

The Recovery of Image and Dominion in Ephesians

by John Pester

In the New Testament Paul's letters often addressed specific problems. From the problems created by division and immaturity in Corinth, the law and religion in Galatia, and gnosticism in Colossae, Paul responded to every need among the early churches by presenting a revelation of Christ according to the economy of God. He presented Christ as the unique answer to every problem in the church and the economy of God as the unique means for dispensing the riches of Christ to the church. In writing the Epistle to the Ephesians, however, the temporal problems of the church were far from Paul's immediate consideration. Instead, he addressed God's eternal desire for an enlarged expression of Himself in which all things are headed up in Christ.

This enlarged expression of God involves humanity, specifically redeemed and regenerated humanity. When God created man, He declared His desired purpose, stating,

Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heaven and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. (Gen. 1:26)

God desires that man would express His image and exercise His dominion. Temporarily, this desire was frustrated by the fall of man into sin and rebellion, instigated by the deceitfulness of Satan. The eternal purpose of God, however, remains, and Paul received a full revelation of the mystery of God's will and presented a complete picture of the process of the recovery of image and dominion in Ephesians. Knowing that the recovery of image and dominion is dependent upon the believers' participation in the economy of God, Paul framed his view of recovery in Ephesians within the context of the economy of God. Without God's economy there is no possibility of recovering a full expression of God's image or restoring God's unchallenged dominion throughout the universe.

Image and Dominion

At first glance, the subject of image and dominion does not appear to be a prominent theme in Ephesians. The subject of the economy of God, however, is stressed (1:10; 3:9), and when Paul refers to the economy of God, he clearly associates it with the eternal purpose of God. In chapter one, Paul speaks of the mystery of God's will being made known unto the economy of the fullness of the times (vv. 9-10). In chapter three, he also speaks of enlightening all that they might see what the economy of the mystery is in order to display the multifarious wisdom of God through the church, which is according to the eternal purpose of God (vv. 9-11). In both instances the economy of God is clearly linked with the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

The eternal purpose of God is centered on Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) and to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt. 28:18). Image and dominion reside in Christ, but through the believers' organic identification with and incorporation into the Christ (1 Cor. 12:12), the image of Christ has been enlarged, expanded, and increased (John 3:30; 12:24), and the dominion of Christ has been delegated to the church (Matt. 28:18-19; 2 Cor. 10:8; Eph. 1:22). God's eternal purpose is fulfilled by the enlargement of God's image and the delegation of God's authority in and through the church.

It is every believer's portion to participate in Christ and share in both His image and dominion. In eternity past, we were predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29); in this age, we are being transformed by the Lord Spirit into the same image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18); and in the next age, we will fully bear the image of the heavenly Christ (1 Cor. 15:49). In regard to dominion, the right to exercise dominion was given to created man in the past (Gen. 1:26); the right to reign in life has been given to redeemed believers in this age (Rom. 5:17); and the right to reign

forever and ever will be given to the glorified believers throughout eternity future (Rev. 22:5). In eternity future, the image of God will be enlarged through Christ as the Head and the church as His Body, and the dominion of God will be unchallenged, following the utter defeat of His enemy through the church which has been incorporated into God as its armor.

Image and Dominion in Ephesians

Image and dominion are intimately related to Christ's preeminent position in God's eternal plan, His eternal economy, and the Epistle to the Ephesians speaks of Christ gaining this preeminence through the heading up of all things in Him, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth (1:10). Even though the words *image* and *dominion* are not present in Ephesians, the intrinsic realities expressed by these terms are well-conveyed in the phrase *to head up all things in Christ*. Ephesians does more than present the concepts of *image* and *dominion*; it speaks to the very process through which image and dominion are attained, experienced, and expressed.

The process of attaining God's image is an organic process involving sons who grow into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, who put on the new man which is created according to God, and who ultimately are headed up and filled unto all the fullness of God (4:13, 24; 1:10, 22; 4:15; 5:23; 3:19). In chapter one, Paul begins to unfold the organic economy of God by speaking of the Father's selection and predestination. The believers have been chosen in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish, having been predestinated unto sonship (vv. 4-5). Our selection and predestination unto sonship speak of our Father's eternal desire for sons who shine forth in His image and express all that He is. Based on His desire, He has chosen some to receive His life and nature based on the redemption of Christ. Having received forgiveness, the believers are no longer alienated from the life of God (4:18), and within each believer there is the divine capacity to grow and mature in the divine life.

The shape of our growth and maturity is according to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (v. 13). The operation of the divine life will produce only a reproduction of Christ, and this operation is activated when the believers exercise to put off, as regards their former manner of life, the old man, which is being corrupted according to the lusts of the deceit, and to put on the new man (vv. 22, 24). "The new man is of Christ. It is His Body, created in Him on the cross (2:15-16). It is not individual but corporate (Col. 3:10-11). In this corporate new man Christ is all and in all" (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:24, note 2). The new man was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality. *Reality*

refers to the reality that is in Jesus, which we have learned and been taught in Him (vv. 24, 21).

We learn from Him (Matt. 11:29) according to His example, not by our natural life but by Him as our life in resurrection. To learn Christ is simply to be molded into the pattern of Christ, that is, to be conformed to the image of Christ. (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:20, note 1)

As we believers learn Christ and are organically taught in Him, we are molded into the pattern of Jesus' human living, a living which is fully headed up.

Jesus lived a life in which He did everything in God, with God, and for God. God was in His living, and He was one with God. This is what is meant by *the reality is in Jesus*. We, the believers, who are regenerated with Christ as our life and are taught in Him, learn from Him as the reality is in Jesus. (Recovery Version, v. 21, note 1)

Through an organic process of learning Christ, we will be headed up and conformed to the image of Christ to the point that the church will be filled unto all the fullness of God (3:19).

Dominion is an organic issue of image, which, in turn, is an issue of God's life and nature. We will bear the image of the heavenly because we have been given, through regeneration, the life and nature of the Triune God, and as we partake of this divine nature with its bountiful supply, there is an escape from the corruption that is in the world and an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior (2 Pet. 1:4, 11). Our entrance into the eternal kingdom is our entrance into the realm of God's dominion. Ephesians addresses both our utter shortage of dominion, due to our fallen human life and nature, and our attainment of dominion through the transmission of the divine life and nature into our being, which are contained in the riches of Christ.

When Paul speaks of all things needing to be headed up in Christ (Eph. 1:10), there is a strong and implied stress upon the utter lack of dominion in this present age among fallen humanity. God's desire for image and dominion would have been attained if Adam had partaken of the tree of life rather than the tree of the knowledge of good and of evil. Instead, man was corrupted through the deceit of God's enemy, Satan, and sin entered into the world through this one man (Rom. 5:12).

In [Romans] 5—8 sin is personified. Sin is not merely an action; it is like a person who can enter (v. 12), reign (v. 21), lord it over people (6:14), deceive and kill people (7:11), and dwell in people and cause them to do things against their will (7:17, 20). It is quite alive (7:9) and exceedingly active; hence, it must be the evil nature of Satan,

the evil one, who, having injected himself into man through Adam's fall, has now become the very sinful nature dwelling, acting, and working in fallen man. This indwelling, personified sinful nature is the root of all the outward sinful acts. (Recovery Version, 5:12, note 2)

Apart from the Father's selection, Christ's redemption, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging, humanity is in bondage to its fallen, sinful, even satanic, nature. By nature we were sons of disobedience and children of wrath (Eph. 2:2-3), doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts. As such, our walk was governed according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, and we walked in the vanity of our mind, darkened in our understanding, fully living in the old man, which is being corrupted according to the lusts of the deceit (4:17-18, 22). "The old man is of Adam, who was created by God but became fallen through sin....*The deceit* is personified. Hence, *the deceit* refers to the deceiver, Satan, from whom come the lusts of the corrupted old man" (Recovery Version, v. 22, notes 4 and 5). Even though Christ's redemption and the Spirit's regeneration have made us members of the household of God (2:19), having the new life and new nature of our Father (4:18; 5:1, 8), there is still a need for heading up, especially in the church. As the church seeks to grow in the divine life upon the foundation of the apostles' revelation of the economy of God (2:20), for example, there is a continuing need to stand against the stratagems of the devil and the winds of teaching in the sleight of men (6:11; 4:14).

Despite the negative picture that is presented in Ephesians chapters two and four concerning the utter lack of dominion in this present age, Paul also presents a view of dominion from the standpoint of its heavenly and spiritual attainment. Ephesians begins with his well-speaking of the Triune God, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ (1:3). Our real status is in Christ, and thus, like Christ, the church's true position is far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named (v. 21). Additionally, all things have been subjected under Christ's feet, and He has been given to be Head over all things to the church (v. 22).

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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 transcendency, the subjection of all things under His feet, and the headship over all things. (Recovery Version, note 3)

In such an exalted position the church displays the multifarious wisdom of God to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies (3:10), gives no place to the devil, and does not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness (4:27; 5:11). Instead, as beloved children possessing the divine life and nature, the church imitates God (v. 1), walks in love and light (vv. 2, 8), redeems the time from evil days (v. 16), and is filled in spirit and subject to one another in the fear of Christ (vv. 18, 21). Finally, in such an exalted position the church stands on the earth, fighting for God's interest against the arrayed forces of His enemy, the rulers, the authorities, the world-rulers of this darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies (6:12-13). This is the dominion that flows forth from the image of Christ that has been imparted into the church through the economy of God.

The Recovery of Image and Dominion in Ephesians

Although Ephesians speaks of image and dominion as accomplished realities in the heavenlies, it also clearly speaks of humanity's loss of image and dominion through Satan's corruption and of the church's recovery of image and dominion through the economy of God. The source of recovery is the economy of God, and as such, the process of recovery is intrinsically related to the impartation of the divine life in the divine truth. Beginning in chapter one, there is an unveiling of the church's full recovery of image and dominion which unfolds through each subsequent chapter. Chapter one unveils the recovery of image and dominion from the standpoint of God's economy, the dispensing of the Triune God into the redeemed and regenerated members of the Body of Christ, the church. And in the following five chapters, there is a progressive unveiling of the recovery of image and dominion from the standpoint of the believers' participation in God's economy, from the church's dark beginning in the world under the control of the ruler of the authority of the air, Satan (2:2), to the church's triumphant stand against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies as God's warrior, even as the warring God in life and nature but not in the God-head (6:11-12).

Chapter One

In chapter one the economy of God is made known, the riches of the Son's grace begin to abound, and the process of recovering both image and dominion is initiated against a backdrop of universal rebellion, collapse, and chaos (vv. 7-10). The goal of this initiated recovery is the heading up

of all things in Christ. There is a need for heading up because the actual condition of the universe at this time is one of chaos and collapse.

The entire universe is a heap of collapse caused by rebellion. God created the universe in an excellent order, but an archangel, the head of the age before Adam, rebelled and became Satan. (See Isaiah 14.) Satan's rebellion caused the first collapse in the universe. In Genesis 1 God came in to restore the creation that had been ruined by this rebellion. Actually, chapter one of Genesis is not primarily a record of creation, but of restoration. In the restored universe God created man and made him the head of creation. But this man, Adam, fell. This was the second rebellion that led to the second collapse. As a result of these two rebellions, the whole universe has become a heap of collapse. (*Life-study* 76)

Apart from the Lord's abounding grace, no one can withstand the course of this satanic age or raise himself up out of this universal heap of collapse. But the Triune God, being rich in mercy, infinitely wise, and utterly purposeful, operates according to the economy of His own being: The Father selects and predestinates, the Son accomplishes the Father's selection through His redemptive blood, and the Spirit applies this redemption by sealing and pledging the believers. In and through this economy, the divine life of the Triune God has been made available, and this life, which is the resurrection life, has the power and capacity to lift unbelievers out of their dead and divided condition. The universe is in a state of collapse because death has been introduced into God's creation through the rebellion of Satan.

Satan has brought death to the entire creation of God. All of creation has been infected by the death factor of Satan. This is the reason that Romans 8:20 and 21 say that the creation has been subjected to vanity and is under the slavery of corruption. (*Life-study* 82)

In the economy of God, the dispensing of the divine life and nature overcomes, defeats, and destroys the power of the satanic life and nature, which has infected and corrupted our human life and nature with death, causing it to be fallen and collapsed. Through sin, death came into the world and has been passed on to every man so that the fruit of our every effort is just death (Rom. 5:12; 7:5).¹ To counteract death and to initiate the process of recovering image and dominion, God supplies His divine life in His economy.

Practically, in the believers' experience, the supply of God's life begins with hearing the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation. Through the hearing of faith, the divine life of the Triune God is applied through the sealing and pledging of the Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). The Spirit

seals the believers with the image of Christ. "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). With the impartation of life, following redemption and regeneration, the believers' recovery out of the satanic heap of collapse can begin and progress.

Progress, however, is not a matter of ethical behavior, self-improvement, or mere doctrinal knowledge. Having begun by the Spirit, progress toward the recovery of image and dominion is possible only through a continuing walk in the Spirit (Gal. 3:3; 5:25), which involves the transmission of the divine life according to the economy of God. In this economical transmission, the surpassing greatness of the power of Christ's resurrection life operates according to the might of His strength, raising and seating us with Him (Eph. 1:19-20). In and through this transmission, all things are subjected under His feet as the Head over all things to the church, and the church progressively expresses His image and exercises His dominion according to its status as the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 22-23).

Fullness is the goal of recovery, but our progressive participation in this process of recovery requires growth in the divine life. Even though we have been marked out and designated an inheritance through the Spirit's sealing, there is a battle for genuine growth raging within every redeemed believer because sin has not been eradicated from our flesh (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:13, 16-17).

Originally, God and Satan were fighting in the universe, but now they are fighting within man....The factor of death is fighting against the factor of life, and the factor of life is conquering, subduing, and swallowing up the factor of death. (*Life-study* 84)

This battle is between the life and nature of God and the life and nature of Satan, both now resident within the believers, the former in our regenerated human spirit and the latter in our flesh.

Chapter Two

In chapter two of Ephesians Paul speaks of the power of the flesh, which is under the control of the authority of

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darkness. It is a bleak picture that seemingly offers no hope for recovery. The corrupted life in our flesh only produces a living that is within the universal heap of collapse. Such a living is according to the age of this world and under the ruler of the authority of the air. This spirit, this aggregate authority, influences conduct that is motivated by the lusts of our flesh, the desires of our flesh and our thoughts, and our wrathful, fallen nature (vv. 2-3). Paul's description serves as a black background for our recovery and also as a sober reminder of our need to advance in the economical recovery of image and dominion. This advance is possible because of the power of the divine life, which Paul unveils in more detail in chapter two.

The power of this recovery is contained in the divine life which we share in Christ. In God's mercy, even when we were dead in offenses, we were made alive together with Christ through His saving grace (vv. 1, 5). Only grace, which cannot be separated from Christ, can empower sinners, who are living as sons of disobedience, to rise up out of the universal heap of collapse (vv. 5, 2). "Grace...denotes not only God freely dispensed into us for our enjoyment but also God's action in freely saving us. By such grace we have been saved out of our wretched position of death into the marvelous realm of life" (Recovery Version, v. 5, note 4). Grace practically comes to those who are in need of recovery when the truth of peace as the gospel is announced (v. 17). This announcing brings the believers into an organic union with Christ, and through Him we have organic access to the Father, who is the source of life, in one Spirit (John 5:26; Eph. 2:18). Through this access, the image of Christ is imparted into us through the sealing and pledging of the Spirit.

The announcing of peace as the gospel also imparts the reality of the mystery of Christ, contained in the revelation given to the holy apostles and prophets, into the believers. This revelation is the foundation of God's building (3:5-6; 2:20). Furthermore, the announcing of peace practically joins both Jew and Gentile into one Body to God in Christ, who is the cornerstone of the building (vv. 15-16, 20). The building of God is not material, but organic, because it is growing through the dispensing of the Triune God into regenerated human spirits (vv. 21-22). This growing building is the dwelling place of God, and the realm of God's dwelling is the realm of God's dominion.



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The recovery of image and dominion is intrinsically related to the growing, organic building of God that arises out of the universal heap of collapse through the dispensing of the Triune God as grace. In God's economy, grace is imparted when peace is announced as the gospel and is supplied² to the members of the Body through the believers' continuing access to and experience of the Triune God.

Chapter Three

Our experience of the Triune God and its organic issue is well-illustrated in chapter three of Ephesians. It provides a detailed picture of the believers' participation in the recovery of image and dominion through a stewardship of grace that dispenses the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and enlightens all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is (vv. 2, 8-9). The result of this twofold stewardship is a display of God's multifarious wisdom through the church (v. 10). The extent to which the economy of the mystery is made known to the believers is the extent to which the believers are brought into the practical experience and enjoyment of the riches of Christ. The riches of Christ produce the fullness of God, and the fullness of God is nothing less than the consummation of image and dominion.

To reach this consummation, however, there is a need for the church to receive and experience, moment by moment, the practical transmission of the divine life. The dispensing of the unsearchable riches of Christ in God's economy is directed *toward* the church. Ephesians 1:19-20 declares that the surpassing greatness of His power, the power that operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at God's right hand in the heavenlies, is *toward us who believe*, and verse 22 declares that, as a result of this transmission, Christ has been given to be Head over all things *to the church*.

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. (Recovery Version, 1:22, note 3)

These verses speak of the general direction of the divine transmission—it is *toward us who believe* and *to the church*. Ephesians 3:14-19, however, reveals that this divine transmission is specifically directed toward our regenerated human spirit. Paul's prayer in chapter three is a prayer for the experience of the divine transmission in God's economy. From such a proper posture in the Christian life, prayer on bowed knees, he prayed that the Father would grant us,

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. (vv. 16-19)

The process of recovery begins in our regenerated human spirit, but there is a need for us to be strengthened *into* our spirit, our inner man. Even though we have been regenerated and have a new source for our living—our enlivened human spirit that possesses the life and nature of God—we still live, primarily and habitually, in our soul which has been conditioned by our fallen and sinful background and nature. As regenerated believers, our human spirit has been made alive and is now our real person. In God's eyes and under Christ's blood, we are in Christ. This is a divine reality that we should never doubt. Having a spirit of faith, we should not shrink from declaring to the enemy, the devil, that we are the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor. 4:13; 5:21). In Christ Jesus, the operation of the law of the Spirit of life has freed us from the law of sin and of death (Rom. 8:2). However, we should not delude ourselves to think that we cannot turn this freedom into an opportunity for the flesh (Gal. 5:13). It is easy for us to habitually return to our former manner of living when the exercise of our spirit unto godliness is lacking (Eph. 4:22; 1 Tim. 4:7). It is for this reason that we must be strengthened *into* our inner man. Every day, we need the posture of submission and the prayerful exercise of our spirit which will empower us with the might of His strength to live in the realm of the divine life and nature rather than the realm of our fallen and sinful nature.

When we are thus strengthened into our inner man, Christ can operate in life to make His home in our hearts (Eph. 3:17), fully recovering every faculty of our heart for His expression, His image. With a strengthened spirit, our conscience will testify that we are without offense toward God and men (Acts 24:16), our mind will be renewed and brought into the obedience of the Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), our emotions will be regulated to express the love of Christ (Eph. 3:19), and our will will be subdued to seek the things of Christ (Phil. 2:20-21). Christ making His home in our hearts is the essence of transformation; it is the progressive growth of the divine image in our being. When our hearts are turned to the Lord, every veil of our old manner of living is taken away, and we are transformed into the same image from glory to glory through the operation of the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:16-18).

Transformation opens us to be built with other saints through a corporate apprehending of the breadth and length and height and depth, which are the universal dimensions of Christ. This, in turn, brings us into an

experiential knowing of the love of Christ that surpasses mere mental knowledge. The progression in Paul's prayer culminates in the church being filled unto all the fullness of God.

The fullness of God implies that the riches of all that God is have become His expression. When the riches of God are in God Himself, they are His riches. But when the riches of God are expressed, they become His fullness (John 1:16). All the fullness of God dwells in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9). Through His indwelling, Christ imparts the fullness of God into our being that we may be filled even unto the fullness of God to be the practical manifestation of the church, in which God may be glorified in His expression (v. 21). (Recovery Version, Eph. 3:19, note 2)

The expression that fully glorifies God is the expression that comes out of His fullness, and this fullness is the Body, which is the consummation of His recovery of image and dominion. Through the experience of being strengthened into our inner man through the Spirit, of Christ making His home in our hearts, of apprehending with all the saints the dimensions of Christ, and of knowing the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, the church practically fulfills the eternal purpose of God by growing and being filled unto all the fullness of God. In this fullness there is the expression of image and the exercise of dominion in the church, the enlarged and increased Christ. The fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God has been delegated to the church.

Many Christians, worshipping God for His almighty power, His supreme sovereignty, and His complete omniscience, have relegated all responsibility for the consummation of this age to God, trusting in an almost mechanistic fulfillment of prophecy to ensure and herald the coming of Christ. This passive attitude was not the attitude of the apostle Paul in his prayer in Ephesians chapter three. Without strengthening prayer, prayer that brings us into our spirit and then flows out of our spirit, we, as Christians, will be as defeated as any unbeliever. Without a willingness to allow Christ to make His home in our hearts, we, as Christians, will think, love, and choose as any unbeliever. Without allowing the divine life and nature to build us together with all the saints, we, as Christians, will be as divided as any unbeliever. And without exercising to be filled unto all

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the fullness of God, we, as Christians, will frustrate and hinder our purposeful and economical Triune God through a walk which is unworthy of the calling to which we have been called.

Chapter Four

In chapter four Paul resumes his exhortation, which he began in 3:1, that we would walk worthily of our calling (4:1). This worthy walk is a demonstration of recovery; it is the proof that the divine transmission is operative within the members of the Body of Christ. The description of this walk begins in chapter four and continues throughout most of chapter six. It is a description of the living and responsibility that are needed for the church in the Holy Spirit.³

This book is divided into two main sections. The first, composed of chs. 1—3, reveals the blessings and the position the church has obtained in Christ in the heavenlies. The second, comprising chs. 4—6, charges us concerning the living and responsibility the church should have in the Spirit on the earth. The basic charge is that we should walk worthily of God's calling, which is the totality of the blessings bestowed on the church, as revealed in 1:3-14. In the church, under the Triune God's abundant blessing, the saints should walk worthily of the Father's selection and predestination, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging. Hence, in chs. 4—6 we see, on the one hand, the living that the church should have, and, on the other hand, the responsibility that the church should bear. (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:1, note 3)

Living implies image because our Christian living is an expression of the measure of the divine life and nature that we practically experience. In our living there should be a daily increase in the expression of the Christ, the image of God. *Responsibility* implies dominion because bearing responsibility is an issue of the operation of the divine life and nature, which alone can order and uphold all things in Christ. In our living, there should be a progressive bearing of responsibility for the things of Christ and the church. This will assert and expand the realm of God's dominion on this earth and ultimately consummate this age in the fullness of the times, the fullness of God's economical recovery.



Keeping the oneness of the Spirit is not dependent upon "shaking hands" over divisive fences; it comes out of the peace of the cross that was established by Christ in His death upon the cross. Crucifixion terminates everything of division and brings us into the realm of the divine life in resurrection through the Spirit.

Chapter four provides some very particular indicators of a responsible living in God's economy. A living that is active in its participation in the recovery of image and dominion is one that diligently keeps the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace (v. 3). Keeping the oneness of the Spirit is a paramount indicator of recovery. As Christians, we are only deluding ourselves if we think that our life and work are satisfying to God when they are built upon a foundation of division, whether these divisions are based on doctrines, denominational affiliations, or practices. There is no image in division, and there is no dominion in division; there is only a white-washed hypocrisy that masks a system that mires down the believers in the "good" side of the heap of collapse. Keeping the oneness of the Spirit is not dependent upon agreements or "shaking hands" over divisive fences; it comes out of the peace of the cross, the uniting bond, that was established by Christ in His death upon the cross. Crucifixion terminates everything of division and brings us into the realm of the divine life in resurrection through the Spirit. Our oneness is the Spirit, not creedal statements or traditions that deprive the word of God of its authority (Matt. 15:6).

In a recovered living in the one Spirit, there is one Body, and this Body is built through gifts who have been constituted with the divine life and nature by having passed through many experiences of death and resurrection in Christ. Constitution comes out of death and resurrection, which is the essence of the uniting bond of peace. Gifts are not produced by seminary training; they were given by Christ to His Body, after He descended into the lower parts of the earth and then ascended with His captives them far above all (Eph. 4:8-10). In a recovered living, there are many experiences of death and resurrection (Phil. 3:10), and eventually, there is a giving by Christ of ourselves, as constituted gifts, to His Body for its perfection.

The image that is expressed by such gifts is marvelous! Some function as apostles sent by God, others function as prophets speaking forth God and speaking for God, others function as evangelists who present peace as the gospel, and still others shepherd and teach by ministering the nourishing word of God.⁴ All of these functions are not individual ministries but part of the one unique ministry that is the economy of God. The overall function of these gifts is to perfect the saints so that they, through the measure in the operation of each part, can directly build up the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:16). The Body, thus built up, bears the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, expressing Christ's image and exercising His dominion. Gifts perfect; they do not replace or usurp the function of the members. The clergy-laity system in today's Christendom is a great replacement and usurpation of the members of the Body; it is outside of the economy of God and only hinders rather than contributes to the

building up of the organic Body of Christ. We must encourage the growth of the divine life in each member, and we must learn to trust in the operation in the measure of these growing, functioning parts.

As the Body attains to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, there is the capacity in life to no longer be tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men. A responsible, recovered living in the Body is a living that rises above the satanic chaos related to the winds of teaching in the sleight of men. Rather than being little children, the Body grows up into Christ, the Head, and out from Christ as our Head, the Body is joined together and knit together through every joint of the rich supply. And in the operation in the measure of each one part, there is submission and order in the members' acceptance of their measure unto growth and growth unto order and submission in the members growing up into Christ in all things as the Body builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:14-16).

This built-up living in responsibility, finally, is absolutely apart from our former manner of life, which is the corrupted old man (v. 22). Instead, the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality, is expressed (v. 24). The new man is Christ, and the living of the new man is the reality in Jesus.

As the Body of Christ, the church needs Christ as its life, whereas as the new man, the church needs Christ as its person. This new corporate person should live a life like that which Jesus lived on earth, that is, a life of reality that expresses God and causes God to be realized as the reality by man. Hence, the new man is the focus of the apostle's exhortation in this section (vv. 17-32). (Recovery Version, note 2)

The new man expresses Christ organically by being renewed in the spirit of the mind, by speaking truth to the members, and by expressing so many fine details of a righteous and holy living: There is no anger that extends beyond the setting of the sun, no stealing, respectable labor, sharing with those who have need, graceful words, the removal of bitterness, wrath, clamor, and evil speaking, and finally, a tenderhearted forgiveness of one another (vv. 23, 25-26, 28-29, 31-32). All of these expressions come out of the sealing of the Spirit, which will eventually consummate in the redemption of our body in the Body to fully shine forth Christ as God's image (v. 30), thus satisfying God's desire for a corporate expression. The new man also exercises dominion organically because the devil has no place in Christ, and thus, no place is given to the devil (John 14:30; Eph. 4:27). With such a responsible living, there is recovery of image and dominion. This recovery is detailed further in chapter five.

Chapter Five

In chapter five, Paul provides further details of a proper living under the responsible dominion of God by reinforcing among the Ephesian believers their organic relationship with the Triune God as beloved children, who have the capacity in the divine life to imitate God. "As the children of God, we have His life and nature. We imitate Him not by our natural life but by His divine life. It is by our Father's divine life that we, His children, can be perfect, as He is (Matt. 5:48)" (Recovery Version, Eph. 5:1, note 1). This imitation is organic; it is not contrived by asking, "What would Jesus do?" Neither is it produced by some conformity to rules and regulations, either imposed from without or from within. Instead, there is a walk in love, even a walk that is an offering and a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God (v. 2). Vile practices of the flesh are not named, and unclean and vain utterances do not proceed out of the mouth; instead, there is a walk in the light that produces fruit as the expression of light (vv. 3-6, 8-9). This fruit is the Triune God.

The fruit of the light in goodness, righteousness, and truth is related to the Triune God. Goodness denotes God the Father, for the only one who is good is God (Matt. 19:17). Righteousness denotes God the Son, for Christ came to accomplish God's purpose according to God's righteous procedure (Rom. 5:17-18, 21). Truth denotes God the Spirit, for He is the Spirit of reality (John 14:17). Truth also denotes the expression of the fruit in the light. (Recovery Version, Eph. 5:9, note 1)

When the Triune God is produced as fruit of the light in the living of the saints in the Body, there is a recovery of image and dominion. The expression of God's image is in the shining forth of Christ, and this shining makes manifest the true condition of the heap of collapse (vv. 13-14). The shining forth of Christ brings in God's dominion. In the realm of our responsible living in God's economical recovery, the unfruitful works of darkness are reprov'd, sleepers are shined on, and time is redeemed out of the heap of collapse. There also is the speaking to one another that comes out of a filled spirit and the giving of thanks to our God and Father at all times for all things in the name, the person, of Christ to

When the Triune God is produced as fruit of the light in the living of the saints in the Body, there is a recovery of image and dominion. The expression of God's image is in the shining forth of Christ, and the shining forth of Christ brings in God's dominion.



whom we are organically joined (vv. 11, 14, 16, 18-20). To be able to give thanks at all times for all things is a sign of a living that is far above all, a living that is being headed up in all things.

In such a headed-up living, the church is one with Christ through submission, love, and sanctification in God's economy. The church is subject to Christ, and Christ sanctifies the church, making it more and more like Him in life and nature but not in the Godhead, through the washing of the water in His instant speaking of words that are spirit and life (vv. 24, 26; John 6:63).

Christ's purpose in giving Himself up for the church is to sanctify her, not only separating her to Himself from everything common but also saturating her with His element that she may be His counterpart. He accomplishes this by cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word. (Recovery Version, Eph. 5:26, note 1)

The sanctification of the church through Christ's nourishing words and cherishing love recovers image because it imparts Christ into the members of His own Body, and it recovers dominion because it joins Christ and the church as one (vv. 29-32). Thus, the ruling Christ, who is the Head and to whom all is subject, is also the ruling church. There is no greater mystery than this. The organic union between Christ and the church is a union that produces and, therefore, recovers image and dominion. Out of such a union, the utter defeat of God's enemy will shortly take place.

Chapter Six

In chapter six, there is the validation of image and dominion in the church through the church's exercise of dominion in its spiritual warfare against the arrayed forces of God's enemy. The church stands against the stratagems of the devil by putting on the whole armor of God, which is just God as truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and Spirit. Properly understood, the armor of God is a display of God in His multifarious wisdom through the church. Being one with the ruling God, the church wrestles against the rulers, the authorities, the world-rulers of this darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies. In God, even as God in life and nature but not in the Godhead, the church stands in organic union with Christ, where previously its constituents were only situated among others in the heap of collapse. And in God, the church, being organically joined to Christ, has the capacity to utterly defeat God's enemy and put down all traces of rebellion in the universe. May we so exercise! Thus, in chapter six, the recovery of image and dominion culminates with the full expression of God's image and the fullest exercise of God dominion.

Conclusion

The economy of God, so thoroughly revealed in Ephesians, is an economy that recovers and brings dead, divided, even satanified humanity, back to God's original purpose—the expression of image and the exercise of dominion. This recovery is a recovery in the divine life that imparts the divine life and nature into the members of Christ's Body and fully constitutes the Body with this divine life. This is not a matter of organization; it is purely and absolutely an organic economy and recovery, an organic expression of image and dominion. **AF**

Notes

¹The Epistle to the Romans deals extensively with the matter of death (5:12, 14, 17, 21; 6:9, 16, 21, 23; 7:5, 10, 13, 24), even though most contemporary focus is on the matter of sin and sins. In 8:2, however, Paul declares that the law of the Spirit of life freed him from the law of sin and of death. Romans describes the power of God's organic life to take sinners and fully conform them into sons of God, according to the operating power of His organic, divine life. This emphasis is largely missed in today's Christianity, which focuses only on the judicial aspects of our salvation. As concerned as we are about sins, we should be more concerned about the vestiges of death that hinder our pursuit of and growth in the Lord.

²In God's economy, recovery is the issue of the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, which is bountifully supplied through the hearing of faith that imparts the very Triune God into our being (Phil. 1:19; Gal. 3:5).

On God's side, He supplies the Spirit bountifully; on our side, we receive the Spirit. Day by day a marvelous divine transmission takes place: God supplies and we receive. The way to open ourselves to this heavenly transmission to receive the supply of the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit is to exercise our spirit to pray and call on the Lord. (Recovery Version, Gal. 3:5, note 1)

³The structure of the following sections is derived from the outline for the Epistle to the Ephesians, contained on pages 845-846 in the Recovery Version of the New Testament.

⁴These functions are covered in more detail in "The Economy of God as the Source, Content, and Issue of Paul's Teaching in Ephesians," *Affirmation & Critique* IV.4 (October 1999): 23-32.

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