



# Vital Factors for the Fulfillment of God's Eternal Purpose

by Ron Kangas

Our God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, is a God of purpose. To the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God will be made through the church, and this universal display of divine wisdom is according to “the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:10-11). This purpose, being eternal, is the purpose of the ages, the plan that God made in eternity past for eternity future. God has a good pleasure, “which He purposed in Himself” (1:9), and for the sake of this good pleasure, the desire of God’s heart, the believers in Christ have been “predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (v. 11). The carrying out of God’s eternal purpose is intrinsically related to His selection, His sovereign choice, made in eternity past “that the purpose of God according to selection might remain, not of works but of Him who calls” (Rom. 9:11). As this purpose is worked out in the lives of millions of children of God (8:16), we may have the full assurance, even a deep inward knowing, “that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (v. 28). The purpose mentioned in Romans 8:28 is identified in the following verse, where we are told that “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” (v. 29). This involves the fulfillment in time of what was determined in eternity past—God’s predestinating us “unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5). We have been predestinated unto sonship and also to be conformed to the image of God’s Son so that He would be the Firstborn among many brothers, who are simultaneously the many sons of God (Heb. 2:10-12). When we place all these portions of the Word together under the shining of the light of life in spirit, we may see that God’s purpose is to have for His

eternal corporate expression the firstborn Son and the many sons, the totality of which will be a corporate person as the composition of these sons—the New Jerusalem, the city of glory. In brief, God’s eternal purpose is, in Christ, to produce and build up the New Jerusalem for the corporate expression of Himself in glory.

## The Divine Intention

The divine purpose is intrinsically and inseparably related to the divine intention. Actually, God’s eternal purpose is His determined intention, an intent that He is resolved to carry out in keeping with “the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11).

The most crucial and mysterious matter revealed in the Bible is that God’s ultimate intention is to work Himself in Christ into His chosen and redeemed people as their life (Col. 3:4) so that they may live Him (Phil. 1:20-21) for His corporate expression (Eph. 3:14-21). There is nothing more important and basic in the Scriptures than this eternal, divine intention to have Christ wrought into our being to make us Christ-men, believers in Christ who are filled, possessed, and saturated with Christ (Gal. 1:15-16; 2:20; 4:19; Col. 3:4, 10-11). God’s desire to build Himself in Christ into our being is the focal point of the divine revelation in the Scriptures and what we may call the life factor in the Bible. For the carrying out of His intention of working Christ into our being for His corporate expression, God created human beings in His image to express Him and as vessels to contain Him (Gen. 1:26; 2:9, 16-17) and with a spiritual organ to contact and receive Him. It was with this in view that Christ, in His resurrection, became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) to enter into our spirit, causing us to be joined to Him as “one spirit” (6:17).

With this understanding as the foundation, we may advance in our understanding of God's intention. God desires to work His being in Christ into us to the extent that He saturates us, permeates us, and becomes our constitution (Col. 3:10-11). His intention is to work Himself in His Divine Trinity into us so thoroughly that He becomes every fiber of our tripartite being (Rom. 8:6, 10-11; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:14-17). He wants to dispense Himself into us and work Himself into us as our life, our nature, and our everything until, eventually, He and we are mingled together, and we become His glorious expression (4:4-6). Yet even more is involved. The divine intention is actually to make the believers in Christ the same as God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead (John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:4). This means that God's intention is to make us the same as He is in His divine life, in His divine nature, and in His image as His expression but certainly not the same as He is in His unique Godhead nor as an object of worship. For God to divinize, to deify, His children in this way is truly to make them God in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead. In His operation to fulfill His intention, God has imparted

Spirit into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people as their life, their life supply, and their everything in order to produce and build up the church, the Body of Christ, as His corporate expression. This corporate expression will consummate as the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:2, 10-11).

The divine economy is an issue of God's will, purpose, good pleasure, and counsel (Eph. 1:5, 9-11; 3:9-11); God's will is God's wish, God's desire; thus, God's will is what He wishes to do and wants to do (Rev. 4:11; Eph. 1:5). God's purpose is God's intent set beforehand. This purpose, being eternal, is His eternal plan made in eternity past (v. 9; 3:11). God's good pleasure is what makes God happy; it is what He likes and what pleases Him, for it is actually the desire of His heart. God's counsel is God's resolution consummated in the counsel by the Divine Trinity (1:9; Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:20). After God's will, purpose, good pleasure, and counsel, there is God's economy—God's household administration, God's plan and arrangement to fulfill His purpose according to His will and the desire of His heart. In keeping with the heavenly

vista presented in Ephesians, we may go on to say that God's economy is to dispense Christ with all His riches (3:8, 16-17) into the believers chosen by God for the constitution of the Body of Christ (1:4-5, 22-23), the church, to express the Triune God in glory (3:21) and to head up all things in Christ (1:10).

If we consider God's economy according to the entire New Testament, we will eventually understand the intrinsic significance of God's economy. The divine economy is that God

became flesh, passed through human living as a God-man, died an all-inclusive death for redemption and the release of the divine life, resurrected with a body of glory, and became the life-giving Spirit to enter into us as life and to dispense God in His Divine Trinity into us so that we may be transformed for the producing of the church, which is the Body of Christ, the house of God, the kingdom of God, and the counterpart of Christ, the ultimate consummation of which is the New Jerusalem (John 1:1, 14, 29; 3:14-15; 12:24; Acts 2:24; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; 15:45; 1 Tim. 3:15; Rev. 5:10; 21:2).

God's economy is the key to the Bible. This means that the central hermeneutical principle in studying the Scriptures is the Triune God with His plan and arrangement to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people as their life, their life supply, and their everything to make them His corporate expression, initially as the Body of Christ and ultimately as the New Jerusalem. This profound thought, the central line of the divine revelation, is a hermeneutic of the Bible, not according to the activity of God but

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Himself in Christ as the Spirit into our being to make us the same as He is in this real yet limited way. This is the divine intention that is at the heart of the divine purpose.

In the God-ordained process for the fulfillment of His purpose with His intention, there are a number of vital factors, four of which will be noted here.

### The Divine Economy

Perhaps the most basic and elementary definition of *economy* is that it is an arrangement for getting things done or for accomplishing one's purpose. A full definition, based on the Greek word for "economy," *oikonomia*, derived from *oikos* (house) and *nomos* (law) is that, as employed by Paul, the expression *God's economy* denotes a household law, a household administration (1 Tim. 1:4). A further unveiling of God's economy is found in Ephesians. According to the Word as revealed in this profound Epistle, the divine economy, the economy of God, is God's plan and arrangement, according to the good pleasure of His will, to work Himself in Christ as the

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according to the intrinsic being of God. It is a hermeneutical key drawn from the revelation not merely of how God acts but of how God is. The impact of the biblical revelation of the Triune God upon our understanding of the Bible should be profound and should result in a three-fold realization: that in His eternal, organic existence the Triune God is a God of life, and as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit He enjoys an existence of relationships in life; that the three of the Trinity exist in a condition of perfect, eternal, unfathomable love; and that the Triune God is an incorporation, with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit mutually coinhering and indwelling one another and working together as one to carry out the divine economy.

If we see that God's economy is the key to the Bible, we can use this key in our study of every book of the Bible. In Exodus, for example, we have a marvelous depiction of God and of four crucial matters—salvation, provision, revelation, and building. The God revealed in Exodus is not only the sovereign God but also the processed and consummated God who dwells in the tabernacle. With such a God we have full salvation and an abundant spiritual provision, consisting of living water and heavenly manna. At the mountain of God—the place where God's seekers meet with God and with one another—we receive God's revelation and see that the desire of God's heart is to have a dwelling place on earth with His redeemed people. God's goal, therefore, is the building—the corporate expression of Himself in Christ, the firstborn Son of God, with the regenerated, transformed, and glorified believers in Christ as the many sons of God.

The principle is the same in Song of Songs and Ephesians. In Song of Songs we see that the intrinsic content of God's economy is the divine and mystical romance between God and His chosen and redeemed people. What we have in Song of Songs, a poetic description of our “romantic” experience of Christ, is a portrait of the loving and courting Christ in His union with His individual believers. This portrait unveils the progressive experience of a believer's loving fellowship with Christ, which transforms the believers corporately into His bride, His wife. Such a progressive experience involves four stages: being attracted by Christ and drawn by Him in His sweetness to pursue after Him for full satisfaction; being called to be delivered from the self through oneness with the cross of Christ; being called by Christ to live in ascension as the new creation of God in the resurrection of Christ; and being called by Christ more strongly to live within the veil through His cross after our experience of His death and resurrection. As the result of these experiences, the seeker of Christ becomes a “Shulammitte,” a duplication of Christ for His satisfaction and expression.

Ephesians is marvelously structured according to the economy of God. In each chapter the vital elements of God's

economy are present, including the Triune God as the source, the dispensing of the Triune God as the means, the regenerated human spirit as the focal point of the divine dispensing, and the Body of Christ as the issue of the dispensing of the Triune God into God's redeemed, tripartite elect. In chapter 1 we see the Body of Christ as the fullness of God, an organic expression of God; in chapter 2, the Body of Christ as the one new man, an organic masterpiece and dwelling place of God; in chapter 3, the Body of Christ as God's wise display, an organic constitution of the riches of Christ; in chapter 4, the Body of Christ as the unique completion of God's work, the organic building and living of God and man; in chapter 5, the Body of Christ as the bride, the organic counterpart and increase of Christ; and in chapter 6, the Body of Christ as a warrior, a corporate man organically exercising dominion and engaging in spiritual warfare. This is the economy of God as the hermeneutic not only of Ephesians but even of the entire Bible. If we see this key and use it, the Bible will become to us what it is to God—a revelation of the divine economy.

### The Divine Dispensing

The divine economy is God's plan and arrangement to carry out His will, desire, and purpose; the divine dispensing is God's dispensing and distributing according to this plan and arrangement (Eph. 1:5). It is extremely important for readers of the New Testament to realize this, for everything that is mentioned in the New Testament concerning God is related to the divine dispensing for the divine economy. The Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—has been processed to become the life-giving Spirit so that we can drink of Him and so that He can become our enjoyment (John 1:14; 4:14; 7:37-39; 1 Cor. 12:13; 15:45). This means that, according to the clear emphasis in the New Testament, the Divine Trinity is for the divine dispensing, that is, for the imparting of God into the believers in Christ. The Father as the origin is the fountain, the Son as the expression is the spring, and the Spirit as the transmission is the flow (John 4:14; 7:37-39).

The revelation concerning the Triune God in the holy Word is not mainly for doctrinal understanding but primarily for the dispensing of God in His Divine Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people for their experience and enjoyment (2 Cor. 13:14). It is impossible for us to know the Triune God merely by doctrine; however, we can know Him by experiencing and enjoying Him (1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4-5). The Bible reveals that the Triune God is not merely the object of our faith; He is subjective to us, dwelling in us to be our life and life supply (Rom. 8:11). If we would understand the Divine Trinity, we must be in the process of the growth in life, in the line of life pursuing the growth in life (1 John 2:12-14). The Bible was written according to the governing principle of the Triune



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God's working Himself into His chosen and redeemed people as their life and life supply (Psa. 36:8-9).

**T**he Trinity is the framework of the entire Bible; the whole Bible, especially the book of Ephesians, is constructed with the Trinity. Ephesians is the only book in the Bible in which every chapter is structured with the Divine Trinity as its basic element. If we do not know the Triune God, we cannot comprehend the profoundness of Ephesians, because every chapter of this book has the Divine Trinity as its framework (1:3-14; 2:18; 3:16-17; 4:4-6; 5:19-20; 6:10-11, 17).

The revelation in Ephesians concerning the producing, existing, growing, building up, and fighting of the church as the Body of Christ is composed of the divine economy, the dispensing of the Triune God into the members of the Body of Christ; thus, the crucial focus of Ephesians is the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity into the believers.

Chapter 1 unveils how God the Father chose and predestinated the members in eternity, God the Son redeemed

(v. 10). The Father's dispensing to produce the masterpiece, the Son's dispensing to produce the new man, and the Spirit's bringing us to the Father in one Body result in the building up of the church and the fulfillment of God's eternal economy (vv. 10, 15-16, 21-22).

**I**n chapter 3 the apostle prays that God the Father would grant the believers to be strengthened through God the Spirit into their inner man so that Christ, God the Son, could make His home in their hearts, that they would be filled unto all the fullness of God (vv. 16-19). The Father is the source, the Spirit is the means, the Son is the object, and the fullness of the Triune God is the issue. Each of the three does not act for Himself but for the fullness of the Triune God; this is a beautiful picture of the Divine Trinity.

Chapter 4 portrays how the processed 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 (vv. 4-6). The Body of Christ is the sphere for the development of the Triune God. The divine

dispensing of God the Father in His being over all, of the Son in His being through all, and of the Spirit in His being in all enables all the members of the Body of Christ to experience and enjoy the Triune God. These verses reveal four persons—one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God the Father—mingled together as one entity to be the organic Body of Christ; thus, the Triune God and the Body are four-in-one.

Chapter 5 exhorts the believers to praise the Lord, God the Son, with the songs of God the Spirit, and give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, to God the Father (vv. 19-20). This is to praise and thank the processed God in His Divine Trinity for our enjoyment of Him as the Triune God. Through the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity, we are constituted as children of God, walking in God as love and light (vv. 1-2, 8).

Chapter 6 instructs us to fight the spiritual warfare by being empowered in the Lord, God the Son, putting on the whole armor of God the Father, and wielding the sword of the Spirit (vv. 10-11, 17). God the Son is the power within us, God realized in the Son is the armor upon us, and God the Spirit is the sword, who is the word of God. This is the believers' experience and enjoyment of the Triune God even in the spiritual warfare.

### **The Believers' Organic Union with God in Christ**

In the Bible there is a very precious principle—the principle that, in Christ, God desires to become one with His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people in order to

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them, and God the Spirit sealed them as a pledge, thus imparting Himself into His believers for the formation of the church, which is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 3-14, 18-23). A fundamental truth in the Lord's recovery is that the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—has wrought Himself into us through the Father's 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 life supply into the believers. The threefold mentioning of the praise of God's glory signifies the threefold dispensing of the Triune God (vv. 6, 12, 14).

Chapter 2 shows that in the Divine Trinity all the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, have access unto God the Father through God the Son in God the Spirit (v. 18). Through God the Son, who is the Accomplisher, the means, and in God the Spirit, who is the Executor, the application, we have access unto God the Father, who is the Originator, the source of our enjoyment. We are a poem written by the dispensing of the Father as the source, the Son as the course, and the Spirit as the flow

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produce an organic entity where God and man have one living by one life with one nature. This organic entity is the church, the Body of Christ, as the one new man, the dwelling place of God, and the fullness of God.

The relationship that God desires to have with His people is that He and they become one in an organic union, that is, in a union of life portrayed by the true vine in John 15. Therefore, the emphasis on the organic union is an outstanding feature of Paul's writings (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:17; 12:2). Faith, in Paul's understanding, involves an organic union through believing (Gal. 2:16). When Paul says that the church is in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 1:1), he indicates that we have been brought into an organic union with Christ. In and through this union, we share whatever Christ is and has (1 Cor. 1:30).

From beginning to end, the Bible unveils the organic union in God's relationship with humanity (Gen. 1:26; 1 Cor. 6:17; John 15:4-5; Rev. 21:2-3; 22:17). The first step in realizing God's desire to become one with man was His creation of humankind in His image. God's intention in creating human beings was that God and they would be joined in a union that is altogether organic, a union in life. With this in view, God created us to be like Him and to be one with Him, creating us for the purpose that He would enter into us as life, make Himself one with us, and make us one with Him in the divine life, signified by the tree of life. Looking at this from a universal perspective, we may say, following Zechariah 12:1, that the heavens are for the earth, that the earth is for man to exist, and that the spirit of man is for God, by which we mean for man to worship God, to be regenerated by God, and to be joined to God so that man may live, walk, and have his being in an organic union with God (John 3:6; 4:34; 1 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:4). God's incarnation was to carry out His desire with His good pleasure to be one with man in an organic union (Eph. 1:5, 9). Thus, the incarnation of Christ brought God as life into humankind, and through incarnation man could eventually enter into an organic union with the Triune God of life (John 1:1, 4, 14; 14:6; 10:10). In and through resurrection, Christ, the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit, ready and able to enter into our spirit, to make our spirit life, and to be mingled with our spirit. As one who lived in this mingled spirit (Rom. 8:4), Paul could testify, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). As those who have believed into the Son of God to receive eternal life, the life of God (John 3:15), and who have been born of God, regenerated, by God the Spirit in our spirit, we should now live in the organic union with Christ everywhere and all the time. The goal of such a living is the building up of the church as the organic Body of Christ, which exists in the union of God and the believers in Christ (Rom. 12:4-5).

The reality of the organic union of the believers in Christ and with Christ is portrayed in the wonderful way in John 15, where the Lord Jesus refers to Himself as the real vine and to the believers as the branches in this vine. The true vine with its branches—Christ the Son with the believers in the Son—is the organism of the Triune God in the divine economy to grow with His riches and to express His life (1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 3:9; John 15:1, 5). The function of the true vine as a sign of the Son is for the Triune God to have an organism in the Son for His multiplication, spreading, and glorification in His divine life (vv. 8, 16). The Father as the husbandman is the source and the founder; God the Son is the center, the embodiment, and the manifestation; God the Spirit is the reality and realization; and the branches are the Body, the corporate expression (vv. 1, 4-5, 26). All that the Father is and has is embodied in Christ the Son and then realized in the Spirit as the reality (16:13-15).

All that the Spirit has is wrought into us, the branches, to be expressed and testified through us; in this way, the processed Triune God is expressed, manifested, and glorified in the church (Eph. 3:16-21). The organism of the Triune God in John 15 is the Triune God united, mingled, and incorporated with His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people (14:20). The Father, the Son, and the Spirit coinhere with the disciples mutually, for the Triune God and the disciples are united, mingled, and incorporated into one (15:4-5). Here we have the goal of God's economy—the enlarged, universal, divine-human incorporation of the consummated God with the regenerated believers.

As the branches of the true vine, the believers in Christ are the multiplication of Christ, the duplication of Christ, the spreading of Christ, and the enlargement of Christ (vv. 4-5, 16). Christ, the infinite God, is the vine, and we are His branches; we are branches of the infinite God, organically one with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). Because we are branches of the divine vine, parts of the organism of the Triune God, we are the same as God in life and nature (1 John 5:11-12). When we believed in the Lord Jesus, He branched into us, and we became branches in Him (John 3:15). For us to be branches in the vine means that Christ has become our life (11:25; 14:6; Col. 3:4). The vine is everything to the branches; from the vine and through the vine, we receive everything we need to live as branches (John 15:4). Christ as the vine does everything through the branches; without Him we can do nothing, and without us He can do nothing (v. 5).

As branches of the vine, we need to abide in the vine (vv. 4-5). To be in the Lord is a matter of union; to abide in the Lord is a matter of fellowship (1 Cor. 1:9, 30). Our abiding in Christ as the vine depends on seeing a clear vision that we are branches in the vine; once we see that

we are branches in the vine, we need to maintain the fellowship between us and the Lord (John 15:2). The Christian life is a life of abiding in the Lord (1 John 2:24, 27-28; 4:13), and to abide in the Lord is to be one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). Furthermore, in spiritual experience, our abiding in Christ is the condition of His abiding in us (John 15:4-5). The more we abide in Him and enjoy His abiding in us, the more we realize that apart from the vine, we are nothing, we have nothing, and we can do nothing (v. 5). Only when the branches abide in the vine can the vine be everything to them.

If we are exercised in spirit and faithful and diligent to live in the organic union with Christ through this mutual abiding, we will enter into a new realm and dimension of prayer—prayer in the mingled spirit, where we pray in a sweet oneness and harmony with the Lord. Effective prayers are the issue of our abiding in the Lord and of His words abiding in us (v. 7). When we abide in the Lord, and His words abide in us, there will be a desire in us that comes out of His words. We will touch the Lord's feeling and understand His intention; then spontaneously we will

Christ as the life-giving Spirit mingled with our regenerated spirit as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). We need to be impressed with the fact that we can have the church life only by living in the mingled spirit; therefore, we should walk and have our being in this mingled spirit for the church life (1 Cor. 15:45; 6:17; 1:2; 12:27). This is to live corporately in the organic union with Christ according to the divine economy and in the divine dispensing.

**T**he organic union in God's relationship with man in Christ consummates in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2-3, 10-11; 22:1-5), which is neither heaven, as commonly understood by religious people, nor a literal, material city, as understood by those who fail to read and understand Revelation as a book of signs (1:1). On the one hand, the New Jerusalem is the Triune God in His economy and with His dispensing; on the other hand, this holy city is the processed and consummated Triune God mingled with His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite elect. Hence, the New Jerusalem is actually a corporate person, the Triune God with all the glorified sons of God. The building up of the New Jerusalem is through the mingling of the Triune God with His divinity with us in our humanity; thus, this city, this corporate God-man, is divinely human and humanly divine. Because the New Jerusalem exists in an eternal organic union of the sons of God with the Triune God, it will be a mutual abode in this marvelous union (vv. 3, 22)—the redeemed counterpart of Christ as a tabernacle in which God will dwell and the processed and consummated Triune God in which His counterpart, His wife, will dwell. This will be the eternal and

ultimate consummation of the organic union of the sons of God with the Triune God, a union in which the Spirit and the bride speak as one (22:17).

### The Corporate Expression of the Triune God

Concerning God, Revelation 4:11 declares, "You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created." If we read this verse in light of the book of Ephesians, which speaks from the heart of God, from the heavens, and from eternity, we will see that God's will, with its mystery, counsel, and good pleasure, is to produce many holy sons of God for the corporate expression of the Triune God through the Body of Christ. If we read this verse in light of the book of Revelation, we will see that, ultimately, God's will is to have the New Jerusalem, a composition of the sons of God, for His eternal, glorious, corporate expression. The goal of the divine intention, the divine economy, the divine dispensing, and the organic union is the corporate expression of the Triune God in the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem. Concerning such a corporate expression, it is

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have His desire in us. His desire will become our desire, what He wants will be what we want, and we will pray according to this desire. The Lord will answer this kind of prayer, because it issues from our abiding in Him and from His words abiding in us and therefore is an expression of His will and the desire of His heart.

**W**hen we abide in Christ as the vine, we have the genuine church life revealed in the New Testament (1 Cor. 1:2, 9, 30; 6:17; 12:27). The branches are one with the vine and with one another (John 17:11, 21-23). When we abide in Christ, we participate in the wonderful fellowship among the co-branches; the inner life of all the branches is one, and this life should continually circulate through all the branches (15:4-5; 1 John 1:7). The more we live in this circulation of life, the more we realize in our actual experience that the church life, the Body, is a life of loving one another (John 15:12, 17). The Body life is a life of love and a life in love (Eph. 4:16; 5:2). Because of this, we need to love one another in the life of Christ, in the love of Christ, and in the commission of Christ (John 15:16). This blessed reality is in the mingled spirit—

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profitable to consider, briefly, the interrelated matters of the image of God and the glory of God.

God created human beings in His own image so that, by receiving the divine life symbolized by the tree of life, they would become His corporate expression. Thus, God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Here we have a corporate man in the image and according to the likeness of God, who is triune (as implied by *Our*). This is reinforced in verse 27: “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” We need to understand this in the light of the truth that, in reality, the image of God is Christ. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul speaks of “Christ, who is the image of God,” and in Colossians 1:15 he speaks of Christ, “who is the image of the invisible God.” Christ the Son is the visible expression of the invisible God (Heb. 1:3). For us to be created in the image of God is to be created in the image of Christ, who is the image of God. That this image is corporate is revealed in Colossians 3:10, where Paul refers to the new man (obviously a corporate person), who is “being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.”

In order for believers in Christ, the children of God possessing the life and nature of God, to have the image of God in reality, they must experience, as crucial aspects of God’s complete salvation in life (Rom. 5:10), both transformation and conformation. “We all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). The fact that transformation takes place through the renewing of the mind, the leading part of the soul (Rom. 12:2), indicates that, whereas regeneration is experienced in the human spirit, transformation is a process that occurs in the soul. The spirit is the organ for contacting God, receiving God, and containing God, but the soul is the organ for expressing God. For God’s expression, the seeking believers in this age may experience the actual and gradual transformation of their souls, and Paul reveals this crucial experience (ignored by countless believers) in the verse from 2 Corinthians quoted above. With an unveiled face, we may behold and reflect the glory of the Lord, the expression of the resurrected Christ in splendor. This happens as we turn our hearts to the Lord so that the veil is taken away (v. 16) and, in the mingled spirit, behold the glory of the resurrected and indwelling Christ. The more we behold Him, the more we are transformed into the same image—the image of the glorious Christ of God. Being an incremental process, unlike regeneration, which is immediate and instantaneous, transformation is from “glory to glory,” that is from one degree of glory to another degree until our entire tripartite being is saturated and permeated with the divine glory. Central to both the

understanding and experience of this is the realization that transformation is “from the Lord Spirit,” that is, from the resurrected Christ, who, in God’s economical operation for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose, is in a very real, experiential sense, identical with the Spirit. “The Lord is the Spirit” (v. 17). Furthermore, the words *we all* in verse 18 underscore the fact that transformation is for all believers in Christ eventually; hence, the result will be a corporate, glorious expression of Christ, who is the image of God.

Transformation is followed by conformation. “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” (Rom. 8:29). As a continuation of transformation, conformation involves our being saved in life from the natural expression of the self (self-likeness) for God’s expression. This entails the solidifying of the image into which we are being transformed inwardly, which results in a definite and concrete expression of God. Paul’s word concerning this involves certain profound matters, the first of which is God’s eternal predestination (Eph. 1:5). We, the children of God (Rom. 8:16), were predestinated to be conformed to the image of the Son of God, who is the expression of God, the effulgence of His glory (Heb. 1:3). Our destiny, therefore, is the image of God, and we were predestinated to participate in a process that will conform all of us to the image of God’s Son. The word *those* in Romans 8:29 indicates that this is a corporate matter, a matter in the Body and for the Body (12:4-5). When *those whom He predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son* have experienced transformation and conformation, there will be the corporate expression of God. Eventually, at the consummation of this process, Christ the Son will be the Firstborn among many brothers. In the Godhead Christ the Son of God is eternally the unique, only begotten Son, but having become the Son of Man through incarnation and having been designated the Son of God with His humanity in resurrection, He is now the Son of God in another sense—the firstborn Son. His being the firstborn Son in God’s economy, as well as the only begotten Son in the eternal, immutable Godhead, surely implies, even indicates, that there will be many sons (8:14), whom God the Father is bringing into glory for His corporate expression (Heb. 2:10-12). In Romans 8:29 the many sons of God (Gal. 3:26; 4:6) are designated the *many brothers* brought forth in Christ’s resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3; John 20:17). Those whom God predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son are the many brothers among whom Christ will be preeminent as the Firstborn. Both the firstborn Son and the many brothers as the many sons will bear the image of Christ for the corporate expression of God.

The expression of God is intrinsically related to the glory of God. Glory is the expression of God, God expressed, and God’s goal in His economy with His dispensing is to



produce and build up the New Jerusalem as the city of glory (Rev. 21:10-11). Because this is God's ultimate goal, there is a line in the Scriptures related to the glory of God.

As an attribute of God, glory is the expression of God, God expressed in splendor (Exo. 40:34; Acts 7:55; 2 Pet. 1:3; Rev. 21:11). The glory of God is intrinsically related to the economy of God, His plan and arrangement to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His redeemed people in order to make Himself one with them and to make them one with Him for His eternal corporate expression of Himself in them and through them (Eph. 1:6, 10, 12, 14; 3:21; 5:27). The Triune God is a God of glory (Acts 7:2; Eph. 1:17; 3:14, 16; 1 Cor. 2:8; 2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 4:14), and God's eternal goal is to bring His many sons into glory (Heb. 2:10; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5-6, 12, 14). This involves a lengthy process extending from the creation of man to the glorification of the sons of God. Man was created by God in His image in order to express Him in His glory (Gen. 1:26; Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6). For this reason God created us as vessels unto honor, prepared unto glory; we were predestinated in His sovereignty to be

stage of God's organic salvation, His salvation in life, and this stage will be our glorification (Heb. 2:10; Rom. 8:17, 21, 30).

As we turn to Ephesians 3, we see that as we are strengthened with power by the Father of glory through His Spirit into the inner man, when Christ makes His home in our hearts, and when we are filled unto all the fullness of God, there will be glory to God in the church (vv. 14-21). The Lord Jesus, the night before He was crucified for our redemption and for the release of the divine life, prayed for His glorification (John 17:1, 5) and prayed also that we would enter into the highest stage of oneness—the oneness in the divine glory for the corporate expression of the Triune God (v. 22). This oneness is the real building up of the church as the Body of Christ typified by the tabernacle and the temple in the Old Testament. The essential significance of the building of God is the Triune God wrought into His redeemed and regenerated people so that they may become His glorious corporate expression (Eph. 2:21-22; 3:17, 19, 21; 4:16; 5:27; cf. Exo. 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Ezek. 43:4; Hag. 2:7, 9). This glory will be expanded and

The divine economy, the divine dispensing, the organic union, and the corporate expression surely are worthy of our prayer, our study of the Word, and our earnest pursuing of Christ, our Beloved.

made visible to all when the Lord returns in glory with His overcomers to bring in the manifestation of the kingdom of God. Since the kingdom of God and the glory of God are inseparable, the glory of God will be manifested in the coming kingdom (Matt. 6:13; 16:27; 26:64; 1 Thes. 2:12; Rev. 5:13), at which time, "the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43). After the age of the manifestation of the kingdom in glory, the New Jerusalem will descend out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:2). An outstanding

His vessels to express what He is in glory (Rom. 9:21, 23). However, the man created in God's image as a vessel prepared for glory sinned against God. To sin is to fall short of God's glory and thus to express sin and the sinful self and to love the glory of men more than the glory of God (3:23; John 5:44; 7:18; 12:43). But there is good news. Christ's redemption has fulfilled the requirements of God's glory (Rom. 3:24-25; Heb. 9:5; cf. Gen. 3:24), and through the gospel of the glory of Christ, God has called us by and into His eternal glory (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; 1 Thes. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3). In the mercy of God we received "the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4), because "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" (v. 6). Under this marvelous shining, we received the Lord of glory, and now the all-inclusive Christ dwells in us as the hope of glory (Col. 1:27; 3:4, 11; 1 Cor. 15:45). As we behold and reflect the glory of the Lord, who dwells in our spirit, we are being transformed into the Lord's image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Eventually, we will reach the last

feature of the New Jerusalem is that it has the glory of God, His expression. The entire city of New Jerusalem will bear the glory of God, which is God Himself in the Lamb shining out through the city (vv. 10-11, 23).

The God of purpose with His intention will carry out His economy by means of the divine dispensing so that His redeemed and regenerated people, living in an organic union with Him in the Son, will be transformed into and conformed to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son and then be glorified with Him for His expression. The divine economy, the divine dispensing, the organic union, the corporate expression—these vital factors for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose—surely are worthy of our prayer, our study of the Word, and our earnest pursuing of Christ, our Beloved. May vast numbers among the children of God, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, be stirred in spirit and awakened in heart to know and experience these factors for the fulfillment of the desire of God's heart and His eternal rest and satisfaction in the New Jerusalem, the holy city, the city of glory shining with splendor in the new heaven and the new earth. **AF**