

# The Economy of GRACE and GLORY in Ephesians

by John Pester

The New Testament revelation of grace and glory is not separate from the New Testament revelation of the Triune God in His economical move to dispense Himself into humanity, and neither is it separate from the revelation of the believers' corporate participation in and expression of the Triune God. Through the economy of the Triune God, God and man are organically joined in the divine life through grace, and the development of this organic union is a progressive expression of the divine glory. Grace and glory in the economy of God are inseparable from Christ, and the believers' experience of Christ ultimately will issue in a display of the multifarious wisdom of God through the church, satisfying His desire for image and vindicating His claim to unchallenged dominion.

Without some understanding of the New Testament revelation of the economy of God, *grace* and *glory* are reduced to abstract terms describing the actions and attributes of God. And they are relegated to a nebulous realm of theological discourse that has little or no immediacy in the believers' personal and corporate experience of Christ. In this context grace often is viewed merely as God's unmerited favor toward us in His judicial imputation of the righteousness of God in Christ to us. Similarly, glory is simplistically regarded as an attribute of God which necessarily elicits praise and adoration and is also typically construed as some kind of ethereal "shining." In Ephesians, however, Paul presents grace and glory as vital, interrelated components of the economy of the Triune God. No other book in the New Testament presents such a complete view of the operation of the economy of God, both from the perspective of the Triune God and from the perspective of fallen humanity. In this economy the heart's desire of God and the destiny of the believers meet, merge, and mingle in a dispensation of grace which produces and builds up the divinely organic Body of Christ, the glorious church.

The eternal economy of God, His plan to dispense Himself into humanity for His enlargement and expression, is not easily understood, much less easily unveiled to the eyes of the human heart. It is not completely hidden from the sons of men, as once it was, but we still need a spirit of wisdom and revelation in order to know the hope of His calling (Eph. 3:5; 1:17-18). God desires to make known His multifarious wisdom through the church, but this wisdom is still spoken forth in a mystery (v. 10; 1 Cor. 2:7). There is something slightly disconcerting, even seemingly contradictory, in this realization: God is willing both to hide Himself and to make known the mystery of His will by revelation (Isa. 45:15; Eph. 3:3). Wonderfully, we have been given the capacity through creation to understand and experience the mystery of His will. Fearfully, the activation of this capacity in time is still dependent upon the exercise of His prudence (1:8). Ultimately, our seeing is a matter of His pleasure; it must be granted: "I extol You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent

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and have revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it has been well pleasing in Your sight” (Luke 10:21). Just as the Lord understood the rich mercy of God in revealing these matters to babes, Paul understood that these matters would remain hidden to the Ephesian believers if utterance was not granted to him in the opening of his mouth to make known the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19). In many respects the well-speaking of the Triune God contained in the first three chapters of Ephesians, concerning the fulfillment of the mystery of God’s eternal economy, is proof that Paul’s prayer for utterance and the supporting prayers and petitions of the members of the Body in response to his request were answered.

Just like our entrance into the kingdom, our entrance into Paul’s utterance in these chapters must be richly and bountifully supplied (2 Pet. 1:11). In this regard, much can be gained by simply and prayerfully reading this portion of the Word. For such an exercise, the first three chapters of Ephesians have been attached to the end of this article without verse references. For this reading to be an effectual exercise, however, we need to allow the Lord to thoroughly deal with all the components of our heart:

We need an open spirit with a conscience purified by our confessing and dealing with our sins and by the sprinkling of the redeeming blood of Christ (Heb. 9:14; 10:22). Next, we need a sober mind (2 Tim. 1:7 and note 2), a loving emotion (John 14:21), and a submissive will (John 7:17) in order to have a pure heart. When we have such a spirit and heart, the eyes of our heart will be able to see. (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 1:18, note 1)

**I**f the eyes of our heart are enlightened, revelation will shine forth as we read. And in this shining, grace will be given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. As captives, we then will be led in captivity and in some measure given as gifts to the Body for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ, which is the goal of God’s economy (4:7-13). May the contents of this article also serve this goal.

### Mystery, Economy, Grace, and Glory

Paul specifically speaks of the economy of God in Ephesians, briefly in chapter one and then in more detail in chapter three (1:10; 3:9). In both instances it is clear that the economy of God has been, and to a certain extent still is, a matter of mystery. It is also clear that the unveiling of this mystery is related to both the dispensing and receiving of grace, which issues in glory. The terms *grace* and *glory* appear in the book of Ephesians twenty-two times, either as nouns, predicates, or adjectives. Significantly, eighteen of these occurrences are found in the first three chapters (1:2, 6, 7, 12, 14, 17, 18; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:2, 7, 8, 13, 16, 21; 4:7, 29; 5:27; 6:24).

#### *Unto the Economy of the Fullness of the Times (Ephesians 1:10)*

In chapter one Paul speaks of the Son’s redemption, the forgiveness of our offenses, as being according to the riches of His grace, which the Triune God has caused to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence (vv. 7-8). Thereafter, however, Paul inserts a significant qualifier: The riches of His grace abound to us as the mystery of His will is made known to us (v. 9). Our experience of the abounding grace of the Triune God is inextricably linked to our knowledge of the mystery of His economy. When, for example, we heard the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation, there was a believing response, and we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise (v. 13). Our initial knowing and our initial experience of the economy of God occurred simultaneously.

All of our experience of the divine economy is governed by what we know of the economy of God: This is a divine principle. If, for example, we know of God only as the Creator, we should not expect to rise above our status as creatures. If we know of God

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only as our Redeemer through the Son's redemptive death on the cross on our behalf, our experience may well be limited to an appreciation of our judicial reconciliation to God. And if, in our desire to please God, we know of Him principally as a righteous Judge (Eccl. 3:17), we easily can be distracted by endless efforts at self-improvement and perfection according to outward standards of righteousness, but never lay hold of the divine life which alone constitutes us righteous (Phil. 3:9; Gal. 3:3, 21; 1 Tim. 6:12; Rom. 5:19). If, however, we see God's desire to impart His life and holy nature into us through His predestination of us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, enabling us to stand before Him in an atmosphere of mutual love and also making us His glorious bride, holy and without blemish, having neither spot nor wrinkle, we will more readily appreciate and enter into the depths of the stewardship of the grace which was given to Paul for us (Eph. 1:4-5; 5:27; 3:2).

**I**f we receive this stewardship of grace, which is contained in the revelation that was granted to the holy apostles and prophets in spirit (v. 5) and which is ministered through words of grace according to the gift of grace (4:29; 3:7), the issue will be a dispensing, an economy, unto the fullness of the times. The goal of God's economy, conveyed in the abounding riches of His grace, is the heading up of all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth (1:10). This is the process through which the Triune God's unchallenged dominion in the universe is reestablished in Christ who has been enlarged through the church's incorporation into the Triune God. The process of heading up begins on the earth, not with humanity generally, but with the church specifically, the redeemed ones who have been called out of the old creation, who have been created in Christ into one new man, and who are growing up into Christ, the Head (2:15; 4:15).

God made Christ the Head over all things (v. 22). Through all the dispensations of God in all the ages, all things will be headed up in Christ in the new heaven and new earth. That will be God's eternal administration and economy. Thus, the heading up of all things is the issue of all the items covered in vv. 3-9. Verse 22 reveals further that this heading up is to the church so that the Body of Christ may share in all that is of Christ as the Head, having been rescued from the heap of the universal collapse in death and darkness, which was caused by the rebellion of the angels and the rebellion of man. The believers participate in this heading up by being willing to be headed up in the church life, by growing in life, and by living under Christ's light (John 1:4; Rev. 21:23-25). When everything is headed up in Christ, there will be absolute peace and harmony (Isa. 2:4; 11:6; 55:12; Psa. 96:12-13), a full rescue out of the collapse. This will begin from the time of the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21). (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 1:10, note 3)

Heading up is the mark, the practical sign, that a member of the Body has not only seen but also is experiencing the reality of the economy of God. In this heading up believers walk worthily of God's calling (Eph. 4:1), which principally involves separation from situations involving division and death. Those who are being headed up are diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace, which was brought in by the all-inclusive death of Christ on the cross that dealt with every negative element of the corrupted and fallen corporate man (vv. 3, 22). Heading up also issues in the members of the Body practically functioning according to the operation in the measure of each one part for the growth and building up of the Body in mutuality and love (v. 16). When this truth is held as part of a worthy walk, the believers grow up into Him who is the Head, Christ, in all things (v. 15). Heading up also deals with every vestige of death brought in by sin and manifested by the old man. In the receiving of the divine dispensing, believers no longer walk as the Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind (v. 17), their understanding is not darkened, and neither are they alienated from the life of God (v. 18). Further, they have not given themselves over to lasciviousness to work all uncleanness in greediness (v. 19). Rather, they are being renewed in the spirit of their mind, and they put on the new man, which is being renewed according to God



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(vv. 23-24). In the details of their living, the lie is put off, truth is spoken to the members of the Body (v. 25), emotions are balanced (vv. 26, 31-32), work is honest (v. 28), and words that build up others by imparting grace are spoken (v. 29) These are the indications of being headed up in God's economy; this is not a matter of outward practices and observances. Rather, the impartation of the divine life of the Triune God as grace results in these practical expressions of the divine life, which, even in afflictions, become our glory (3:13).

**T**here are also clear indicators that one is not being headed up. In relation to division, there is the promulgation of the winds of teaching in the sleight of men in craftiness, with a view to a system of error. These divide the Body and damage the growth of the members of the Body, especially tossing those who are young in the Lord and who lack the maturity of the divine life (4:14). Any activity that damages the oneness of the Body of Christ is not sourced in the Head and should be put off. In relation to death, Paul presents many indicators of the operation of death, rather than the operation of the divine economy. These indicators are in contrast to the reality that is in the mold and pattern of the human living of Jesus, which principally involves a walk in love and light that is a life of sacrifice, sweet-smelling in its savor (4:20-21; 5:2). They include, among other things, fornication, uncleanness, greediness, obscenity, foolish talking, and sly, filthy jesting, rather than the giving of thanks (vv. 3-4). These are the unfruitful works of darkness, and God's economy, which is in light (see "God's Economy in Light," *Affirmation & Critique*, Vol. III, No. 1), reproves and repudiates them, rather than partakes of them (vv. 11, 13, 7).

Thankfully, the riches of God's abounding grace result in a heading up and raise us out of every situation of death and division. And in this heading up, there is an expression of God's divine authority. Ephesians 1:12 says, "That we would be to the praise of His glory who have first hoped in Christ."

This verse does not mean that we shall praise God. It means that so much will be worked out for us and in us by God's abounding grace that all the angels and positive things in the universe will praise God...Glory is God expressed. At the fullness of the times, all the sons of God will be fully saturated with God and will express God. God will be expressed through us. This expressed God is glory. All the angels and positive things in the universe will praise the expressed God. This is what it means to say that we shall be to the praise of His glory. (Lee, *Life-study* 97, 99)

In the verses immediately surrounding Paul's explicit mention of the economy of the Triune God in verse 10, there is a clear indication that God's economy is a marvelous mystery involving the dispensing of the Triune God as grace. Through the church's participation in this grace there is an operation that heads up the church to the point that God is fully expressed in the believers, and He is fully praised in His economy.

#### *The Economy of the Mystery (Ephesians 3:9)*

In chapter three Paul speaks of the stewardship of the grace, which was given to him for the sake of the Body (v. 2). The word *stewardship* is the same Greek word as *economy* in verses 1:10 and 3:9. "The stewardship of the grace is for the dispensing of the grace of God to His chosen people for the producing and building up of the church. Out of this stewardship comes the ministry of the apostle, who is a steward in God's house, ministering Christ as God's grace to God's household" (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 3:2, note 2). Paul received the stewardship of grace through a revelation of the mystery of Christ (v. 3). This revelation of the mystery was the heavenly vision that governed his life and work from the moment of his conversion to the moment of his martyrdom, and it empowered him to work together with the Triune God for the purpose of dispensing the riches of Christ as grace for the building up of the Body of Christ (Acts 26:19;

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2 Tim. 4:16-18; 2 Cor. 6:1). The content of this mystery was not made known to the sons of men in other generations. It was hidden in God, and only as the Triune God was progressively revealed, first as the Son with the Father by the Spirit in incarnation and then through the Spirit as the Son with the Father in resurrection, was it possible for this revelation to be made known to the sons of men. This is because the economy of God, the mystery of God and the mystery of Christ (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4), is not separate from the Triune God Himself. The economy of God is God. Therefore, as the Triune God was progressively revealed, the economy of the mystery progressively unfolded.

**W**ith the revelation of the Son in His incarnation, the economy of the mystery began to unfold, but the manifestation of this economy still involved an element of mystery. Rather than coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matt. 24:30), the Son first came in the way of human birth—God was born of a woman, manifested in the flesh, and found in fashion as a man (Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 3:16; Phil. 2:8). From hiding in the heavens, God chose to hide Himself in flesh, a fact little understood and grasped while He was on the earth. If it had been known, the rulers of this age would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8). So hidden was this mystery that Peter was able to grasp the profound aspect of this step in the divine economy only after receiving a revelation from the Father in the heavens (Matt. 16:17).

In the aftermath of the Son's death and resurrection, the divine economy progressed in the outpouring of the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit (Phil. 1:19). From the day of Pentecost even until now, redemption is applied when the word of the truth proclaims the gospel of our salvation, and when children of wrath are enlivened by grace and sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise by faith in Christ (Eph. 1:13; 2:3, 5, 8). In this stage of the divine economy, the mystery of Christ can be unveiled fully and given freely because faith brings man into an organic union with God through the regeneration of the human spirit by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:15; John 3:6). The express purpose of the anointing, the moving of the Spirit of reality who abides in us, is to guide us into all the reality (1 John 2:27; John 14:17; 16:13). The Spirit also makes known the things which have been graciously given to us by God by revealing them to us, who are joined to the Lord as one spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-12; 6:17).

**T**he economy of the mystery in Ephesians 3:9 was thus revealed and made known to Paul in his regenerated human spirit (v. 5). And the central content of this revelation is the incorporation of both Jewish and Gentile believers into the Body of Christ as fellow members and fellow partakers of the promise (v. 6). The middle wall of partition was broken down through the abolition of the law of the commandments in ordinances, and the two were created in Christ into one new man (2:14-15). Coming as the Spirit, Christ then announced this peace as the gospel so that through Him we both would have access in one Spirit unto the Father (vv. 17-18). For the carrying out of this economy, Paul became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God. "The grace of God is God Himself, especially as life, partaken of and enjoyed by us; the gift of grace is the ability and function produced out of the enjoyment of the grace of God. Grace implies life, and the gift is the ability that comes out of life" (Lee, Recovery Version, 3:7, note 2). Paul not only was a minister according to the gift of grace, but he also was empowered by grace to announce, to impart and dispense, the riches of His grace, which are the riches of Christ, as the gospel (1:7; 2:7; 3:8).

In his announcing of the unsearchable riches of Christ, Paul endeavored to enlighten all that they might see the economy of the mystery for the purpose of making known the multifarious wisdom of God through the church, according to the eternal purpose of God (vv. 9-11). The economy of God is an eternal economy, reflecting as it were the eternal dispensing that exists within the inner trinitarian being of the Godhead. There is no higher purpose, no higher goal, than the dispensing of the Triune God into those who have first hoped in Christ (1:12). Like Paul, we also should bow our knees in



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prayer for the cause of the operation of this economy, the end of which is glory to Him in the church and in Christ Jesus. In his prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21,

Paul asked that the Father would strengthen the saints according to the riches of His glory. This implies that the glory of God is wrought into the saints. In the doxology Paul said, "To Him be the glory" (v. 21). This implies that the glory of God returns to God after it has been wrought into the saints. Firstly, the glory of God is wrought into us; then it returns to God for His glorification. (Lee, *Life-study* 300)

In order to more fully understand the economy of this mystery, it is important to see the operation of this economy, both from the perspective of the Triune God, who works all things according to the counsel of His will (1:11), and from the perspective of the church which is produced and built up through its experience of the operation of the might of His strength (v. 19).

### The Process of the Economy of the Triune God

From its initiation in the Father of glory (1:17) to its consummation with glory in the church and in Christ Jesus (3:21), the economy of the Triune God is intrinsically related to the Triune God Himself, and the process of the economy of the Triune God is fully carried out by the operation of the Triune God.<sup>1</sup> This operation began in eternity past with the Father's selection and predestination, which speaks forth His eternal purpose. Before time, there was an intrinsic desire in the heart of God for expression through sonship. Before the foundation of the world, the Father, motivated by this desire and working according to the counsel of His will, chose us from among humankind to be holy and without blemish and predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ (1:11, 5). Even before there was sin, God was motivated by this desire for an enlarged expression of the divine life through sonship. Redemption serves as a means to satisfy His desire to impart Himself into us as life. The Father's selection and predestination ultimately will be to the praise of the glory of His grace (v. 6).

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**T**he operation of the Triune God in His economy continued in time with the Son's redemption, which speaks forth the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose. Redemption became necessary with the entrance of sin into the perfect realm of God's created order, both in the heavens because of the rebellion of the angels and on the earth because of the disobedience of Adam. The Son accomplished this redemption through the shedding of His blood on the cross for the forgiveness of our offenses (v. 7). "Redemption is what Christ accomplished for our offenses; forgiveness is the application of Christ's accomplishment to our offenses" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 7, note 2). It is applied through the riches of His grace which abound to us as the mystery of His will is made known, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself.

God takes pleasure in making known the mystery of His will because this enables the riches of Christ to abound to us and brings us into His economy. Verse 9 is a marvelous confirmation of the centrality of the economy of God, showing that it is sourced in His very being. It was not an afterthought or a decision forced upon Him by some external contingency. "God's good pleasure was what He purposed in Himself unto the economy of the fullness of the times (v. 10), indicating that God Himself is the initiation, the origination, and the sphere of His eternal purpose, which nothing can overthrow, for which everything is working, and regarding which He did not take counsel with anyone" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 9, note 4). From eternity to eternity, God desires to dispense all that He is, and this dispensing is conveyed as the abounding riches of Christ which head up the members of the Body of Christ.

The economy that God, according to His desire, planned and purposed in Himself is to head up all things in Christ at the fullness of the times. This is accomplished through the

dispensing of the abundant life supply of the Triune God as the life factor into all the members of the church that they may rise up from the death situation and be attached to the Body. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 10, note 1)

In this heading up Christ, the Christ in whom we have first hoped (v. 12), the application of God's accomplished purpose occurs through the operation of the sealing and pledging of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's sealing and pledging speak forth the application of God's accomplished purpose. Through hearing the word of the truth (Gal. 3:2; Rom. 10:17), the gospel becomes the gospel of salvation through faith, and the believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit. In this sealing, the believers are marked with the Spirit as a living seal and given the Spirit as the pledge of inheritance, which will be fully realized with the redemption of the body (Eph. 1:13-14). In the economy of God, there is a mutual inheritance of God and man. God, according to the counsel of His will, has designated us as His inheritance (v. 11), and the Spirit's sealing is the proof that we belong to God (v. 13). Eventually, God will inherit the church as the glorious fulfillment of His economy. We, however, will also inherit God, and the Spirit serves as a pledge, a foretaste of this inheritance. In our experience of the Spirit today, therefore, we know that we eventually will inherit the Triune God to the uttermost.

**I**n the span of just twelve verses, Paul well-speaks of the full process of the economy of God, which originates and operates through the Triune God. At the end of the subsections concerning the Father (vv. 3-6), concerning the Son (vv. 7-12), and concerning the Holy Spirit (vv. 13-14), there is a reference to the praise of His glory. In the operation of the Triune God, glory is not limited just to God, and it does not describe God alone. It describes the Triune God who has been dispensed and wrought into redeemed humanity. Glory is God expressed, and as a result of His economy, God will be fully expressed in the church. This glory is expressed through the believers' experience of the riches of Christ as grace. In this experience of grace there is a heading up that brings the new man, the church, which was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality, out of every vestige of the old creation (4:24). Thus, there will be praise to the glory of His grace (1:6). In His economy, God in Christ as the Spirit is dispensed into man as grace through faith. This grace is Christ, and this faith is Christ. In His economy, God in Christ as the Spirit is expressed in the church as grace unto glory. This grace is Christ, and this glory is Christ. Grace is Christ dispensed, and glory is the dispensed Christ expressed. Without the dispensing of the Triune God, there is no experience of grace and no expression of glory in the church.

In this chapter there are seven crucial things requiring the same basic factor for their accomplishment: God's selection that we should be made holy and without blemish (v. 4); God's predestination that we may become His sons (v. 5); the sealing of the Holy Spirit that we may be fully redeemed (vv. 13-14); the hope of God's calling; the glory of God's inheritance in the saints (v. 18); God's power that causes us to participate in Christ's attainment (vv. 19-22); and the Body of Christ, the fullness of the all-filling Christ. All these are accomplished by the Triune God being dispensed and wrought into our being. The issue of such a divine dispensing into our humanity is the fullness of the One who fills all in all and the praise of God's expressed glory. Actually, this chapter is a revelation of God's marvelous and excellent economy, from His choosing of us in eternity to the producing of the Body of Christ to express Himself for eternity. (Lee, Recovery Version, 1:23, note 3)

Ephesians 1 presents a complete revelation of the economy of the Triune God, and this economy is directed toward the believers' full participation and incorporation into the Triune God. In order for us to fully participate in this economy, we need to see it. In God's economy seeing equals entering (John 3:3, 5), just as making known the mystery issues in an abounding of the riches of grace. After unveiling the process of the economy of God in Ephesians 1:3 through 14, therefore, Paul prayed that the saints, like himself (3:5), would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation to see the economy of



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God in Christ  
as the Spirit is  
dispensed into man  
as grace through  
faith. This grace  
is Christ, and this  
faith is Christ.*

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as the Spirit is  
expressed in the  
church as grace  
unto glory. This  
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and this glory  
is Christ.*





God and fully experience it (1:17). The issue of our experience of this economy is a marvelous consummation of both image and dominion in the New Testament. In this experience there is a transmission of the surpassing greatness of God's power toward us who believe (v. 19). This is the power which God operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies (v. 20). In and through this power, the believers participate in Christ's attainments and Christ's position, which is far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come (v. 21). Within this power there is also the power to subject all things under the feet of His Body, the church, and the power to head up all things in Himself as the Head of the Body (v. 22). This is the consummation and fulfillment the Triune God's desire for a full expression of His image through the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (v. 23). It is also the consummation and fulfillment of the Triune God's desire for unchallenged dominion. In the economy of God, the church is produced, built up, joined, and incorporated into Christ through grace, which is our experience and enjoyment of the dispensed Christ, and the church also is displayed as a masterpiece of God's wisdom through glory (2:10; 3:10), which is our expression of the dispensed Christ, whom we have experienced and enjoyed.

### The Experience of the Economy of the Triune God

Even though the economy of God has a glorious consummation as an issue of the operation of the Triune God, the church's experience of this economy has a less auspicious beginning from the perspective of fallen humanity. This is the reason Paul proceeds in chapter two of Ephesians to describe how the operation of the economy of God produces and builds up the church. In chapter three, he also unveils, through his marvelous prayer in verses 14 through 21, how the believers can remain in a continuing experience of the dispensing of the Triune God.

#### *Producing and Building the Church*

The dispensing of the Triune God has a glorious conclusion in the church, in part, because of the condition of the church at the point when the dispensing commences. In order for the believers to truly see and appreciate the consummation of the church, Paul points to the bleak condition of humanity at the beginning of chapter two.

Grammatically, *and* indicates that the thought in the last sentence of ch. 1 is incomplete. The last verse of ch. 1 reveals that the church, the Body of Christ, was produced by Christ through His attainment. Now this chapter unveils to us the background—the realm of death—from which the church was brought forth. In ch. 1 the church is the issue of the transmission of the heavenly divinity into us. In this chapter the church comes out of the earthly humanity. (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 2:1, note 1)

**T**he principal condition of humanity, prior to God's dispensing, is one of death and division. As unbelievers, we were dead in offenses and sins (2:1), and we walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air. In contrast to the operation of the might of the Triune God's power, the ruler of the authority of the air operated in the sons of disobedience (v. 2). As such, we all conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts (v. 3). We were without hope and God because we were by nature children of wrath (vv. 12, 3). No amount of good works could counteract the power of the law of sin and of death which operated in our members (Rom. 7:23; 8:2). As a result of this condition, we were dead, especially spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1). Forgiveness, however, is not enough to counteract death. While forgiveness rightly aligns us with God according to the standard of His righteousness, holiness, and glory, the divine life still must be dispensed to counteract death.

*In the economy of God, the church is produced, built up, joined, and incorporated into Christ through grace, which is our experience and enjoyment of the dispensed Christ, and the church also is displayed as a masterpiece of God's wisdom through glory, which is our expression of the dispensed Christ.*



In comparison with the book of Romans, the book of Ephesians does not consider us sinners; it considers us dead persons. As sinners, we need God's forgiveness and justification, as revealed in the book of Romans. But as dead persons, we need to be made alive. Forgiveness and justification bring us back to God's presence to enjoy His grace and participate in His life, whereas being made alive causes us, the living members of the Body of Christ, to express Him. God made us alive by imparting His eternal life, which is Christ Himself (Col. 3:4), into our dead spirit through His Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2). He has enlivened us together with Christ. (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 2:5, note 1)

Paul's emphasis in chapter two clearly indicates that our condition cannot be remedied merely with an outward, judicial, and forensic justification—there is a need for the divine life to be imparted into human beings who are spiritually deadened in the human spirit. God's mercy reached us so that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy (Rom. 9:23). God reached us in our pitiful situation to bring us to the point of standing before Him in love, and, according to His exceedingly great and precious promises, He imparted His life and nature into us (2 Pet. 1:4). This is the context in which Paul speaks of grace. When we were dead in offenses, we were made alive together with Christ in His resurrection (Eph. 2:5). The enlivening of life through identification with Christ is grace. It is a shame to merely use, as many do, the verses on grace in Ephesians 2 as "proof texts" of our judicial justification before God. In contrast to this judicial view, grace brings the divine life into the believers. "Grace is God dispensed into us. Therefore, to be saved by grace means to be saved by having the processed Triune God dispensed into us" (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 2:8, note 2).

**T**he believers have been corporately regenerated unto a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). In His resurrection, the divine life of the Triune God in Christ was released to bring forth much fruit (John 12:24). The believers who have been made alive together with Christ are this fruit. For Paul, therefore, grace joins believers to the resurrected Christ through the release of the divine life. Certainly, this grace is not of ourselves. It is the gift of God; it is God as the gift. "The free action of God's grace saved us through our substantiating faith. This faith of ours is the faith by which we believe in Christ, and it is Christ in us as our faith" (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 2:8, note 3). Grace cannot be of works because dead men cannot work, and neither can they boast (v. 9). The only work that we can participate in is the work that occurs after being enlivened, and this is the work of the ministry unto the building up of the Body of Christ (4:12). Such a work produces a masterpiece, prepared beforehand by God in His economy (2:10). This masterpiece is the church as the Body of Christ, the Triune God's inheritance, joy, and enlarged expression.

In the economy of God, the church is produced from humans who were dead but who have been enlivened by the resurrection of Christ. The church, however, is built by joining humans, who once were divided, into one new man in Christ to form His one Body for His full expression. The divisions that have been eliminated in Christ's death pertain to religious practices, race, nationality, social status, and even gender (vv. 11-12; Gal. 3:28). But in Christ Jesus, we have become near in the blood of Christ, and He Himself is our peace (Eph. 2:13-14). The two were created in Himself into one new man and have been reconciled in one Body (vv. 15-16). Now as members of the household of God, the church is being built upon the foundation of the apostles through their unveiling of the mystery of Christ, the economy of the Triune God. This building is the growth, the development, of the divine life which was dispensed to produce the church and which is now being dispensed as a nourishing and cherishing supply of Christ to the church (5:29).

#### *The Experience of Grace unto Glory*

The producing and building of the church through the dispensing of the divine life is the



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*Most Christians cannot seem to advance beyond the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God, and division, rather than oneness among the believers, is lauded as normative. Instead of being to the praise of the glory of His grace, the church is in greater danger of being spewed out of His mouth for its lukewarmness and its degraded testimony.*

destined experience of the church in the divine economy, but much of this experience seems non-existent and, to many, it surely may seem to be overly idealistic and mystical. Speaking of such lofty aims may be interesting to some, but for most, there is little or no evidence that there is even a modicum of this reality in existence in the Body of Christ. Most Christians cannot seem to advance beyond the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God (Heb. 5:12), and division, rather than oneness among the believers, is lauded as normative (see “Misaimings,” page 60 in this issue). Instead of being to the praise of the glory of His grace, the church is in greater danger of being spewed out of His mouth for its lukewarmness and its degraded testimony. Rather than Christ Himself being our peace, the winds of teaching have devastated the church, and new “middle walls” have been erected. Most are satisfied with civilly retaining their distinctions. What a travesty! What a nullification of grace!

**H**ow then is it possible to enter into the economy of God? First, we must pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation, individually, personally, and even corporately. Then we must be willing to exercise ourselves unto godliness by exercising our mingled, human spirit which is the dwelling place of God (1 Tim. 4:7; 1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 2:22). The proper exercise of the human spirit is revealed in Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21. It is a matter of being strengthened, according to the riches of His glory, with resurrection power through the Spirit into the inner man (v. 16).<sup>2</sup> In this strengthening, Christ will begin to make His home in our hearts through an ever-deepening union in the divine life. Then there will be a rooting for growth in the divine life and a grounding for building in love (v. 17). In such an environment of love, there will be strength to apprehend with others all the vast dimensions of Christ in a blended and corporate enjoyment of Christ (1 Cor. 12:24; Eph. 3:18). Eventually, there will be a filling unto all the fullness of God (v. 19). Ultimately, however, we look to Him who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, whose power operates in us to the point that there will be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever (vv. 20-21). To the experience of Christ in the divine economy, we say that He is able; to the obliteration of divisions in practicality, we say that He is able; and to the full expression of Christ in the church, we say, “And now, O LORD God, the word that thou has spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said” (2 Sam. 7:25, KJV).

#### **Grace and Glory: The Triune God Corporately Experienced, Enjoyed, and Expressed**

Grace is the Triune God in Christ becoming our enjoyment for our experience, both individually and corporately. Every spiritual blessing is in Christ, whether it is the putting off of the old man through the application of His death, the enlivening of our deadened spirit through the application of His resurrection, or the subduing of the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies through the application of His ascension and enthronement. Christ is all we need; in fact, as grace, He is all that we have. The Triune God gives, dispenses, nothing but Himself. All of Christ’s wonderful attainments and obtainments have been compounded into His being and have been made available in the Spirit who, at one time, was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. In resurrection, however, He has been glorified, and now as grace, He is bringing His Body into the glory of His full expression. Yes, Lord, do as You have said! [AFC]

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Much of the structure of this section is derived from Witness Lee’s outline of the first chapter of Ephesians, as contained in the Recovery Version of the New Testament, pages 845-846.

<sup>2</sup>The prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3:14-21 is the highest and deepest prayer in the New Testament, and it will take a further article in the next issue of *Affirmation & Critique* to develop

the centrality and practicality of these verses in our experience of God's economy. Even this prayer, briefly stated, is a matter of grace and glory as the following note attests:

In his prayer the apostle prayed that the Father would strengthen the saints according to the riches of His glory. This implies that the glory of God can be wrought into the saints. In the doxology he said, "To Him be the glory" (v. 21), implying that the glory of God, which has been wrought into the saints, returns to God. First, the glory of God is wrought into us; then it returns to God for His glorification....The apostle prayed that God would strengthen the saints according to His glory, "but" eventually God's glory, after being wrought into them, returns to Him along with the strengthened saints. This is the way in which God is glorified in the church. (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 3:20, note 1)



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## EPHESIANS UNVEILS THE CHURCH—THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST, THE BODY OF CHRIST AS THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST, BECOMING THE FULLNESS OF GOD

### CHAPTER 1

**P**aul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He graced us in the Beloved; in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of His grace, which He caused to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence, making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him; in whom also we were designated as an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we would be to the praise of His glory who have first hoped in Christ. In whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in Him also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance unto the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory. Therefore I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you and your love to all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the operation of the might of His strength, which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

## CHAPTER 2

And you, though dead in your offenses and sins, in which you once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all conducted ourselves once in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest; but God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised *us* up together with *Him* and seated *us* together with *Him* in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, that He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast. For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them. Therefore remember that once you, the Gentiles in the flesh, those who are called uncircumcision by that which is called circumcision in the flesh made by hands, that you were at that time apart from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have become near in the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, He who has made both one and has broken down the middle wall of partition, the enmity, abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, *so* making peace, and might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity by it. And coming, He announced peace as the gospel to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near, for through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone; in whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.

## CHAPTER 3

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you, that by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I have written previously in brief, by which, in reading *it*, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit, that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the Body and fellow partakers of the promise through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God which was given to me according to the operation of His power. To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and to enlighten all *that they may see* what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things, in order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church, according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in Him. Therefore I ask *you* not to faint at my afflictions for your sake, since they are your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God. But to Him who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which operates in us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen.