



# The HOPE of Our Calling

## Experiencing the Economy of God in Ephesians

**M**any of us Christians have a distant God, a God who is revered more as a high concept than enjoyed as a living reality. In response to this, our Lord weeps, longs to gather us together under His wings to warm our hearts, and knocks on the door of the church, hoping that we will hear and open ourselves to Him, receiving Him in His economy and being filled with Him unto all the fullness of God. Many of us Christians are taught a distant God, a God who is reified to the point of idolatry. In response to this, our Lord does not weep; rather He displays anger and hatred, warns of the danger of stumbling those who have been given to Him from the Father, and promises a sure recompense for the works that damage the building up of the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (John 11:35; Matt. 23:37; Rev. 3:20; Eph. 3:19; John 2:14-17; Rev. 2:6; Mark 9:42; John 17:12; 2 Tim. 4:14; Rom. 2:6; Eph 1:23).

The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians reveals the purpose and plan of the Triune God, the economy of God, as the dispensing of the very being and person of the Triune God into His chosen and redeemed people. The God of Ephesians is not distant; He is indwelling the believers, who are growing into a holy temple in the Lord and who are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit (2:21-22). The God of Ephesians is not a reified object of worship like the bronze serpent of the Old Testament which became a mere piece of brass. Rather, He is actively working all things according to the counsel of His will. More than anything, He is available to us for our experience, both individually and corporately, and consummately for His expression.

The Epistle of Ephesians is not a book of doctrines; it is a book which describes our experience of the Triune God in His economical dispensing. This dispensing is the hope of our calling (1:18; 4:1, 4). The proof of the experiential

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emphasis in Ephesians is contained in two monumental prayers by the apostle Paul. The first prayer is in chapter one, and it is a prayer for the church regarding revelation, that is, that the church would know the hope of her calling. The second prayer is in chapter three, and it is a prayer for the church regarding experience, that is, that the church would practically enjoy the dispensing of the Triune God to fulfill the hope of her calling.

### The Hope of Our Calling and the Economy of God

The hope of our calling, as presented in Ephesians, is not a nebulous concept, subject to a variety of interpretations which define hope without reference to the biblical revelation of our real hope and real calling. Matthew Henry, who provides respectable commentary on many points of the truth, especially those points which underscore the redemptive work of Christ, demonstrates this tendency toward obscure definitions of the hope of our calling: "There is a hope in this calling; for those who deal with God deal upon trust. We ought to labour after, and pray earnestly for, a clearer insight into, and a fuller acquaintance with, the great objects of a Christian's hopes" (1849). Within the span of just two sentences, Henry's commentary advances from a singular hope to a plurality of hopes, from one object to many objects.

**I**t is clear from Ephesians, however, that Paul refers to a unique hope: "Even as also you were called in one hope of your calling" (4:4, emphasis added). We have *one* hope, not many. There is also one object of our hope, not many. The hope of our calling involves the realization of the good pleasure of God's will, which He purposed in Himself (1:5, 9). He works all things according to the counsel of His will to consummate this hope (v. 11), which involves the church being brought to the point of being to the praise of the

glory of His grace (v. 6) through the dispensing of the Triune God.

The dispensing of the Triune God is clearly seen in Paul's well-speaking of the Triune God in Ephesians 1:3-14.

God's calling is the sum total of all the blessings listed in [these verses]: God the Father's selection and predestination, God the Son's redemption, and God the Spirit's sealing and pledging. When we were called, we participated in the Father's selection and predestination, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging. (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:18, note 4)

All of the factors included in Paul's well-speaking concerning both the church and the Triune God in verses 3 through 14 are dependent upon and the result of God's desire to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people. In verses 3 through 6, Paul speaks of the Father's selection and predestination of the believers unto sonship. Before time began, God purposed to have sons, and based on the good pleasure of His will, He selected and predestinated. Sonship is an issue of the dispensing of the divine life. Those who are perishing, being darkened in their

understanding, are alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance which is in them and because of the hardness of their heart (4:18), but as believers, we are no longer alienated from the divine life. When we received the Son, we received and were regenerated with the divine life (1 John 5:11-12). Being born again is a matter of being regenerated with the divine life which was imparted in the resurrection of Christ from the dead and which is the source of our living hope (John 3:3-6, 1 Pet. 1:3). The divine life and nature have been imparted into our very being (2 Pet. 1:4). Unfortunately, many view sonship as a legal matter of adoption rather than as an organic matter of receiving the divine life and nature of the Triune God. Arno C. Gaebelin comments on this tendency:

He predestinated all who believe in Christ to the Son-place. The authorized version speaks of "adoption of children." This hardly expresses it correctly. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are not adopted into the family of God; they are born into the family. The Greek has only one word "Son-place." We are placed into the position of Sons. Not alone hath God given to us His own nature, but He gives us, because we have that nature in and through His Son, the place as Sons. (240-241)

### *From High Concept to Idolatry*

It is a very short distance from reverence to reification. The bronze serpent, which Moses lifted up in the wilderness, brought relief from God's wrath and judgment when the children of Israel looked upon it and lived (Num. 21:4-9). Later, however, the bronze serpent became an idol that Hezekiah had to destroy. Matthew Henry writes:

The brazen serpent was originally of divine institution, and yet, because it had been abused to idolatry, [Hezekiah] broke it to pieces. It seems, it had been carefully preserved, as a memorial of God's goodness to their fathers in the wilderness, Num. xxi. 9. But when they began to worship the creature more than the Creator, those that would not worship images borrowed from the heathen were drawn in by the tempter to burn incense to the brazen serpent, because that was made by order from God himself and had been an instrument of good to them. But Hezekiah, in his pious zeal for God's honour, not only forbade the people to worship it, but, that it might never be abused any more, he showed the people that it was *Nehushtan*, nothing else but a *piece of brass*, and that therefore it was an idle wicked thing to burn incense to it; he then broke it to pieces. If any think that the just honour of the brazen serpent was hereby diminished they will find it abundantly made up again, John iii. 14, where our Saviour makes it a type of himself. (423)

The relief that came to the children of Israel was not inherent in the bronze serpent itself; rather, it came in response to their looking (Heb. 12:2), to their faith in Moses' presentation of Christ in type. Only Christ can stay God's judgment. Similarly, it is only our union through faith with the Son of Man, who was lifted up on the cross in the likeness of the flesh of sin and who condemned sin in the flesh (John 3:14-15; Rom. 8:3), that can save us from the effects of the fall through the operation of the Spirit's moment-by-moment application of the effectiveness of His death (Gal. 5:24, 16). Our Redeemer lives, not in the plethora of crosses, crucifixes, images, and numerous other forms of religious paraphernalia that clutter the vision of the Lord's children, but in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). The Spirit bears witness with our spirit of this reality (Rom. 8:16). There is no need to ask, "What would Jesus do?" looking to Him as a distant exemplar of morality and imposing on Him, even ascribing to Him, our own limited concepts of what we think He would do. We have received Christ; we can walk in Him (Col. 2:6). It is time for the Lord's people to begin to destroy the *Nehushtans* that have so long distracted them from the living experience of Christ, which is available, even planned and purposed for them, in the economy of God, the dispensing of the Triune God into the tripartite man. —J. P.

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**W**hen the life of the Triune God in the Son is dispensed into our being, regeneration occurs and sons are produced. It should be no wonder that, having received the divine life and nature of the Triune God, the church has the capacity in life to be to the praise of the glory of His grace. It also should be no wonder that our calling to be holy and without blemish before Him in love is possible only because the holy One has been dispensed into our being (Eph. 1:4). There is nothing in us that even comes close to the standard of God's holiness.

*Holy* means not only sanctified, separated unto God, but also different, distinct, from everything that is common. Only God is different, distinct, from all things. Hence, He is holy; holiness is His nature. He chose us that we should be holy. He makes us holy by imparting Himself, the Holy One, into our being, that our whole being may be permeated and saturated with His holy nature. For us, God's chosen ones, to be holy is to partake of God's divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and to have our whole being permeated with God Himself. This is different from mere sinless perfection or sinless purity. This makes our being holy in God's nature and character, just like God Himself. (Recovery Version, v. 4, note 3)

Following the Father's selection and predestination, the Son accomplished the eternal purpose through His redemptive work on the cross involving the shedding of His blood (v. 7). The application of redemption is an aspect of the riches of His grace which abound to us in the economy of God as the mystery of His will is made known. The abounding riches of grace are the dispensing of the Triune God, and this dispensing elevates the church into a heavenly and spiritual realm of blessing that serves as a seal of our predestinated status as an inheritance to God (vv. 3, 13-14, 18). All that we have in Adam is but sin and death, and it is completely unworthy of being inherited by God. Only the Triune God, who has been wrought into His chosen and redeemed, is worthy of being an eternal inheritance. Our inheritance is the Lord, and He has chosen us for His own inheritance (Psa. 16:5; 33:12); He is now imparting Himself into us so that we will be corporately filled unto the fullness of God, and thus be worthy of all His acceptance.

Our inheritance is the spiritual blessings with which we

have been blessed (Eph. 1:3). The application of these spiritual blessings involves nothing more or less than the application of the Spirit. The redemption which Christ accomplished on the cross is applied by the Spirit in the presentation of the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation (v. 13). In this application the sealing and pledging of the Spirit occur. The sealing of the Spirit is the Spirit's marking out of the selected, predestinated, and redeemed believers as God's acquired possession through His indwelling (v. 14), and the pledging of the Spirit is the Spirit as a foretaste, a down payment, and guarantee that as sons we will inherit all that the Triune God has and is.

At the time we were saved, God put His Holy Spirit into us as a seal to mark us out, indicating that we belong to God. The Holy Spirit, who is God Himself entering into us, causes us to bear God's image, signified by the seal, thus making us like God. (Recovery Version, v. 13, note 1)

The Spirit's sealing and pledging complete the operation of the Triune God in His dispensing of Himself into the believers. The sealing and pledging of the Spirit are the application, impartation, and enjoyment of the divine life as our guaranteed and covenanted inheritance, made possible through the redemptive death of the Son on the cross, which satisfied the righteous requirement of God and opened the way for our regeneration as sons who possess both the divine life and nature, accomplishing in time the Father's selection and predestination of the believers in eternity past and satisfying His heart.<sup>1</sup>

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

God's expressed glory. Actually, this chapter is a revelation of God's marvelous and excellent economy, from His choosing of us in eternity to the producing of the Body of Christ to express Himself for eternity. (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:23, note 3)

**T**he hope of our calling is equivalent to the economy of God as the dispensing of the Triune God into the tripartite man. According to the stewardship<sup>2</sup> of God, Paul completed the word of God through his unveiling of the mystery which had been hidden from the ages and the generations (Eph. 1:9; 3:2-4; Col. 1:25-26). The mystery which he revealed is the hope of our calling, and God has willed to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in us, the hope of glory (v. 27). There are not many objects of hope for the believers; there is but one—the glorious Christ, who is becoming ever more glorious in us through the dispensing of the Triune God.<sup>3</sup> Our hope resides in the unseen realm, the realm of spiritual

blessings, not material blessings. Nothing should be more precious to us than our glorious Christ, who is the source of every spiritual blessing, including our being chosen (Eph. 1:4), our sonship (v. 5), our redemption (v. 7), our heading up (v. 10), our inheritance (v. 11), our believing (v. 13), our sealing and pledging (vv. 13-14), and ultimately our glory (v. 14).

### Knowing the Hope of Our Calling

Just as Paul does not speak of the hope of our calling in verses 3 through 14 for the sake of establishing doctrine, his prayer in verses 17 through 23<sup>4</sup> is not a prayer for the mental apprehension of doctrinal points. It is a prayer for a deeper, revelatory knowledge of the hope of God's calling that issues forth from our human spirit, not merely from the mental faculties of our soul. As those who have been selected and predestinated with a particular hope, it is imperative that we have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in

### *Hope That Is Not Hope*

For we were saved in hope. But a hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? (Rom. 8:24).

**W**ithin the context of late, twentieth-century Christianity in America, culture more than the Bible defines the prevailing perceptions of the hope of our calling. For many, the hope and calling of Christians have been grossly mischaracterized in terms that are highly individualistic and overtly materialistic in nature. We live in an individualistic society that judges merit in terms of personal position and material prosperity, and so the church has become infested with "ministers" struggling to establish a kingdom for themselves in this age and with "teachers" of a prosperity gospel that is completely foreign to the teachings of both Jesus and the apostles, and even much of church history. It should give us pause to consider that the prosperity gospel began to emerge in the environment of America's unfettered and unchallenged dominance of the world economy in the aftermath of World War II. Now it seems that the hope of most Christians in America revolves around only the attainment of objects that are easily seen and coveted—a new car, freedom from debt, health, attractive spouses, obedient children, and even a moral society. Because of the hardness of our hearts, many of these things are allowed by God, but it was not so from the beginning (Matt. 19:8). Truly, these ministers and teachers have their reward in full now (6:5), but none of these objects will pass through the fire of the Lord's judgment into the next age. These works will be judged, but mercifully, the misguided ministers and teachers who genuinely have Christ in them as their hope of glory, but lack any real

surplus of oil in their vessels, will be saved, yet so as through fire (25:1-13; 1 Cor. 3:13-15).

It is time for the eyes of the church to begin to focus on that which is not seen, but which is the source of our real hope—the ever-increasing growth of Christ, who is spreading from our human spirit into our hearts and ultimately will glorify our bodies through the dispensing of the life of the Triune God. It is impossible to see the inward activity of Christ, but it is possible to see the unique result of this divine dispensing—the oneness of the believers. It is not without reason that Paul speaks of the one hope of our calling immediately after he speaks of one Body and one Spirit (Eph. 4:4).

To walk worthily of God's calling, to have the proper Body life, we first need to care for the oneness. This is crucial and vital to the Body of Christ. Strictly, oneness differs from unity. Unity is the state in which many people are united together, whereas oneness is the one entity of the Spirit within the believers, which makes them all one. This oneness is a person, Christ Himself, who is the Spirit dwelling within us. (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:3, note 2)

The dispensing of the Triune God is 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 (1:10). In the economy of God, there is only Christ at the initiation and at the conclusion, and this one Christ is expressed in one Body which has one Spirit as its essence. —J. P.

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the full knowledge of Him (v. 17). This is not a simple matter that we, as believers, should gloss over. In our pursuit of biblical knowledge, it is more than possible to be ever learning but never able to come to the full knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7), it is possible to heap up to ourselves teachers who tickle our ears (4:3), and it is possible to search the Scriptures which testify of Christ, but never come to Him (John 5:39-40). We can all too easily honor the Lord with our lips, even though our hearts are far away from Him (Matt. 15:8).

**I**n order to know the hope of our calling, we need an exercised human spirit, but even more importantly, we need a heart that has been adjusted by Christ and calibrated to Christ. When the eyes of our heart have been enlightened, it is possible for the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, to grant us wisdom in our spirit<sup>5</sup> to know the mystery of God and revelation in our spirit to unveil the details of this mystery (Eph. 1:17-18). According to the Bible, the heart consists of the mind, emotion, and will of man plus the conscience, which is one of the functions of the human spirit.<sup>6</sup> In the initial salvation experience of every believer, the divine dispensing enters through the heart, even though the destination of this dispensing is the human spirit: With the heart there is believing unto righteousness, but it is the spirit that is life because of this righteousness (Rom. 10:10; 8:10). Even in our continuing experience of the divine dispensing, the condition of our heart remains vitally important. When we turn our heart to the Lord, the veil is taken away and we clearly can see the things of God in our spirit (2 Cor. 3:16). When our heart does not blame us, we have boldness toward God (1 John 3:21). And when we have a true heart in full assurance of faith, having a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, we can come forward to the Lord in our spirit (Heb. 10:22).

To have the eyes of our heart enlightened requires that our conscience, mind, emotion, and will, which are the components of our heart, be thoroughly dealt with....First, we need an open spirit with a conscience purified by our confessing and dealing with our sins and by the sprinkling of the redeeming blood of Christ (Heb. 9:14; 10:22). Next, we need a sober mind (2 Tim. 1:7 and note 2), a loving emotion (John 14:21), and a submissive will (John 7:17) in order to have a pure heart. When we have such a spirit



and heart, the eyes of our heart will be able to see. (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:18, note 1)

**P**aul's prayer that we would know the hope of our calling is utterly outside the realm of doctrine. The knowing which he speaks of is possible only when we open ourselves to the principles of the divine life that are operative in the divine economy: The base of this operation is the righteousness of God, which is satisfied by our application of the precious blood of our redeeming Christ. With righteousness satisfied, the divine life can and will flow out from the innermost part of our being. Expressing it differently, the apostle John described a "river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1). If our heart is not right before the Lord, either because of sin, coldness, or even hardness, the divine economy will not be operative, and any knowledge that we have will be nothing more than an assemblage of doctrinal points, no matter how coherently the points are organized. In contrast, we have the ability to know the things which have been graciously given to us by God because the Spirit indwells our human spirit (1 Cor. 2:11-12), and when our heart is proper, the Spirit actively makes known to us the hope of our calling by bringing us into the divine dispensing of the Triune God.

In the dispensing of the Triune God, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints are also made known to us (Eph. 1:18). All that God is and has cannot be expressed through any one individual. All of the saints, who are His corporate Body, are necessary for His full expression. Without an adjusted heart and an active spirit, there is little, if any, appreciation for the saints, which in reality equals little, if any, appreciation for the Christ who has been uniquely wrought into every member of His Body. A lack of appreciation for the saints is a clear sign of the need for more of the divine dispensing. Paul prefaced his prayer in these verses with tender appreciation for the saints in Ephesus: "Therefore I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you and your love to all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (vv. 15-16). Paul's openness to the Lord was equivalent to his openness to the saints. True appreciation for the riches of the

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glory of God's inheritance in the saints is an issue of the divine dispensing because we naturally think more highly of ourselves than we ought (Rom. 12:3) and more often than not despise the brothers (14:10). Such thoughts, however, do not come from a sober mind; they come from a heart in need of calibration. Without this calibration, the operation of the divine economy in the measure of each one part is frustrated, and the growth of the Body, which can come only from the Body itself, not from teachings or organization, is limited.

**T**hese limitations seem insurmountable: Who can love so unreservedly given our heritage in Adam of individualism and divisiveness? Who can bear with one another, receive one another, and minister words of grace to one another? This requires a power beyond the capabilities of our human nature. This power, however, is not beyond the capabilities of the divine nature which we partake of in the dispensing of the Triune God. Consequently, we need to know the surpassing greatness of God's power which is toward us who believe (Eph. 1:19). This is the power which operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead; it is the power of resurrection. This is the power which seated Christ in the heavens; it is the power of ascension (v. 20). This is the power which is far above all and able to put all things under Christ's feet; it is the subjecting power. And this is the power which heads up all things; it is the heading-up power (v. 22). This power is *toward* us who believe; it is *to* the church, but how much of this power is accessed in our daily living? If we are willing to answer honestly, the placement of Paul's prayer in this chapter and its evident burden will be immediately understandable. The surpassing greatness of His power is the energy behind the hope of our calling. With this power, the church, which is His Body, will express the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

*To the church* implies a kind of transmission. Whatever Christ, the Head, has attained and obtained is transmitted to the church, His Body. In this transmission the church shares with Christ in all His attainments: the resurrection from the dead, His being seated in His transcendence, the subjection of all things under His feet, and the headship over all things.

*Toward us who believe* (v. 19) and *to the church* indicate that the divine power, which includes all that the Triune God has passed through, has been installed into us once for all and is being transmitted into us continually, causing us to enjoy Christ richly and to have the proper church life as His Body, His fullness, the issue of God's blessing mentioned previously. (Recovery Version, v. 22, note 3)

To see this power is to know this power. Just as Abraham possessed the land which he was shown (Gen. 13:15), we can possess the blessings of the Triune God by seeing and

knowing the hope of our calling in accordance with Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1. And like Abraham who then began to walk through the length and breadth of the land (Gen. 13:17), Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1 is the road map for our entrance into the economy of God as the dispensing of the Triune God. Even with an entrance into the economy of God, however, a walk that is worthy of the hope of our calling involves a moment-by-moment, day-by-day, life-long experience of the divine dispensing.

### Experiencing the Hope of Our Calling

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3<sup>7</sup> expresses his profound burden for the church's experience of the economy of God. It builds upon the burden that he expressed in his prayer in Ephesians 1, and in many respects, it is the highest prayer in the New Testament. This is the way in which the Father's will is done on earth, and this is the way in which the kingdom and the power and the glory are fully manifested. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 defines the pattern and outworking of the divine economy which the Triune God purposed in Himself. It is a pattern of experience, plainly and simply.

#### *For This Cause*

The force of the cause behind Paul's prayer was so strong that it interrupted his writing at the beginning of chapter three and then brought him to his knees to intercede for the church's experience of the economy of God. Many commentators<sup>8</sup> agree that verses 2 through 21 in chapter three are a parenthesis, a parenthetical pause in the discourse of Paul's writing. Ephesians 4:1, which says, "I beseech you therefore, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called," completes Paul's thought in 3:1, where he writes, "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the Gentiles." In between these two verses, his thought is divinely interrupted by an overwhelming burden that the church would practically enter into the experience of the divine dispensing which he presented in the first two chapters and which he personally enjoyed in his status as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

**T**he cause of the economy of God brought Paul to the position of being a prisoner of Christ Jesus, both literally and figuratively. Paul wrote this Epistle during his imprisonment in Rome, which was brought about in the sovereignty of God to protect and complete the revelation of His new testament economy. Paul's imprisonment was precipitated by his arrest in association with riots that broke out in Jerusalem at the conclusion of his third journey. The immediate catalyst of these riots was his participation in a purification ceremony involving the Nazarite vow of the Old Testament. This brought him into the temple and in too close a proximity with Jews from Asia with whom he

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had been vigorously contending for the truth (Acts 21:17-28).

God might have tolerated Paul's carrying out of a private vow in [Acts] 18:18, but He would not allow Paul, a vessel chosen by Him not only for the completing of His New Testament revelation (Col. 1:25) but also for the carrying out of His New Testament economy (Eph. 3:2, 7-8), to participate in the Nazarite vow, a strict Judaic practice. In going to Jerusalem, Paul's intention might have been to clear up the Judaic influence on the church there, but God knew that the church there was incurable. Hence, in His sovereignty God allowed Paul to be arrested by the Jews and imprisoned by the Romans that he might write his last eight Epistles, which completed the divine revelation (Col. 1:25) and gave the church a clearer and deeper view concerning God's New Testament economy (Eph. 3:3-4). (Recovery Version, Acts 21:26, note 1)

**A**s Paul was writing the details of God's economy in Ephesians 1—2 from his prison cell in Rome, he must have been impressed with the central importance of the revelation that had been entrusted to him. Undoubtedly, he also realized that his status as a prisoner was due largely to his conduct in the execution of his divine commission. In accepting his imprisonment and in learning from his experiences, Paul also became a prisoner in a spiritual and figurative sense. He was willing to be taken and led as a captive, and in his status as a captive, he then was willing to be given as a gift to men, an apostle, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ (4:8, 11-12). What a marvelous testimony of the heart of a man who is willing to forsake everything in his past for God's economy and for the saints: "Blessed is he who does not judge himself in what he approves" (Rom. 14:22)! Faithfulness following failure, rather than self-indulgent remorse, is always a powerful demonstration of blessing, but such faithfulness, steeled under the governmental hand of God, will always be tempered with genuine humility and a deep burden that the Body would benefit from such experiences. Often, however, this benefit can be passed on only through prayer, and so Paul prayed that the church would have a deeper experience of the cause before him—God's economy.



### *Strengthened with Power*

The remedy to weakness of any kind, whether it is colossal, public failure or merely momentary, private lapses in a walk that is worthy of God's calling, is power—divine power. Our entrance into the experience of God's economy, walking in the length and breadth of this vast land, begins with the transmission of divine power to the church. In situations of spiritual death and dormancy, the church must be strengthened with the power that raised Christ from the dead. In situations involving gross or even subtle entanglement with the things of the world that lies in the hand of the evil one (1 John 5:19), the church must be strengthened with the power that raised Christ to the heavens. In situations involving our need to exercise God's authority, binding and loosing on earth that which is bound and loosed in the heavens, the church must be strengthened with the power that subjected all things under the feet of Christ. And for the topmost goal of the Triune God, the expression of the One who fills all in all, the church must be strengthened with the power that heads up all things in Christ. This is the fourfold power that Paul prayed the church would know in Ephesians 1. The transmission of this power is both a demonstration of the divine economy and the means of the church's practical participation in the divine economy.

Paul's use of the word *strengthened* highlights the typical condition of most of us saints—the need to be spiritually strengthened with divine power that can resurrect, ascend, subject, and head up. Acknowledging our need for this divine power is not an admission of defeat but rather an admission of our need to grow in the divine life. The life which we have received is but a small seed in need of being rooted and grounded with others of like precious faith. The rooting and grounding that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 3:17 begins with being strengthened with the divine power that is surpassingly great toward the church. May we all pray such a genuine prayer: "Lord, strengthen us with the divine power that is toward the church."

### *Through His Spirit*

The fourfold divine power is available only through the Spirit. It is not something that falls upon us; it comes

from within us through the indwelling Spirit in our spirit. From the time of our regeneration, the Spirit as the source of this divine power has been installed within our innermost being. Every situation of death that we encounter while in the body of our flesh can be overcome by the enlivening operation of the Spirit in our spirit (1 Pet. 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:10). In the Spirit's divine operation, there is distinction, but not separation, between the Spirit and the divine power, and there is distinction, but not separation, between the Spirit and our spirit. We have been joined to the Lord as one spirit, and the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:16). The demonstration of the Spirit is always a demonstration of power, and the spirit which we have been given is a spirit of power (1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Tim. 1:7). May we all pray that the Spirit's divine operation would empower the church to grow inwardly in the sustaining environment of His fourfold power. In the Spirit's divine operation, a spirit of faith will be produced as our inner man is renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:13, 16).

### *Into the Inner Man*

In the church's experience of the economy of God, the strengthening of the Spirit is directed into the inner man, the regenerated human spirit mingled with the Spirit. Prior to regeneration, the soul is the very person of man, and the body and spirit are subservient vessels under the power and direction of the soul. The physical conduct of unregenerate man is directed by the lusts of his flesh, which respond to the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts (Eph. 2:3), and the spirit of unregenerate man is deadened in terms of its fellowship with and intuition of God because of offenses and sins (v. 1). At the time of our regeneration, however, the Spirit indwelt our human spirit and enlivened our capacity to know and fellowship with God because of the dispensing of the divine life.

Our spirit is no longer merely a vessel; it has become our person with the life of God....The old person, the soul with the human life, has been crucified on the cross, and now our new person is the spirit with the divine life. Our spirit regenerated with the divine life is now our inner man. (Lee, *Life-study* 279)

**T**he experience of God's economy begins with our inner man being strengthened with power through the Spirit. Having conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh and possessing a heritage of sin and death in Adam, there should be little doubt of our need to be strengthened into our inner man. We easily are distracted from the Spirit and all too often fall back into our former manner of life (4:22), the habitual living of the old man. Putting off the old man is a matter of putting on Christ, of putting on the new man, which is to be renewed in the

spirit of our mind as our mingled spirit begins to direct our walk in the Spirit (Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:23-24). The putting off of the old man comes through the strengthening of the Spirit, not from the power of our physical life, the will of our flesh, or even the created will of man (John 1:13). It comes from God being practically and experientially dispensed into our mingled human spirit. There is much in contemporary Christian teaching that stresses self-help and self-improvement, but these efforts of the flesh eventually will wither away like grass. The putting on of the new man also comes through the strengthening of the Spirit. This is a process of learning Christ and of being taught in Him as the reality is in Jesus (Eph. 4:20-21), and it is the Spirit who guides us into this reality, making the unsearchable riches of Christ known to us (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; Eph. 3:8).

### *The Riches of His Glory*

The Spirit strengthens us into the inner man according to the riches of His glory, which are the unsearchable riches of Christ. Glory is the expression of God, Christ is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), and the glory of God is found in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). "The riches of Christ are what Christ is to us, such as light, life, righteousness, and holiness, what He has for us, and what He accomplished, attained, and obtained for us. These riches of Christ are unsearchable and untraceable" (Recovery Version, Eph. 3:8, note 3). Contrary to what many Christians are taught, the primary emphasis of the Spirit is to strengthen the believers to express the unsearchably rich Christ; it is not to "manifest" signs and wonders. Those who seek signs and wonders may or may not find them, but such manifestations are of little use in the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man. The most compelling evidence of the Spirit's strengthening is presented, not through signs and wonders, but rather through the transformation of the soul (Rom. 12:2). Our mind must be renewed, our emotions must be regulated, and our will must be constrained so that we will be open to the Lord for His moment-by-moment dispensing. This produces a living according to Paul's pattern, a living that is with all lowliness and meekness and long-suffering, and which bears one another in love in order to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace (Eph. 4:2-3). This is a living that is according to the riches of His glory.

### *Christ Making His Home in Our Hearts*

A living that maintains the oneness of the Spirit is also a clear sign that Christ is making His home in our hearts. The strengthening of the Spirit into the inner man is so that Christ can make His home in our hearts. God dispenses Himself into us from our spirit to our soul and

ultimately to our mortal bodies. Christ desires to spread into our mind, emotion, and will because the fundamental obstacle to gaining His poetic masterpiece is the condition of our heart (2:10). It is the hardness and coldness of our heart that is the most difficult for God to surmount. Regeneration is instantaneous, but transformation is the issue of a lifelong walk that is according to the hope of our calling. Thus, the true focus of the believers' experience is for Christ to make His home in our hearts. More often than not, however, we treat Christ as a guest rather than as the host: Our thoughts are our thoughts, our will is our will, our emotions are our emotions, and only reluctantly do we let go of them. We typically want God's will for our life, not God's will in

and of itself. We make Him subservient to our wishes and relegate Him to the status of our dutiful provider, rather than acknowledging that we are a people acquired for His possession (1 Pet. 2:9). There is no doctrine that can cause Christ to dwell in our hearts; it is only our experience of the Spirit's strengthening through faith that avails in God's economy.

### *Through Faith*

The realm of the Spirit's strengthening and of Christ making His home in our hearts is a realm of faith, not of feeling. The economy of God is in faith, and it is faith that avails (1 Tim. 1:4; Gal. 5:6). When properly understood

## *From Hype to Faith and Love*

Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith. But the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and out of a good conscience and out of unfeigned faith; from which things some, having misaimed, have turned aside to vain talking, desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither the things that they say, nor concerning what they confidently affirm. (1 Tim. 1:3-7)

**A**ccording to Paul's admonition to Timothy, missing the mark of God's economy—the living Christ in our spirit—is more the norm rather than the exception. If it were not so, would the Body of Christ, for example, be so rife with division? The end of Paul's charge to Timothy was love out of a pure heart, out of a good conscience, and out of unfeigned faith. Teachers who turn away from these safeguards of the divine life only produce vain talk, even when the talk concerns the Scriptures. It is quite easy to entangle the truth with myths and unending genealogies that only produce questionings.

Much now is being taught concerning the second coming of Christ. While many teachers are careful not to give exact predictions, they still predict His imminent return, drawing more evidence from their interpretations of unfolding world events and "confirmations" from extra-biblical sources than from the Scriptures. As such, our newspapers are read more ravenously than the Bible, and many selfishly prepare for doomsday, hoarding food, water, and other "essentials." Many in the church are consumed more with the conversion of their assets into gold in preparation for a global economic meltdown

than they are with buying the gold that is available only through a living touch with Christ: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire that you may be rich, and white garments that you may be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness may not be manifested, and eyesalve to anoint your eyes that you may see" (Rev. 3:18).

In the Bible our operating, working faith (Gal. 5:6) is likened to gold (1 Pet. 1:7), and the divine nature of God, which is the divinity of Christ, is typified by gold (Exo. 25:11). By faith we partake of the divine nature of God (2 Pet. 1:1, 4-5). The degraded recovered church has the knowledge of the doctrines concerning Christ but not much living faith to partake of the divine element of Christ. She needs to pay the price to gain the golden faith through the fiery trials that she may participate in the real gold, which is Christ Himself as the life element to His Body. Thus she can become a pure golden lampstand ([Rev.] 1:20) for the building of the golden New Jerusalem (21:18). (Recovery Version, Rev. 3:18, note 2)

The hype concerning Christ's return should not distract the believers from the hope which is in us now. The Christ who will return is now available in our spirit; we should be looking for Him subjectively, rather than just objectively. We should sanctify Christ in our hearts (1 Pet. 3:15), love out of a pure heart (1 Tim. 1:5), and endeavor to have a good and pure conscience by confessing our sins (1:19; 3:9) in order to remain in the fellowship of the divine life (1 John 1:6-9). With hearts thus comforted, we can be knit together in love with all the saints unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ. This is the full knowledge of Him that Paul prayed would be our portion in Ephesians 1:17-23. —J. P.

within the context of the New Testament revelation, faith is the organic operation of Christ, who is appreciated, received, accepted, joined, partaken of, and enjoyed in response to hearing the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation. We are justified by the faith of Christ, which is the dispensed Christ who cannot deny Himself (Rom 3:22; 2 Tim. 2:13).

Faith has an object, and it issues from its object. This object is Jesus, who is God incarnate. When man hears Him, knows Him, appreciates Him, and treasures Him, He causes faith to be generated in man, enabling man to believe in Him. Thus, He becomes the faith in man by which man believes in Him. Hence, this faith becomes the faith in Him, and it is also the faith that belongs to Him. (Recovery Version, Rom. 3:22, note 1)

Christ makes His home in our hearts through the organic operation of the divine life—His love becomes our love (1 John 4:7), His mind our mind (1 Cor. 2:16) and His will our will (Eph. 6:6). This is the growth of God (Col. 2:19). The life of every believer should be a life of faith, not of appearance, a life of walking by the organic operation of the divine life. Too often, however, Christians are weighed down under layers of condemnation because they have been given a “barometer” of faith that judges spiritual worthiness by things which are seen, rather than things which are not seen (2 Cor. 4:18). Faith is not proven by material possessions but by the genuine growth of the divine life, which is principally manifested in the transformation of our soul as Christ makes His home in our hearts. This is the realm of the unseen things, but it is an eternal and heavenly realm of spiritual blessing.

### *Being Rooted and Grounded in Love*

Faith, the organic operation of the indwelling Christ, is experientially demonstrated by two issues of this operation, namely the rooting and grounding of the saints in love. Paul’s use of the terms *rooted* and *grounded* is the first explicit indication that his prayer in chapter three is a prayer for the church’s experience, rather than just for an individual’s experience. It is no coincidence that they also occur in close proximity to the terms *faith* and *love*. Both of these terms are intensely corporate in their application throughout in the New Testament. Although every believer has been apportioned a unique measure of faith, the faith that has been allotted is equally precious (Rom. 12:6; 2 Pet. 1:1). It is the same faith because there is one faith (Eph. 4:5). Furthermore, we are members of the household of the faith (Gal. 6:10). The operation of faith, which is Christ making His home in our hearts, issues in the saints being rooted and grounded in the divine life for the building up of the Body of Christ. This operation flourishes in an atmosphere of mutuality as love

flows among and between saints who are being built up together. Faith, hope, and love abide, but the greatest indicator of the divine dispensing is love because love is the inner substance of God. When we love one another with the love of God, the love that is God, God abides in us and Christ makes His home in us (1 John 4:12).

### *Full of Strength to Apprehend with All the Saints*

In such an environment of faith and love, the church is full of strength to apprehend the vast dimensions of Christ, to intensively lay hold of the unsearchably rich Christ. Such an apprehension requires all the saints. In the divine dispensing, the church, realizing its mingled roots in the divine life and its shared foundation for the growth of the divine life, increasingly receives and values every member of the Body, recognizing that the operation in the measure of each one part is necessary, even highly treasured. Without all the saints, no one is complete. The strengthening of the Spirit is so that Christ can make His home in our hearts, and Christ makes His home in our hearts so that His vast dimensions can be apprehended by all the saints. The true gaining of Christ begins when we are rooted and grounded with the saints. We have not been called to be individual, spiritual giants, but rather to be blended and coordinated members, each receiving and transmitting the divine life of the Triune God, and each effecting the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love (Eph. 4:16).

### *The Breadth and Length and Height and Depth*

Paul likens the dimensions of Christ, whom the church is strengthened to apprehend, to the breadth and length and height and depth. Paul attaches no unit of measurement to these descriptors because Christ is immeasurably vast. We will never exhaust all that He is to us. Like the Holy of Holies and the New Jerusalem, Christ is proportionally balanced in every way. The church’s experience of Christ will also produce a proportionally balanced corporate living. In the divine dispensing, there is no provision for an unturned cake, there is only balance and blending (Hosea 7:8; 1 Cor. 12:24). If any spiritual “experience” is taken to an extreme in any direction, it is an indication that there may be little, if any, genuine experience of Christ. To apprehend Christ is the portion of the saints in the light (Col. 1:12), and anyone who resists the balancing that comes through the impartation of Christ’s multi-dimensional divine life eventually will be in danger of being isolated and cut off from the supply of life that flows from the Head to the Body. The whole body is not an eye, and the eye cannot say that it has no need of the hand (1 Cor. 12:17, 21). The balance that the church needs in its pursuit of Christ does not come from outward correction and legalistic discipleship but rather from receiving the saints in their unique and necessary functions (Rom. 12:4). In the

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*In the divine dispensing, the church increasingly receives and values every member of the Body, recognizing that the operation in the measure of each one part is necessary, even highly treasured. Without all the saints, no one is complete.*

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proper experience of the economy of God, the divine life can flow from one member to every member and from every member to one member. This is the fellowship of the divine life.

#### *Knowing the Knowledge-surpassing Love of Christ*

In such a fellowship, the love of Christ, which is knowledge-surpassing, is known. Words simply fail here; more experience is needed. This is possible in the economy of God, and for now this promise is sufficient.

#### *Filled unto All the Fullness of God*

The end result of the church's experience of the divine economy and the goal of Paul's prayer is the church being filled unto all the fullness of God. The church is a corporate vessel—selected, predestinated, redeemed, and sealed—in order to contain and express the fullness of God. It receives the riches of Christ as grace and expresses these riches as glory. The hope of our calling is to be filled unto all the fullness of God. This thought, this hope, does not dishonor God; it is not presumptuous or irreverent. Rather, it satisfies God, fulfills His desire for image and dominion, and displays His multifarious wisdom, Christ, the Son in whom He finds His delight, through the church according to His eternal purpose (Gen. 1:26; Eph. 3:10-11; Matt. 3:17).

#### *Superabundantly above All That We Ask or Think*

The Triune God has purposed to have an economy unto the fullness of the times, and although this purpose seems so extravagantly beyond our concepts, much less our capabilities, we have the assurance that He will accomplish what He has purposed. And He will do it in a way that is superabundantly above all that we ask or think. Having a spirit of faith, we believe, therefore we speak. He is able. He is our guarantee. He is our hope.

#### *The Power Which Operates in Us*

He will accomplish His economy through the operation of His economy. Having begun by the impartation of the Spirit through regeneration, He will perfect the church by

the continuing impartation of the Spirit through the work of the ministry, the functioning that flows out from the members of the Body who have been strengthened with the Spirit's fourfold power.

#### *Glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus*

The issue of this power is glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, simply and wonderfully. This glory will be preeminently, ultimately, and expansively with Christ because the church can never attain to the Godhead; nevertheless, there will be glory in the church because the divine life and nature that have been dispensed into the church has but one eternal destination—the expression of the Triune God. And this expression will be glory.

#### **Conclusion**

The hope of our calling is a corporate hope. His calling is our calling, and this calling is rooted and grounded in the church's corporate experience of the economy of God, the dispensing of the Triune God. There is an aspect of this experience that depends upon our individual response, but the experience of God's calling consummately is a corporate experience. We, who have been joined to the Lord as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), have been joined to one another in the same one spirit. There is only one mingled spirit, not many mingled spirits in many individual saints. The Spirit witnesses with *our* spirit (Rom. 8:16). We are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit (Eph. 2:22), not spirits. God is the Dweller; *our* one mingled spirit is the dwelling place. It is time for the saints to abandon individual spiritual pursuits; this is an extreme that is ultimately unbalanced and unproductive. The Triune God is seeking a corporate dwelling place in our corporately mingled spirit.

**T**he Spirit's strengthening is directed toward a corporate inner man, the new man, who was created in Christ and reconciled in one Body through His work on the cross. Christ is making a corporate home in the hearts of the saints. The rooting and grounding that results from Christ making His home is corporate. The apprehension of the vast dimensions of Christ is corporate. The filling that is unto all the fullness of God is a corporate filling,

and the glory that will be displayed through the church is the corporate glory of the Body of Christ.

This hope is also our challenge; it is well worthy of Paul's marvelous prayers in chapters one and three and well worthy of his burdened beseeching at the beginning of chapter four. **LFC**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The eternal dispensing of the Triune God is likened in the Bible to a flowing river that stretches from eternity past to eternity future, and many of the sentence structures that describe this dispensing in Ephesians seemingly are a divine reflection of this flowing river—long, winding, and with numerous modifying clauses that are essential to the presentation of the divine reality that is the portion of the church. This is especially evident in verses 3 through 14 of chapter one, which describe the hope of our calling, verses 15 through 23 of the same chapter, which convey Paul's burden and prayer that the church would know the hope of its calling, and verses 14 through 19 of chapter three, which convey Paul's prayer that the church would experience the spiritual blessings contained in the Father's selection and predestination, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging, which are the hope of our calling.

<sup>2</sup>In Greek the word *stewardship* is the same as *economy* in Ephesians 3:9 and 1:10.

In relation to God, this word denotes God's economy, God's administration; in relation to the apostle, it denotes the stewardship (*stewardship* is used also in 1 Cor. 9:17). The stewardship of the grace is for the dispensing of the grace of God to His chosen people for the producing and building up of the church. Out of this stewardship comes the ministry of the apostle, who is a steward in God's house, ministering Christ as God's grace to God's household. (Recovery Version, Eph. 3:2, note 2)

<sup>3</sup>Colossians 1:27 succinctly presents our experience of God's economy as the dispensing of the Triune God. Our first experience of this economy occurred when we first hoped in Christ. We were joined to the Lord through faith (1 Cor. 6:17), and Christ, ever unable to deny Himself and ever available as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), was imparted into the very center of our being, our human spirit (John 3:6). Now Christ is in us, never to depart and never stagnant in operation. Our continuing experience of God's economy involves the living and moving of the indwelling Christ as He makes His home in our hearts, dispensing more of Himself into us in order to complete the good work that He has begun in us (Phil. 1:6).

<sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>Our human spirit is the innermost part of our tripartite being. There are many verses which attest to the fact that we have a human spirit, as distinguishable from both the Holy Spirit and the soul (Rom. 1:9; 1 Cor. 2:11; 5:4; 14:14-16; 16:18; 2 Cor. 2:13; 1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12; James 2:26; 1 Pet. 3:4), and when the church begins to better grasp this scriptural distinction, the reality of the indwelling Christ will become clearer in both our understanding and experience of the divine economy.

<sup>6</sup>A clear biblical overview of the functions of the soul and spirit, as well as the heart, is presented in chapters three through seven of *The Economy of God* by Witness Lee, published by Living Stream Ministry.

<sup>7</sup>For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God. But to Him who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which operates in us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>8</sup>I.e., William Kelly, J. N. Darby, Robert Govett, Matthew Poole, and Alfred Barry in *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

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