot, one another member, the body would not be full. Through all members, therefore, his body is made full. Then the head is

fulfilled, then the body becomes perfect, when we are all combined and gathered into one. (Homily on Ephesians 3.1.20-23)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

By the church he means the whole community of the faithful. This he calls the body of Christ and the fullness of the Father. This body he has filled with all gifts. He “lives in it and goes about in it” (Leviticus 26:11-12), as the voice of prophecy says. But this will be more strictly so in the future life. . . . In the present life God is in all, since his nature is uncircumscribed; but he is not “all in all” (I Corinthians 15:28), since some are impious and some lawless. Yet he lives in those who fear him and who put hope in his mercy. In the next life at any rate, when mortality has ceased and immortality is conferred and sin has no place any longer, he will be all in all. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.23)