

The Eternal Purpose of God as Revealed in Ephesians 1

by Ron Kangas

Human beings in general and Christian believers in particular want to live a significant and meaningful life on earth, a human life filled with profound purpose and lofty intentions. Influenced by *The Purpose-driven Life*, the best-selling book by Rick Warren, thousands of Christians are seeking to live the kind of purpose-driven life that is taught by Warren and illustrated by what is regarded as the phenomenal success of his ministry and church. Those who ascribe to Warren's written precepts may declare, with the focus on individual human existence, "You were made to live a purpose-driven life!" (*Meditations*). Central to this purpose-driven theology is the following declaration: "You weren't created just for one purpose. You were created for five special reasons that are explained in God's Word, the Bible" (*Meditations*). We are told that this fivefold purpose includes worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism (*Inspiration* 6-7). "Living on purpose," as defined by the purpose-driven literature, "is the only way to *really* live" (275). The purpose-driven individual is even encouraged to compose what is called a "Life Purpose Statement"—a document that "summarizes God's purposes for your life," that "points the direction of your life," that "defines 'success' for you," that "clarifies your roles," and "that expresses your shape," that is, "it reflects the unique ways God made you to serve Him" (275-277). The reader of *The Purpose-driven Life* is told that God "shaped you for a purpose, and he expects you to make the most of what you have been given...To do this you must discover your shape, learn to accept and enjoy it, and then develop it to its fullest extent" (249). Clearly, the emphasis is on a person's individual fulfillment and success, both of which are in keeping with one's psycho-spiritual shape, which one must discover, accept, enjoy, and develop. "Knowing your purpose gives your life meaning, simplicity, focus and motivation. It also prepares you for eternity" (*Inspiration* 21). "From the very beginning, God's plan has been to make you like his Son, Jesus" (135). "You were placed on this planet for a special assignment"

(194). "You are the way you are because you were made for a specific ministry" (201). Such a message has a special appeal to pastors who, to state the obvious, are eager for success in their ministry and their church. The word for them is that "purpose-driven churches are led by purpose-driven leaders" (*Church* 395). "Successful ministry," Warren explains, "is building the church on the purposes of God in the power of the Holy Spirit and *expecting* the results from God" (397).

Here the author, perhaps unwittingly, touches upon a matter that is crucial in the Word of God and dear to the heart of God—the truth that the church which Christ is in the process of building according to God's eternal economy (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16) is vitally and essentially connected to God's eternal purpose. Contrary to what is emphasized in popular purpose-driven literature, God's purpose is not centered on individuals who are desperately seeking fulfillment for themselves in life and rewards for themselves in eternity. God's purpose is focused on *God* and on God's will, God's intention, God's economy, and God's good pleasure. Because this truth is rare among today's believers—the popularity of the purpose-driven books is, perhaps ironically, an evidence of this—it is the goal of this article to present, admittedly in a basic and introductory way, the eternal purpose of God as it is revealed in chapter 1 of the book of Ephesians. Only when we see this grand purpose of God and become one with the Lord in fulfilling it will our present human life be in line with and according to God's will, God's desire, God's intention, and God's goal, and only then will we begin to care not for our "own things" but for "the things of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:21).

An Epistle from the Heart of God

As Paul was writing the Epistle to the Ephesians, he was, spiritually, in a transcendent position, for he was in Christ—the One who is seated at God's "right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power

and lordship” (1:20-21)—and was seated “together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus” (2:6). Thus, in contrast to the book of Romans, which was composed from the perspective of fallen humankind with its countless problems and needs, Ephesians was written from the heavenlies, from eternity, from the eternal purpose of God, and from the heart, will, and good pleasure of God.¹ Because Paul was in spirit (3:5; 1:17), though physically confined in a Roman prison, he was lifted out of his condition into God’s revelation and taken beyond time and space to know the mystery of God’s will (v. 9) and could “see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things” (3:9). Therefore, the special characteristic of Ephesians is that it speaks from God’s eternal purpose. However, in our reading of this Epistle, or any other portion of the Bible, we may be imprisoned in the self, limited by the narrowness and smallness of our mind with its natural and religious concepts, and bound to our personal condition and wholly enveloped in it. Those who study the book of Ephesians while in such a pathetic subjective state are like the proverbial frog in a well, whose vision is limited, at best, to a small circle of sky. If we would understand the truth revealed in this book, we need to be rescued, delivered from ourselves, and even carried away in spirit (Rev. 21:10). We would do well to follow the advice of Witness Lee:

When we come to this book, we need to pray, “Lord, take me out of my condition, away from the earth, and outside of time. Lord, rescue me from my condition and bring me into eternity and into the heavenlies. I want to enter into the heart of God and into His eternal purpose.” (*Ephesians* 9)

God’s Purpose in Relation to His Good Pleasure, Will, Counsel, and Economy

Because the book of Ephesians was written from God’s perspective, this Epistle speaks of God’s good pleasure (1:5, 9), which is related to God’s will, counsel, purpose, and economy. God’s good pleasure is what God likes, what pleases God, what makes Him happy. Although it may sound strange to those with certain theological views, God needs pleasure. Every living thing desires pleasure, and the more living a being or person is, the greater is the need and desire for pleasure and delight. The degree of livingness determines the degree of the need for pleasure. In keeping with this principle, human beings have a greater desire for pleasure than animals do. Since human beings desire more pleasure than animals, because human life is higher than animal life, then we may say that God needs more pleasure than we do, because He not only has the highest life but even is the highest life. God, the living One, has a deep need for pleasure. Because God is the most living One, He surely

needs the most pleasure. The expression *His good pleasure* is related, therefore, to God’s need for pleasure, delight, and happiness.

A deeper and fuller understanding of God’s good pleasure is that this refers to the desire of God’s heart. Deep within the intrinsic being of God is a desire, a longing, a yearning, and only when this desire is fulfilled will God find the joy, delight, and satisfaction that He requires. All those who truly love the Lord and seek to live in oneness with Him should care for the desire God has in His heart, realizing that the significance of our life on earth is determined by the extent to which we care for God’s heart’s desire and contribute to its fulfillment.

God’s good pleasure, the desire of His heart, is intimately related to Christ, to the church, to the divine sonship, and to God’s working Himself in Christ into His chosen people. The church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 22-23). Because God delights in Christ, He delights also in the church as the corporate expression of Christ; thus, God’s good pleasure, the desire of His heart, is focused on the church. It is God’s good pleasure to produce and build up the church as the living, organic Body of Christ, as the universal fullness of Christ. Since the church is composed of the many sons of God—those who have been born of God to have the life and nature of God for the expression of God—God delights in His sons, and His good pleasure is to bring many sons into glory (Heb. 2:10). The many sons of God, as the reproduction and increase of Christ as the firstborn Son of God, are produced by God’s working Himself in Christ into His chosen and redeemed people.² Therefore, the desire of God’s heart is to cause Christ to make His home in our hearts (Eph. 3:17), and for this purpose He is strengthening us with power through His Spirit into our inner man by dispensing Himself into us (v. 16). Christ, the church, the sons, the divine dispensing—all are a matter of God’s good pleasure. When God, who delights in His beloved Son, has the church as the Body of Christ constituted with the many sons indwelt by Christ, God will enjoy eternal rest in the fulfillment of the desire of His heart.

God’s good pleasure, being the desire of God’s heart, has its origin in God Himself, not in extrinsic things. In fact, the desire in God’s heart preceded the creation of the universe and is the reason for its existence (Rev. 4:11). Having received a revelation concerning this, Paul could speak of God’s “good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself” (Eph. 1:9).

God’s good pleasure is intimately related to His will and is embodied in His will. In Ephesians 1 Paul speaks of the good pleasure of God’s will (v. 5), the mystery of God’s will (v. 9), and the counsel of God’s will (v. 11). In these

verses the word *will* does not indicate that God has a strong, overpowering will but that He has a wish, an intention, which He desires to carry out for His good pleasure. God's will is what God wishes to do, wants to do, and intends to do. A will is an intention, and the will of God is God's intention, which is intrinsically connected to the desire of His heart. God's good pleasure—the desire of His heart—is conveyed in His will. The divine good pleasure has become the divine will, for out of His good pleasure and according to it, God has an intention to accomplish something, and this intention is His will. Thus, God's will is God's intention to fulfill His good pleasure and to gain what He desires for eternity future.

God's will was hidden in Himself as a mystery, and for this reason Ephesians 1:9 speaks of the mystery of His will. In eternity past God had a will, and then He concealed His will within Himself as a mystery. However, in Christ and through Christ, the hidden will of God, the mystery of God's will, has been made known to us, and thus Paul speaks of "the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages but has now been manifested" (Rom. 16:25-26). "By revelation," Paul testifies, "the mystery was made known to me" (Eph. 3:3), and now we may be enlightened to see what the economy of the mystery is (v. 9). How blessed we are to know, in Christ, the mystery of God's will!



In eternity God planned a will. This will was hidden in Him; hence, it was a mystery. In His wisdom and prudence He has made this hidden mystery known to us through His revelation in Christ, that is, through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. (Recovery Version, 1:9, note 2)

As revealed in Ephesians 1, three matters are of God's will: the good pleasure of His will, the mystery of His will, and the counsel of His will. Regarding the counsel of God's will, verse 11 tells us that we have been "predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will." "God's will is His intention; God's counsel is His consideration of the way to accomplish His will or intention" (Recovery Version, v. 11, note 4). This counsel was the result of a council among the three of the Godhead. In eternity past there was a council involving the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—and a decision was made called a counsel. This decision was a resolution, and this resolution is God's determined will to fulfill His good pleasure, which is embodied in His will, His intention. Because God's good pleasure and intention are now His determination to do His will,

nothing will ultimately hinder Him or frustrate Him. Rather, all things were created because of God's will (Rev. 4:11), and for His determined will God continues to work all things until His desire in eternity past is fulfilled in and for eternity future.

If we have a clear view of God's good pleasure and will, we can gain a general understanding of God's purpose. Ephesians 1:9 puts together God's will, good pleasure, and purpose: "Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself." The fact that according to His counsel, the Triune God made a purpose means that the counsel—the determined will of God—became a purpose, a plan. God's good pleasure is embodied not only in His will and in the counsel of His will but also in His purpose, which, as a plan made in eternity past for eternity future, was His intent set beforehand, the purposeful determination in His plan. God's purpose is eternal; it is the eternal plan of God made in eternity past before the beginning of time. "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

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which He did not take counsel with anyone" (Recovery Version, v. 9, note 4).

God's eternal purpose is carried out by God's economy—God's plan and arrangement, according to His universal administration to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people as their life and their life supply in order to make them His corporate expression, which is the Body of Christ consummating in the New Jerusalem.³ In Ephesians 1:10 Paul speaks of "the economy of the fullness of the times," and in 3:9, of "the economy of the mystery." As indicated by the Greek word *oikonomia* (from *oikos*, "house," plus *nomos*, "law"), God's economy is His household administration, in which He has a governmental arrangement to dispense the wealth of His being into His children so that they become the house of God, which is the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15).

The divine economy is the issue of God's good pleasure, will, counsel, and purpose. God's good pleasure is embodied in His will, His intent, which has become the counsel of His will expressed as His eternal purpose. The

divine economy was made by the Triune God according to the purpose of the ages in Christ. In the gradual accomplishment of God's economy, the central matter is the divine dispensing of the divine life into the believers.

The Lord's using five loaves and two fish to feed thousands of men, women, and children illustrates the connection between God's arrangement—His economy—and God's dispensing—the distribution of the wealth of God's being to the members of His household. The Lord Jesus arranged the people into groups, by hundreds and by fifties, and then after blessing the loaves and the fish, He gave them to the disciples, who distributed them to the multitude gathered there (Mark 6:38-41). Without the arrangement, there would have been no dispensing. The arrangement was for the dispensing, and the dispensing was based upon the arrangement. Likewise, for the fulfillment of the desire of His heart, God has a will, a counsel, and a purpose, all of which are carried out by His economy, which is an arrangement for dispensing. As we will see, the goal of the divine economy with the divine dispensing is the church as the organic Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:10, 22-23).

A Definition of God's Eternal Purpose

God's eternal purpose is to have the Body of Christ, which will consummate in and consummate as the New Jerusalem (vv. 22-23; Rev. 21:2). According to the divine revelation in the book of Ephesians, the eternal purpose of God, which He made in Christ, is to produce and build up the church as the organic Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. For the Body of Christ, we have been blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ (1:3). For the Body of Christ, we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world—that is, before the creation of the universe—to be holy and without blemish before God in love (v. 4). For the Body of Christ, we were predestinated unto sonship through Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of the Father's will (v. 5). For the Body of Christ, we have been graced by God in the Beloved (v. 6). For the Body of Christ, we have redemption through the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of offenses (v. 7). For the Body of Christ, God has caused the riches of His grace to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence (vv. 7-8). For the Body of Christ, we have been designated as an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who is working all things according to the counsel of His will (v. 11). For the Body of Christ, we have heard the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation, and have believed in Christ (v. 13). For the Body of Christ, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance (vv. 13-14). For the Body of Christ, we need to receive from the Father a spirit of wisdom and revelation, and the


eyes of our heart need to be enlightened so that we may know the hope of God's calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of His power, which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead, in seating Him at God's right hand in the heavenlies, in subjecting all things under His feet, and in giving Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His Body (vv. 17-23). Through the church as the Body of Christ, God will "head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him" (v. 10). Ultimately and eternally, in the church as the Body of Christ, we will be to the praise of God's glory (vv. 6, 12, 14). Therefore, God's eternal purpose, according to His good pleasure, will, and counsel, is to have the Body of Christ.

At this juncture, let us consider the details of this marvelous, profound revelation item by item.

A Purpose Made by God in Christ

God's eternal purpose was made by God in Christ and therefore is centered in Christ and on Christ, the Son of God. Because God's eternal purpose is altogether in Christ, the believers are required to focus on Christ, know Christ, and experience Christ by, experientially, being in Christ and having Christ live in them through their living in the mingled spirit and walking by the Spirit. If we are not in Christ actually and practically, we cannot know the purpose of God formed in Christ, His beloved Son. The Father has declared emphatically that He delights in His Son: "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight" (Matt. 3:17). The fact that God's good pleasure, will, and purpose are centered in Christ is indicated by the frequent mention of Christ in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

- This Epistle is addressed to those who are faithful in Christ Jesus (1:1).
- Grace and peace come to us from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 2).
- Every spiritual blessing comes to us in Christ (v. 3).
- God chose us in Christ and predestinated us through Christ (vv. 4-5).
- God has graced us in the Beloved (v. 6).
- In the Beloved we have redemption and forgiveness (v. 7).
- The economy of the fullness of the times is to head up all things in Christ (v. 10).

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- In Christ we were designated as an inheritance (v. 11).
 - We have hoped in Christ (v. 12).
 - In Christ we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise (v. 13).
 - God is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 17).
 - The might of God's strength operates in Christ (vv. 19-20).
 - God raised Christ from the dead, seated Christ at His right hand in the heavenlies, subjected all things under the feet of Christ, and gave Christ to be Head over all things (vv. 20-22).
 - God made us alive together with Christ (2:5).
 - God raised us up together with Christ and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus (v. 6).
 - God will display the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (v. 7).
 - We are God's masterpiece created in Christ Jesus (v. 10).
 - In Christ Jesus we have become near (v. 13).
 - Christ is our peace and has made the Jews and Gentiles one (v. 14).
 - Christ abolished the law of the commandments in ordinances (v. 15).
 - Christ created the one new man in Himself (v. 15).
 - Christ has reconciled us in one Body to God (v. 16).
 - Christ has announced peace as the gospel (v. 17).
 - Through Christ we have access in one Spirit unto the Father (v. 18).
 - Christ Jesus is the cornerstone (v. 20).
 - God's universal building is growing in Christ (v. 21).
 - In Christ we are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit (v. 22).
 - Paul was a prisoner of Christ Jesus (3:1).
 - The church is the mystery of Christ (v. 4).
 - In Christ we are fellow heirs, fellow members of the Body, and fellow partakers of the promise (v. 6).
 - Paul announced the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel (v. 8).
 - God made His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord (v. 11).
 - In Christ we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in Him (v. 12).
 - Christ is making His home in our hearts (v. 17).
 - We can know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ (v. 19).
 - To God there is glory in Christ Jesus (v. 21).
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Because God's eternal purpose is altogether in Christ, the believers are required to focus on Christ, know Christ, and experience Christ by, experientially, being in Christ and having Christ live in them through their living in the mingled spirit and walking by the Spirit.
- Paul was a prisoner in the Lord (4:1).
 - There is one Lord (v. 5).
 - Grace is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ (v. 7).
 - Christ descended and ascended that He might fill all things (v. 10).
 - Christ gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers for the perfecting of the saints (vv. 11-12).
 - The work of the ministry is the building up of the Body of Christ (v. 12).
 - We need to arrive at the full knowledge of the Son of God and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (v. 13).
 - We may grow up into Christ the Head in all things (v. 15).
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- Out from Christ as the Head, the Body causes the growth of the Body (v. 16).
 - Paul testified in the Lord (v. 17).
 - We have learned Christ (v. 20).
 - We have heard Christ and have been taught in Him as the reality is in Jesus (v. 21).
 - God in Christ Jesus has forgiven us (v. 32).
 - Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor (5:2).
 - We may have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ (v. 5).
 - We are light in the Lord (v. 8).
 - We should prove what is well pleasing to the Lord (v. 10).
 - Christ will shine on us (v. 14).
 - We need to understand what the will of the Lord is (v. 17).
 - We should give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 20).
 - We should be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (v. 21).
 - Wives should be subject to their husbands as to the Lord (v. 22).
 - Christ is Head of the church and the Savior of the Body (v. 23).
 - The church is subject to Christ (v. 24).
 - Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (v. 25).
 - Christ is sanctifying the church and cleansing the church (v. 26).
 - Christ will present the church to Himself glorious (v. 27).
 - Christ nourishes and cherishes the church (v. 29).
 - The great mystery concerns Christ and the church (v. 32).
 - Children should obey their parents in the Lord (6:1).
 - We should obey Christ with singleness of heart (v. 5).
 - We are slaves of Christ, serving the Lord (vv. 6-7).
 - We will receive recompense from the Lord (v. 8).
 - Our Master is in the heavens (v. 9).
 - We need to be empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength (v. 10).
 - Tychicus was a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord (v. 21).
 - Peace and love with faith are from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 23).
 - Grace is with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility (v. 24).
- S**ince this article is devoted specifically to Ephesians 1, it is necessary to comment on the relationship between Christ and the purpose of God as unfolded in this chapter. As verse 1 makes evident, this Epistle is addressed to those who are “faithful in Christ Jesus.” If we are not experientially in Christ as we read this portion of the Word, we are not qualified to receive and understand its contents. In verse 3 Paul assures us that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ, indicating thereby that Christ is the sphere, the realm, in which we are blessed by God and that apart from Christ and outside of Christ, we cannot receive spiritual blessings. In verses 4 and 5 Paul goes on to declare that in Christ God chose us to be holy and without blemish before Him and that through Christ we were predestinated unto sonship. In Christ the Beloved we have been graced, and in Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of offenses (vv. 6-7). The economy of the fullness of the times is in Christ to head up all things in the universe—the things in the heavens and the things on the earth (v. 10). *In Christ* and *in Him* point to the centrality of Christ in God’s purpose and economy (v. 9). In Christ “we were designated as an inheritance,” a designation that is “according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (v. 11). We have hoped in Christ (v. 12), and in Christ, having heard the word of the truth, we were “sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise” (v. 13). God has caused His power 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. (vv. 20-21)
- Furthermore, God has subjected all things under the feet
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of Christ and “gave Him to be Head over all things to the church” (v. 22). The church is Christ’s Body, “the fullness of the One who fills all in all” (v. 23). Apart from Christ, God has no purpose, and outside of Christ, we cannot know God’s purpose. Only by being in Christ can we participate in the accomplishing of the eternal purpose of God.

Blessed with Every Spiritual Blessing

In Christ we are blessed spiritually. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ” (v. 3). In Christ we bless God, for in Christ we are blessed by God. This tremendous blessing is not for our prosperity or material benefit but for God’s purpose. If we rely upon natural human ability and skill, we cannot be used by God to contribute to the fulfillment of His heart’s desire. We need to recognize our need of God’s blessing and realize that in our life and service everything depends on God’s spiritual blessing. We have a picture of this in Genesis 1. After He created humankind as male and female, “God blessed them; and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (v. 28). God created humanity for His purpose, and for His purpose He blessed them. The principle is the same in the present age, the age of grace and of the church. In Christ and for the fulfillment of His purpose, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Regrettably, believers often appreciate physical blessing and prosperity more than spiritual blessing. The more we live on earth for God’s will, counsel, good pleasure, purpose, and economy, the more we will treasure the spiritual blessings with which God has blessed us in Christ.⁴



When God chose us to be holy, He selected us to be constituted with Himself as the One who is holy. This saturation implies deification—the organic process in Christ by which we are made the same as God in life and nature but not in the Godhead or as an object of worship.

Chosen to Be Holy and without Blemish

For His purpose to have the church as the Body of Christ, God chose us in Christ to be holy and without blemish. The words *be holy* refer not merely to our extrinsic behavior but primarily to our intrinsic being. Our being holy in Christ involves separation, saturation, and deification. To be separated unto God means that in our standing before God we are distinct, uncommon, and fundamentally different from unbelievers. Before the creation of the universe, God selected us to stand apart from ordinary, common human beings and thus to be wholly for God. Based upon our separation, we have the experience of being saturated with the holy nature of God through the inward sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, a

work in which the nature of God is dispensed into us and constituted into us. “According to the Holy One who called you, you yourselves also be holy in all your manner of life; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy because I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Only God can declare, “I am holy,” for holiness is God’s nature. Since we are commanded by God to be holy and only God is holy, what we need is God, the Holy One Himself, wrought into us in Christ to be our holiness. Therefore, when God chose us to be holy, He selected us to be constituted with Himself as the One who is holy. This saturation implies deification—the organic process in Christ by which we are made the same as God in life and nature but not in the Godhead or as an object of worship. In brief, by choosing us to be holy, God was actually choosing us to become God in this limited sense. God is holy, and we are commanded to be holy; this can be accomplished only by our becoming God in His attribute of holiness. This separation, saturation, and deification, which are required for the producing of sons of God, will consummate in the holy city, New Jerusalem. This city, as a corporate divine and human person, the mingling of divinity and humanity, will be the ultimate issue of the chosen ones being

saturated with God and actually becoming God in life and nature without becoming God in the Godhead. If we see this, we will realize that, even before the foundation of the world, in eternity past, God’s intention was to make us the same as Himself in His holy nature. Deification, therefore, has its source in the will, purpose, and good pleasure of God.

The ones chosen by God to be holy as He is holy will be without blemish before Him; with them there will be no defects, imperfections, or foreign elements. As God Himself examines them and then places them on display before the universe for His glory, He will find them—and others will declare them—to be altogether without blemish, without anything contrary to God’s holy nature. The following note makes the point with striking clarity:

A blemish is like a foreign particle in a precious gem. God’s chosen ones should be saturated with only God Himself, having no foreign particles, such as the fallen natural human element, the flesh, the self, or worldly things. This is to be without blemish, without any mixture, without any element other than God’s holy nature.

The church, after being thoroughly washed by the water in the word, will be sanctified in such a way (5:26-27). (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:4, note 4)

Predestinated unto Sonship

Ephesians 1:5 says, “Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” God delights in His beloved Son, in whom He finds His delight, and according to the good pleasure of His will, He has predestinated us unto sonship—unto the life, position, and expression of divine sons. Contrary to the opinion of certain theologians, what is in view in verse 5 is neither redemption nor salvation but sonship. As we will see, redemption is a remedial procedure in God’s economy, which recovers His chosen and predestinated ones to His original purpose concerning the church as the Body of Christ. God’s purpose is to have glorified sons as the components of the Body of Christ (Heb. 2:10).⁵

The sons of God must have the life of the Son of God, that is, the divine, eternal, uncreated, indestructible life of God. “God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:11-12). In order to have the life of God, God’s chosen and predestinated ones must be born of God to become children of God (John 3:3, 5-6, 15-16; 1:12-13). This, of course, is a matter of regeneration. Regeneration—to be born of the Spirit in our spirit—is to receive another life, the eternal life, the life of God, in addition to our natural created human life. Because we have the life of God, we are children of God (1 John 3:1-2), and now the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16). Through our growth in the divine life by the dispensing of the Triune God as life into our tripartite being (vv. 2, 6, 10-11), we develop into sons of God, a primary characteristic of which is to be led by the Spirit (v. 14). Upon reaching maturity in Christ (Heb. 6:1), God’s chosen ones will be granted the legal, official position of sons that qualifies them to be heirs of God (Rom. 8:17-19).

According to the Scriptures, a son is the expression of the father. The pattern of this is the Godhead itself, where the Son is the expression of the Father. God has spoken to us in the Son, who is the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance (Heb. 1:1-3). The Gospel of John, in particular, reveals the Son as the expression of the Father: “No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (1:18). When Philip said to the Lord Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us,” He said, “Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the

Father” (14:8-9). To see the Son is to see the Father because the Son is the expression of the Father. What is true of the only begotten Son is, in principle, true of the many sons whom God the Father is bringing into glory (Heb. 2:10). The only begotten Son is the individual expression of the Father, and the many sons are the corporate expression of the Father, for they have the life, nature, and glory of the Father (John 17:22) so that, as a corporate organic entity—the Body of Christ—they may be the expression of the Triune God.

Central to the truth concerning sonship is the fact that we become sons of God “through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5). The name *Jesus* refers particularly to the Lord’s incarnation, human living, and death on the cross for our redemption; the title *Christ* applies especially to the Lord’s resurrection and exaltation, in which, by His heavenly ministry, He is carrying out His God-ordained commission to build up the church, His Body (Matt. 16:18). Our being sons, therefore, depends upon the processes of the Lord’s incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and indwelling; only in Him and through Him are we sons of God.

This is predicated upon Christ’s becoming, in and through resurrection, the firstborn Son of God, who has many brothers (John 20:17; Rom. 8:29). As the eternal only begotten Son of God in the immutable Godhead, Christ alone is the Son of God, and there can be no other. As the only begotten Son of God possessing divinity but not humanity, the unique Son does not have and cannot have brothers. In the Godhead for eternity there will be the only begotten Son. But God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin for our redemption (v. 3), and thus the Lord became the Son of Man, having humanity as well as divinity. In resurrection He was begotten by God as the firstborn Son (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5-6), and His humanity was glorified, uplifted, and brought into the divine sonship. This makes it possible for God to have many sons (reproductions and duplications of the Firstborn) and for Christ to have many brothers. Significantly, Hebrews 2:10 speaks of sons, and verse 11, of brothers. God is leading many sons into glory, in verse 10, through Christ as the Author of our salvation. Verse 11 continues, “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers.”⁶ Now in His economy God has many sons, and Christ has many brothers, and this is for the Body of Christ.

In our study of Ephesians 1:5, we need to consider Romans 8:29. Both verses speak of predestination. The latter verse says, “Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers.” The Son is the image, the expression, of God, and

we, the many sons, are being transformed into and conformed to the image of the resurrected Christ as the firstborn Son of God in order to become His corporate expression. Once again, predestination is connected not to redemption but to sonship. Christ is the Son of God's love (Col. 1:13), and the Father delights in Him. According to His good pleasure, the desire of His heart, God the Father has predestinated us unto sonship and to be conformed to the image of His Son. Together, the firstborn Son as the Head of the Body and the many sons as the members of the Body will be the corporate expression of God, and with this expression of Himself in the Son and in the sons, God will be well pleased and eternally satisfied.


Graced in the Beloved

In the Beloved—the unique, precious Son of God—we have been graced by God. “He graced us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). How should we understand *graced* here? The traditional view is that for God to grace us means that He bestows favor, granting us “unmerited favor,” a common definition of grace. This view is correct, at least in a limited sense, but it is shallow. If we study the theme of grace throughout the New Testament, we will see that far from being mere unmerited favor kindly shown to us by God, grace in a higher definition is the Triune God in His economy—God in Christ as the Spirit—dispensed into us, giving everything to us, being everything in us, and doing everything for us in the way of delight and enjoyment. Grace is the Triune God Himself—the grace of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the grace of which the Spirit is (1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Cor. 8:9; 13:14; Heb. 10:29). If we follow the Scriptures to have this understanding of grace, we will realize that to be graced in the Beloved is to experience and enjoy the Triune God as grace in His economy.

The New Testament reveals that grace is related to Christ in His incarnation, human life, crucifixion, and resurrection. “The Word became flesh...full of grace” (John 1:14), for “grace...came through Jesus Christ” (v. 17). This is grace in the Lord's incarnation. “The little child grew...and the grace of God was upon Him” (Luke 2:40). “Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature and in the grace manifested in Him before God and men” (v. 52). This is grace in the Lord's human living. “All bore witness to Him and marveled at the words of grace proceeding out of His mouth” (4:22). This is grace in the Lord's ministry. “We see Jesus, who was made a little inferior to the angels because of the suffering of death...so that by the

grace of God He might taste death on behalf of everything” (Heb. 2:9). This is grace in the Lord's crucifixion. Now in resurrection and ascension Christ supplies us with His all-sufficient grace. This grace enabled Paul to say, “By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me” (1 Cor. 15:10). If we read this verse in the context of 1 Corinthians 15, we will see that the grace which makes us what we are and which enables us to labor is nothing less the Christ in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit. In the midst of suffering, Paul received grace from the resurrected Christ: “He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9). Having a rich and deep enjoyment of the grace of God, Paul could exhort Timothy, saying, “You therefore, my child, be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1).

The grace which is in Christ is the grace with which God graces us in the Beloved. The words *in the Beloved* indicate a sphere of indescribable delight (Eph. 1:6), wherein we “exult with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory”



Far from being mere unmerited favor kindly shown to us by God, grace in a higher definition is the Triune God in His economy—God in Christ as the Spirit—dispensed into us, giving everything to us, being everything in us, and doing everything for us in the way of delight and enjoyment.

as we receive, experience, and enjoy the Triune God as our all-sufficient, super-abounding grace (1 Pet. 1:8). To be graced in this way is to have God in Christ as our enjoyment and supply.

The consummation of our experience and enjoyment of the grace of the Triune God is the church as the Body of Christ. To see this we need to join verses 6 through 8 of Ephesians 1 with verses 22 and 23. The grace with which we are graced in the Beloved produces and builds up the church as the Body of Christ. Paul testified that grace was given to him to announce the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is and to know the function of the church in the eternal purpose of God (3:8-11). Paul goes on to say, “To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (4:7). When we read this in light of Ephesians as a whole and chapter 4 in particular, we will note the relationship between grace in 3:8 and the building up of the Body in 4:16. For the Body we should speak words that are good for building up, words that minister grace to those who hear (v. 29). Every part of the church

as the organic Body of Christ is an issue of the grace of God, and every function in the Body is according to the measure of the grace of God in His economy. It surely is significant, then, that Paul's closing word concerns grace: "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility" (6:24).

Based upon Redemption

The redemption of Christ is the basis upon which we receive the grace of God to fulfill the eternal purpose of God, which is to produce and build up the Body of Christ. Immediately after speaking in 1:6 of God's gracing us in the Beloved, Paul continues in verse 7, saying, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of His grace." Some crucial matters require comment.

First, it is in the Beloved that we have redemption and the forgiveness of offenses (which is the application of the redemption accomplished by Christ in His vicarious death). To be in the Beloved requires that we believe into Him (John 3:15-16) and thereby enter into an organic union with Him, forever living as branches abiding in the vine (15:1-5). As the children of Israel had to be in the house in order to experience the passover, so we need to be in Christ in order to benefit from His marvelous redemption. Outside of Christ there is no redemption and no forgiveness of offenses.

The redemption and forgiveness we have in Christ are according to the riches of God's grace. The grace of God opens the way for us to be in Christ as the Beloved, the unique realm in which God graces His people. Apart from grace we cannot be in Christ, and apart from being in Christ we cannot be graced by God for the Body of Christ.

The most important point concerning redemption in the context of Ephesians 1 is that it is not an end in itself. Sadly, many believers, including pastors and theologians, do not properly connect Christ's redemption to God's eternal purpose. We have emphasized the fact that, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, God made His purpose, and in Christ, before the existence of the angels, the universe, and human beings, God chose us to be holy and predestinated us unto sonship for the Body of Christ. This is the view from eternity, from the heavens, and from the heart of God. Because of the fall of humanity into sin—a condition that, unremedied, would make it impossible for God, who is righteous and must condemn sin and judge sinners—God instituted His judicial redemption to fulfill His purpose with us. Thus, although we were chosen and predestinated *before* the foundation of the world, the Lamb of God was slain *from* the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). God, in His infinite

foreknowledge, anticipated the fall of humankind and for the sake of His purpose prepared the means of redemption. Because the Lamb without blemish was foreknown before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:18-20) and was slain from the foundation of the world, "Christ's death was not a historical accident but an act planned by God according to the purpose of His good pleasure and announced beforehand through the prophets" (Recovery Version, Acts 3:18, note 1). Instead of being the goal, redemption is the procedure whereby we, sinners under the righteous judgment of God, can be justified, forgiven, and reconciled to God. Furthermore, with redemption as the solid basis, God is now able, without jeopardizing His righteousness in His government, to impart the divine life into us through regeneration to fulfill His good pleasure that we would be sons of God for the Body of Christ. Redemption is for God's eternal purpose.

Carried Out by the Divine Dispensing

Because we have redemption in the Beloved and are in Him, in whom we receive every spiritual blessing, we can receive the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—by which, in the divine life, we participate in God's purpose and contribute to its accomplishment in our generation. The revelation concerning the Triune God in the holy Word is not merely for doctrinal understanding but primarily for the dispensing of God in His Divine Trinity into His chosen, predestinated, redeemed, and regenerated people for their experience and enjoyment so that they may be holy sons of God for the constitution of the Body of Christ. The book of Ephesians is constructed with the Trinity, for every chapter is structured with the Divine Trinity as its basic element, and every chapter discloses the divine dispensing for the producing and building up of the church as the Body of Christ.

Chapter 1 unveils how God the Father chose and predestinated us in eternity, how God the Son redeemed us, and how God the Spirit sealed us as a pledge (vv. 3-14) for the formation of the Body of Christ (vv. 22-23). Central here is the fundamental truth in God's economy that the Triune God is working Himself in Christ as the Spirit into us for the Body, operating through the Father's choice and predestination, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging. The Body of Christ comes into being by the dispensing of the Triune God as the life and the life supply into the believers, a revelation which is supported by a threefold mention of the praise of God in relation, respectively, to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Such a threefold dispensing is for the church as the Body of Christ.

Chapter 2 shows us that in the Divine Trinity all the believers have access unto God the Father through God

the Son in God the Spirit (v. 18). Through God the Son, who is the Accomplisher, and in God the Spirit, who is the Executor, the application, we have access to God the Father, who is the unique source and origin. We are a poem, a masterpiece (v. 10), written by the dispensing of the Father as the source, the Son as the course, and the Spirit as the flow (cf. 2 Cor. 13:14). The Father's dispensing to produce the masterpiece, the Son's dispensing to produce the new man (Eph. 2:15-16), and the Spirit's dispensing to bring us to the Father in one Body result in the building up of the church (vv. 18, 21-22).

In chapter 3 Paul prays that God the Father will grant us to be strengthened through God the Spirit into our inner man so that Christ, God the Son, may make His home in our hearts. The issue is that we are filled unto all the fullness of God. The Father is the source, the Spirit is the means, the Son is the object, and the fullness of the Triune God—the expression of the Triune God in the church—is the issue.

Chapter 4 portrays how the processed Triune God as the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father is mingled with the Body of Christ so that all the members of the Body may experience the Divine Trinity and grow up into Christ the Head in all things for the building up of the Body of Christ (vv. 4-6, 15-16). The dispensing of God the Father in His being over all, of God the Son in His being through all, and of God the Spirit in His being in all enables all the members of the Body of Christ to experience and be constituted with the Triune God. As the result, four persons—the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body—are mingled together, making the Triune God and the Body a four-in-one organic entity.⁷

In chapter 5 Paul exhorts the believers to praise the Lord, God the Son, with the songs of God the Spirit, and to give thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, to God the Father (vv. 19-20). This is to praise and thank the processed and consummated Triune God—God in His economy for the Body—for our experience and enjoyment of Him as members of the Body of Christ. Through His precious economical dispensing, we are children of God with the life and nature of God, walking in God as love and light (vv. 2, 8).

Chapter 6 charges us to fight the spiritual warfare by being empowered in the Lord, God the Son, by putting on the whole armor of God the Father and by wielding the sword of the Spirit (vv. 10-11, 17). God the Son is the power within us, God the Father is the armor upon

us, and God the Spirit is the sword, which Spirit is the word of God. Once again, this is the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity for the producing, building up, and functioning of the Body of Christ.

A Mutual Inheritance

This dispensing produces a mutual inheritance—God as the believers' inheritance and the believers as God's inheritance (1:11, 14). First, God is our inheritance, and then, through our experience and enjoyment of the Triune God in the divine dispensing, we become God's inheritance. In verses 13 and 14 we see that the Holy Spirit of the promise is the pledge of our inheritance. Our inheritance is God Himself with all that He is, all that He has, all that He has accomplished, and all that He has done and intends to do for His chosen and predestinated people. In Colossians 2:9 we see that the Triune God is embodied in Christ, who is the portion allotted to us as our inheritance (1:12). The Holy Spirit is moving within us as the pledge, the surety, the guarantee, of the Triune God as our eternal inheritance, providing us a blessed foretaste today and assuring us of



In ourselves and in our natural constitution we are not God's inheritance and cannot ever be His inheritance. It is only as God in Christ, with His supreme preciousness, is wrought into us that we become God's inheritance, something precious to Him for His delight and satisfaction.

the full taste that we will enjoy in eternity.

The more we experience and enjoy the divine dispensing of the Triune God as our inheritance, the more we become His inheritance for His possession and enjoyment. To be sure, in ourselves and in our natural constitution we are not God's inheritance and cannot ever be His inheritance. It is only as God in Christ, with His supreme preciousness, is wrought into us that we become God's inheritance, something precious to Him for His delight and satisfaction:

In Christ we have been made God's inheritance. It is by having the Triune God wrought into us that we are constituted into an inheritance. As God's element is wrought into our being, we become His inheritance in reality...

We, the saints, are God's inheritance. However, what we are by nature cannot be God's inheritance. God does not desire to inherit our nature, our flesh, our natural being. He desires to inherit all that He has wrought into us of Himself. Therefore, whatever God has wrought into us of Himself becomes His inheritance...

Through the sealing of the Spirit God is working His essence into our being that He may enjoy us, His acquired possession, as His inheritance...

It is God Himself within us who constitutes His inheritance among the saints...If God is not wrought into us, we could not become His inheritance, His peculiar possession. The believers become precious to Him by being saturated with the divine essence. Only in this way can poor sinners become God's special treasure. In this universe God is the only One who is precious. Now this precious God of matchless worth is working Himself into us to make us His glorious inheritance...

As heirs of God we enjoy Him as our inheritance, and we become His inheritance for His enjoyment. Therefore, our enjoyment of the divine inheritance consummates in our being made God's inheritance. We enjoy God. Then our enjoyment of Him makes us His enjoyment.

...As He is dispensed into us and constituted into us, we become His enjoyment. Eventually God will enjoy Himself in our constitution. (Lee, *Conclusion* 1092-1094)

The Church as the Body of Christ

The issue of the blessing, the grace, and the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity is the church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). The economy of God is for the Body of Christ (1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 3:9-11; 4:16). God's plan and arrangement according to His good pleasure for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose is to produce the Body of Christ as the organism for His expression and move. The Body of Christ is the intrinsic significance of the church. Without the Body of Christ as its significance, the church would be lifeless, meaningless, and nothing more than a human organization. The church as the house of God, the kingdom of God, and the bride of Christ takes the Body of Christ as its intrinsic factor. The Body is the church, the house of God, the kingdom of God, and the bride, the counterpart, of Christ (1:22-23; 2:21-22; 1 Tim. 3:15; Rom. 14:17; Rev. 19:7).

The church as the Body of Christ is the fullness of the universal, all-inclusive Christ, the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22-23). The church is the Body, and the Body is the fullness; these two levels of *is* are not in parallel but in succession. The Body is the fullness of the Head, and the fullness is the expression of the Head. This fullness issues from the enjoyment of the unsearchable riches of Christ (3:8). This means that the fullness of Christ is Christ experienced by us, Christ assimilated by us, and Christ constituted into us to become our element, producing the church as the Body of Christ and the Body as the fullness of Christ. Christ, as the One who fills all in all, needs the Body to be His fullness for His complete, universal expression.

The Body of Christ is the one new man to accomplish God's eternal purpose (2:15-16; 4:16, 24). The Body is the new man, and the new man is the Body. The emphasis on the church being the Body of Christ is on life, and the emphasis on the church being the one new man is on the person. As the Body of Christ, the church needs Christ as its life; as the one new man, the church needs Christ as the person, who is making His home in our hearts. God's intention in His creation of humankind was to have a corporate person—the one new man, the Body of Christ—to express Him and to represent Him (Gen. 1:26). God's creation of man in Genesis 1 is a picture, a type, of the new man in God's economy. Eventually, the church, the Body of Christ as the one new man, will be the corporate man of God's original intention, and this new man, the Body, will fulfill the twofold purpose of expressing God and dealing with God's enemy (Eph. 1:23; 3:10-11).

The unique Body of Christ is expressed in various localities as the local churches (4:4; 2:21-22). Since the one Body is the one church manifested in many localities as many local churches (Matt. 16:18; 18:17), a local church is the expression of the Body of Christ in a certain locality (1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12-13, 27). The Body of Christ—the unique, universal church—becomes the many local churches, the many expressions of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 16:16), with every local church, as a local expression of the Body, being part of the unique, universal Body of Christ. Therefore, a local church cannot be the whole Body but only a part of the Body, an expression of the Body.

If we see the revelation of the Body in Ephesians, especially in chapter 1, and if we would practice the Body life in genuine local churches, we need to have the consciousness of the Body of Christ. In actual experience, this consciousness comes from holding Christ as the Head of the Body (Col. 1:18; 2:19) and enjoying Him as our life, our life supply, and our everything (3:4, 10-11). Because the Christ we enjoy is the Head of the Body and, as such, has a keen feeling for and consciousness of the Body, we also will eventually have the proper and necessary Body consciousness and be full of feeling for the Body (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Phil. 1:8). To live in the Body and for the Body by the life of the Body and with the consciousness of the Body is to live for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

Resulting In the Heading Up of All Things in Christ

When the Body of Christ is built up in reality and practicality, Ephesians 1:10 will be fulfilled: "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." God's eternal intention is to head

up all things in Christ, who has been appointed to be the universal Head (v. 22). It is God's eternal purpose that in the economy of the fullness of the times, He will head up all things in Christ through the church as the Body of Christ. Through the dispensations of God in all the ages, eventually all things will be headed up in Christ in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-2). Under the blazing light in chapter 1 of Ephesians, we see that God has blessed us, chosen us, predestinated us, graced us, redeemed us, forgiven us, and worked Himself into us through the divine dispensing for the purpose of heading up all things in Christ.

The goal of Satan, the enemy of God, is to corrupt God's creation and to cause confusion (Rom. 8:19-23). When Satan injected himself as sin into humankind, Satan became death and darkness within human beings. Sin brings in death, death brings in darkness, and darkness brings in confusion. Because of this corruption and confusion, the universe is in a state of collapse. Nevertheless, God is continually working to liberate His creation from bondage and to bring it into liberty by heading up all things in Christ.

Here the church as the Body of Christ plays a crucial role, as it takes the lead to be headed up. The first step in the heading up of all things in Christ is for God to bring His people—those chosen to be holy and predestinated to be sons—

out of chaos, collapse, and confusion and to place them under the unique headship of Christ (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:10, 19). As the church, the Body of Christ, takes the lead to be headed up in Christ, God has a way to head up all other things (Eph. 1:22-23, 10). The more we live a life in the Body of Christ of being headed up in Christ by growing up into the Head in all things and by walking in the light as children of light (4:15; 5:8), the more will all other persons, beings, and things be headed up in Him. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that the church as the Body of Christ is the key to the heading up of the whole universe in Christ to the glory of God.


Issuing In the Praise of God's Glory

When the Body of Christ is built up through the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity, there will be "the praise of the glory of His grace" (1:6). Grace is God dispensed into us for our experience and enjoyment, and glory is God expressed through us for His praise. Glory is the expression of God, God Himself expressed, and the church as the Body of Christ is the corporate expression of God in glory. God is the Father of glory (v. 17) with the

riches of His glory (3:16), and the riches of the glory of His inheritance are in the saints as the members of the Body of Christ (1:18). God has ordained in His eternal purpose that the Body would be a corporate vessel for the expression of the God of glory. When the church is presented to Christ in glory for His satisfaction, there will be in the universe the praise of the glory of God's grace. In the church as the Body of Christ, we enjoy the Triune God as grace for our satisfaction, and God gains His glorious expression for His satisfaction. The grace comes into us, and the glory shines out of us. This is the revelation of the church as the Body of Christ for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose as presented in Ephesians 1. "To Him be the glory in the church" (3:21).

A Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation

In order to know the eternal purpose of God regarding the Body of Christ as revealed in Ephesians 1, we need wisdom, revelation, and enlightenment.⁸ For this reason, Paul prayed in verses 17 through 23 that his readers would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of God and His purpose:



Sin brings in death, death brings in darkness, and darkness brings in confusion. Because of this corruption and confusion, the universe is in a state of collapse. Nevertheless, God is continually working to liberate His creation from bondage and to bring it into liberty by heading up all things in Christ.

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.

Since this is not the occasion to consider this marvelous prayer in detail, it is sufficient, as we draw this article to an end, that we point out some crucial elements of this prayer for spiritual sight.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the spirit in

verse 17—a spirit of wisdom and revelation—is the regenerated human spirit of the believers in Christ indwelt by and mingled with the Spirit of God. Living and praying in this mingled spirit is absolutely necessary if we are to know God and His purpose as disclosed by the Spirit through Paul (3:3-5). The two spirits, the human and the divine, are related to the wisdom and revelation mentioned in 1:17. Wisdom is in the regenerated human spirit so that we may know the good pleasure and purpose of God, and revelation is of the divine Spirit who opens the veil so that we may see divine and heavenly things. “First, we have wisdom, the ability to understand, which enables us to know spiritual things; then the Spirit of God reveals the spiritual things to our spiritual understanding” (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:17, note 4).

In addition to wisdom and revelation in the mingled spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), we need the eyes of our heart to be enlightened (Eph. 1:18). *Eyes* here denote the capacity to see the divine things, and *enlightened* indicates that the eyes of our heart need the light that comes from God and His word. If we would know God’s purpose concerning the Body of Christ, we need the light of life to shine in our heart (John 8:12). “The God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). If we experience this kind of shining as we read Ephesians 1, we will be turned from darkness to light (Acts 26:18), and we will be enlightened to see “what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things” (Eph. 3:9). Otherwise, we will be in darkness while reading the Scriptures and remain ignorant of God’s eternal purpose.

When we have a spirit of wisdom and revelation and the eyes of our heart are enlightened, we will know the hope of God’s calling, the riches of the glory of God’s inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of God’s power toward us who believe. Then we will realize that this great power of God is 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 (vv. 18-21). God has subjected all things under the feet of the resurrected and ascended Christ and given Him to be Head over all things to the church (v. 22). *To the church* indicates a transmission from Christ the Head to the church, His Body, by means of which all that Christ has attained and obtained is imparted into the Body, enabling the church to share in Christ’s resurrection and ascension with His headship over all things.

Significantly, Paul’s prayer concludes with “His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all” (v. 23). God’s blessing, selection, predestination, redemption,

forgiveness, grace, and dispensing are all for the Body and produce the Body—the goal of God’s purpose according to the good pleasure of His will. May believers everywhere enter into Paul’s prayer for revelation and enlightenment in order to know the Body and care for the Body and thereby live in the present age for the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God as revealed in Ephesians 1. **A&C**

Notes

¹A particular characteristic of this book is that it speaks from the viewpoint of God’s eternal purpose, from eternity, and from the heavenlies. It is positioned in the New Testament immediately after the revelation concerning Christ versus religion (Galatians). It is followed by a book on the practical experience of Christ (Philippians), and it leads to Christ, the Head (Colossians). Thus, these four books are the heart of the New Testament revelation concerning God’s eternal economy. (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:1, note 1)

²As the eternal only begotten Son in the Godhead, Christ is unique, and with respect to this divine uniqueness, it cannot properly be asserted that He can have the many brothers (as the many sons of God) as His reproduction and increase. However, as the firstborn Son of God possessing humanity as well as divinity, Christ does have brothers as His reproduction and increase, and eventually these many brothers will be conformed to His image as the firstborn Son. When Christ came to earth in His incarnation, He came as the only begotten Son (John 1:1, 14, 18; 3:16), but when He comes again, He will come as the Firstborn accompanied by His overcomers. For this reason, Hebrews 1:6 says that “He [God] brings again the Firstborn into the inhabited earth.” In and through His resurrection, the only begotten Son became the Firstborn, who has many brothers (John 20:17; Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:3-4; 8:29; Heb. 2:10-12). The many brothers are the reproduction of Christ as the firstborn Son, not of Christ as the only begotten Son. Knowing that it is God’s good pleasure to reproduce Christ as the firstborn Son in the believers, Paul could say, “It pleased God...to reveal His Son in me” (Gal. 1:15-16). This One who has been revealed in us is now living in us (2:20) and is being formed in us (4:19).

³In simple terms, an economy is an arrangement for getting things done. What God wants to accomplish is intrinsically related to His life—the uncreated, indestructible, eternal life—and to His household—His vast spiritual family produced through regeneration, in which the believers in Christ become children of God (John 3:15-16; 1:12-13), possessing the life and nature of God. God, according to His good pleasure embodied in His will, intends that His children grow to maturity in Christ and thus be filled unto all the fullness of God for the corporate expression of God. This is God’s purpose, and for this He has an economy, an arrangement to fulfill His eternal intention and to accomplish what He desires.

⁴All the blessings with which God has blessed us, being spiritual, are related to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is not only the channel but also the reality of God's blessings. In this verse God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are all related to the blessings bestowed on us. God's blessing us is actually His dispensing Himself into us. (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:3, note 6)

⁵It is significant that in Romans, a book that is a summary of the essential truths concerning the Christian life and the church life, Paul speaks in chapter 8 of sons before He speaks of the Body in chapter 12. The sons of God become the members of the Body of Christ, and thus in order to have the Body, God must first bring forth many sons, who are the many brothers of Christ as the firstborn Son (8:29). As the ultimate consummation of the Body of Christ, the New Jerusalem will be the totality of the divine sonship (Rev. 21:2, 7).

⁶The mention of sanctification in relation to sonship here is crucial, for it is a reflection of Ephesians 1:4-5. God has chosen us to be holy. However, our becoming holy is not an end in itself—sanctification is for sonship. God is making us holy as He is holy because He desires sons.

To be made holy—to be sanctified by God by His putting Himself into us and then mingling His nature with us—is the process, the procedure, whereas to be sons of God is the aim, the goal, and is a matter of our being joined to the Son of God and conformed to a particular form or shape, the very image of the firstborn Son of God. (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:5, note 2)

⁷This certainly does not mean that the church as the Body of Christ becomes part of the Godhead. Rather, this is a revelation of the producing and building up of the Body of Christ in and by the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity. This is solely in the realm of God's economy and does not affect in any way the transcendent, immutable Godhead.

⁸To say that we need revelation is not to assert that we need some kind of revelation in addition to what is contained in the Bible. Such an assertion would be heretical, for nothing can be added to or taken away from the Word of God. However, it is truthful and faithful to say that we need a revelation, an unveiling, in spirit of what is revealed in the Scriptures. Otherwise, we may understand a chapter such as Ephesians 1 according to natural and religious concepts. Even worse, a veil may be upon our heart as we read this portion of the Word. In principle, what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:15 applies to countless believers today: "Indeed unto this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart." Likewise, when many believers

read Ephesians 1, veils are upon their heart, preventing them from seeing the truth from God's perspective.

Along with revelation, we need enlightenment. Although it is rather commonplace for believers to emphasize our need to be enlightened by God as we read the Word, this view and practice is challenged by Douglas Kennard in his recent article in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* entitled "Evangelical Views on Illumination of Scripture and Critique." For Kennard, as long as a person, even an unbeliever, follows accepted hermeneutical principles, he or she can readily understand the Scriptures, and thus, Kennard claims, there is no need for what he describes as "this evangelical appeal to illumination" (799). Kennard seems to be saying that in reading the Bible, we do not need God or the Spirit's anointing and enlightenment. "It is my contention," he declares, "that such speech-acts as commands and promises are clearly indicated in the divinely accommodated biblical text itself without the need of an intuitive work of the Spirit to render this clear" (799).

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