

# The ORGANIC OPERATION and CONSUMMATION of GRACE in EPHESIANS

by John Pester

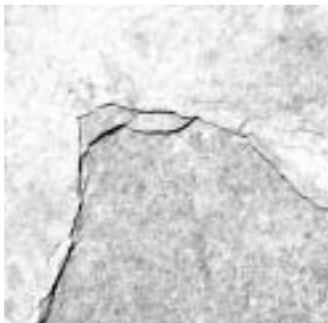
*Through the organic operation of grace, God's eternal purpose will be fulfilled because the grace of God, which is God as grace, will produce a consummate, corporate expression of the Triune God in the church and in Christ Jesus.*

The scope and content of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians far transcends the limited understanding and appreciation of God's full salvation that pervade much of today's Christianity. In its scope Ephesians presents a view of God's plan that begins in eternity past with His desire for many sons who are conformed to the image of His Son, that continues in time with the revelation and impartation of Himself as life into His chosen and redeemed, and that consummates in eternity future with the many members of Christ, as His corporate Body, being filled unto all the fullness of God. In its content Ephesians reveals that this purpose and plan of God is accomplished through an organic operation of grace.

Based on the judicial redemption wrought by Christ on the cross, the divine life of the Triune God, even the Triune God Himself, has been imparted as grace into redeemed humanity. And through the organic operation of this grace, God's eternal purpose will be fulfilled because the grace of God, which is God as grace, will produce a consummate, corporate expression of the Triune God in the church and in Christ Jesus. Ultimately, universal praise will be elicited for the glory that is displayed in and through the church which has attained to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ through its enjoyment of the unsearchable riches of Christ as grace. In the organic operation of grace, the surpassing greatness of the power of the divine life has the capacity to redeem, enliven, join, fit, and cause the believers to grow up into Christ in all things for the sake of the building up of the Body of Christ.

Much of the teaching associated with Ephesians, however, completely misses this scope. Rather than seeing grace as an organic component of God's full salvation, the operation of grace in Ephesians often is limited to redemption. Ephesians 2:8, for example, which speaks of being saved by grace through faith, often is used only as a proof text for the doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). While the text certainly supports this aspect of the truth of justification, Paul's emphasis in Ephesians is not on the role of grace in our initial salvation, but rather on the operation of grace that will bring us to the consummation of God's eternal purpose, as evidenced in our predestination. The salvation that Paul speaks of in verse 8 encompasses the full scope of God's salvation, not just our initial justification.<sup>1</sup> Without a broader view of grace,<sup>2</sup> its operation in our experience can be minimized to the point that we effectively nullify its mighty operation in our experience of God's eternal economy (1:10; 3:9).

In addition to teachings that limit the economical operation of grace to its role in



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justification, Ephesians is quite often utilized merely as a reference for ethical and moral constructs. In sermons, husbands are charged to love their wives, wives are charged to submit to their husbands, and children are charged to obey their parents. Similarly, the other ethical charges of Paul in Ephesians 4:25—6:9 often are featured more prominently than the spiritual blessings that he presents in the preceding chapters and verses. While grace is central to redemption, its organic operation extends far beyond redemption. And while grace establishes a base in righteousness for the proper living of a believer, its organic operation encompasses more than proper ethical relationships.

**I**n Ephesians the operation of grace not only redeems (1:7); it organically enlivens those who were dead in offenses through the impartation of the divine life (2:5); it organically joins those who were divided into one Body (vv. 11-16); it organically fits the members of the Body together through the operation in the measure of each one part (v. 21; 4:16, 7); and it causes the organic growth of the Body unto the building up of the Body (2:21-22; 4:16). Ultimately, the operation of grace will be consummated in the church as a full-grown man, the organic Body of Christ (v. 13). This consummate manifestation of grace will be a glorious expression of the grace that the believers have experienced and enjoyed as the unsearchable riches of Christ.

To enter into and experience the scope and content of the operation of grace in Ephesians is a cause that is worthy of prayer. And so Paul prayed that we would have a full revelation of the hope of our calling and a full experience of the organic operation of grace that begins with Christ making His home in our hearts and that consummates with being filled unto all the fullness of God. The magnitude of this consummation is almost beyond the reach of our minds to fathom; it certainly seems to be beyond our limited experience of the operation of the divine life.

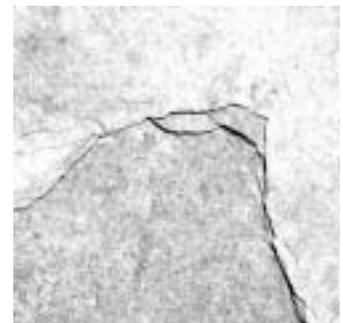
In the gap between revelation and experience, there often is cause for dismay, even despair, as our lives seemingly fall short of the stated goal of God's economy. The accomplishment of God's economical work to bring us into His full salvation, however, is not dependent upon us. What God began in eternity past, He will accomplish in time, and ultimately, He will be praised for His wondrous work throughout eternity future. Of this work, no man will be able to boast; it will be a work of grace, purely and wholly. This great cause will be accomplished because it is sourced in the heart of the Triune God and because He is organically operating as grace within His chosen and redeemed to produce a glorious and corporate consummation of Himself in the church and in Christ Jesus.

### **The Operation of Grace Being the Economical Operation of the Triune God**

To understand the operation of grace, it is important to understand that grace is not just an action of the Triune God, even an unmerited action on our behalf. Rather, grace is the Triune God in action, particularly in His economical action toward us as His chosen elect. When Christ, the fullness of the Triune God, came, grace came (Col. 1:19; 2:9; John 1:17). The coming of Christ to redeem humanity was the coming of grace, and the receiving of Christ by redeemed humanity is the receiving of grace (v. 16).

**T**he economical operation of the Triune God, especially as it has been manifested in Christ's incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection, is an operation that is focused on the dispensing of the divine life of the Triune God. Here again, the divine life is not something apart from the Triune God: "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1 John 5:12). In Christ's incarnation and human living, the divine life was manifested (1:2). In Christ's death and resurrection, the divine life was released and imparted (John 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:3). As the last Adam in death, Christ became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45). In our experience we believe in Christ, but we receive the Spirit (Gal. 3:2), who

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is now the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit who gives life (Rom. 8:9, 2; John 6:63).

After resurrection and through resurrection, the Lord Jesus, who had become flesh (1:14), became the Spirit who gives life, as is clearly mentioned in 1 Cor. 15:45. It is as the life-giving Spirit that He can be life and the life supply to us. When we receive Him as the crucified and resurrected Savior, the Spirit who gives life comes into us to impart eternal life into us. We receive the Lord Jesus, but we get the Spirit who gives life. (Recovery Version, John 6:63, note 1)

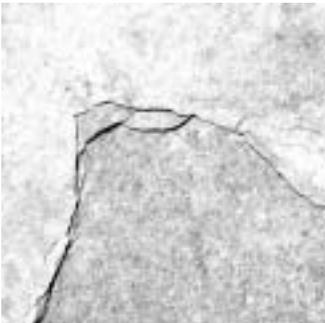
**T**o receive the Lord is to receive the Spirit, to receive the Spirit is to receive the divine life, and to receive the divine life is to receive the Triune God as grace. Grace is the continual, eternal procession of the Triune God as life. This procession is realized in our experience as the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19; Gal. 3:5), and this Spirit is supplied to us as grace upon grace. Through incarnation the Triune God came as grace through Christ, and now through resurrection and ascension the Triune God is still coming as grace through the Spirit (Heb. 10:29). Grace, therefore, is the Triune God being dispensed and imparted as life into His chosen and redeemed. This economical operation is fully developed in Ephesians, beginning with redemption, but continues with the enlivening, joining, fitting, growth, and building up of the Body of Christ through the organic operation of grace.

#### The Organic Operation of Grace in Redeeming God's Elect

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Our saving and calling are according to God's purpose and grace which was given to us before the times of the ages (2 Tim. 1:9). The organic operation of grace, however, began to be carried out in time with the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus and with the redemption that He wrought on the cross by nullifying death and bringing life and incorruption to light through the gospel (v. 10). Grace was given to us in eternity past because love, the inner substance of God's being (1 John 4:8), motivated God to act according to His good pleasure. "Grace is the expression of love, and love is the source of grace" (Recovery Version, Eph. 5:2, note 1). Based on His love, the Triune God began to execute His good pleasure by choosing us in Christ and by predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ with a view to gracing us in the Beloved (1:4-6). "We were chosen and predestinated. But after being created, we became fallen. Hence, we need redemption, which God accomplished for us in Christ through His blood" (Recovery Version, v. 7, note 1).

**T**he goal of God's good pleasure, the desire of His loving heart to have some who are holy and without blemish before Him in love, is carried out through grace, and grace was manifested in Christ's redemptive death on the cross on our behalf. We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of His grace (v. 7). Based on His redeeming blood, we are no longer apart from Christ and no longer alienated from the life of God (2:12-13; 4:18). Instead, we have been joined organically in the divine life to the redeeming Christ to enjoy the gracing that is available in the Beloved (1:6).



The Beloved is God's beloved Son, in whom He delights (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Hence, in gracing us God makes us an object in whom He delights. This is altogether a pleasure to God. In Christ we have been blessed by God with every blessing. In the Beloved we were graced, made the object of God's favor and pleasure. As such an object we enjoy God, and God enjoys us in His grace in His Beloved, who is His delight. In His Beloved we too become His delight. (Recovery Version, v. 6, note 4)

Through the operation of redeeming grace, it is possible for His riches to abound and to organically operate to head up all things in Christ (v. 10). The more we are headed up in Christ through the abounding riches of His grace, the more we will realize our

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status as the object of God's delight in our experience. Redemption is the base of God's organic operation of grace, but in our experience we must know grace as an abounding supply of the divine life that causes us to be headed up in Christ, not only individually but also corporately as the Body of Christ. We should not be satisfied with a knowledge of grace that is limited to Christ's objective accomplishment of redemption on our behalf. Rather, we should realize that redemption opens the way for the unsearchable riches of Christ to abound to us. Only grace, subjective and abounding, is unto the economy of the fullness of the times. Without the organic operation of grace, our participation in God's purpose will be frustrated in our experience.

### The Organic Operation of Grace in Enlivening the Body of Christ

The heading up that Paul speaks of in verse 10 is not a matter of ethical adjustment or self-improvement. It is an issue of the dispensing of the divine life of the Triune God, which has the capacity to not only enliven those who were dead in offenses but also to attach them to the organic Body of Christ. This enlivening and attaching is a further aspect of the organic operation of grace. Even when we were dead in offenses, God made the believers alive together with Christ, saving us by grace (2:5). 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). In verses 7 and 8, Paul speaks further of grace when he indicates that we have been saved by grace through faith so that the surpassing riches of God's grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus can be displayed in the ages to come.

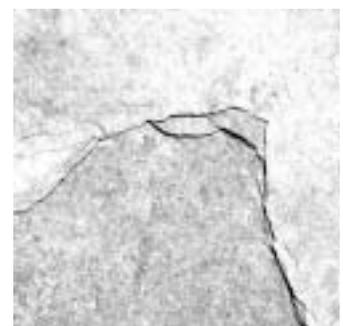
Being saved by grace through faith is not of ourselves or of works; it is the gift of God (v. 8). Salvation by grace through faith is not a gift from God; it is God imparted into us as a living gift and, thereby, saving us by virtue of our organic union with Him. "Grace is God dispensed into us. Therefore, to be saved by grace means to be saved by having the processed Triune God dispensed into us" (Recovery Version, v. 8, note 2). In *Union with Christ*, Braaten and Jenson highlight the connection between grace and gift as it is realized in the person of Christ.

Luther points out that Christ's person on the one hand and the grace and gift that is merited on the cross on the other hand belong inseparably together. With the help of John 1:17 he insists that grace and gift are performed (*facta*) through Christ. Christ is not only the necessary means (*per Christum*), however, by which grace and gift are caused or produced. Christ is in himself full of grace and gift (John 1:14). Thus, it is Christ himself who has become grace and gift for sinners. We might say as well that grace and gift exist for us only in Christ. (52-53)

**T**hrough faith the gift of God is realized as grace, and this grace has the capacity to save us by organically enlivening us with the resurrection life of the Triune God. Faith brings us into an organic union, and in this union with Christ, there is salvation.<sup>3</sup> "This faith of ours is the faith by which we believe in Christ, and it is Christ in us as our faith" (Recovery Version, Eph. 2:8, note 3). By faith we substantiate Christ's accomplishments for us, beginning with redemption but continuing with the impartation of the divine life. On the day of Christ's resurrection, the divine life was imparted into the chosen members of Christ's Body. The surpassing greatness of the power of this life is now available to be continually received and enjoyed, as the surpassing riches of His grace, by those who believe (1:19). In the operation of the enlivening power of the divine life, the Body is filled with God, becoming the fullness of the One who fills all in all (v. 23). This is an ongoing operation that must be revealed in our regenerated human spirit and enlightened to the eyes of our heart (vv. 17-18).

Being enlivened with the divine life is not a minor matter, paling in significance to our

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objective justification; it is a monumental development and crucial component in the effective outworking of God's economical plan.<sup>4</sup> Prior to Christ's redeeming death, itself an issue of grace, sinful humanity could not receive and enjoy the divine life as grace, even though this was God's eternal intention. The divine life is

the uncreated, eternal life of God, which man did not have at the time of creation. After being created, man with the created human life was placed before the tree of life (Gen. 2:8-9) that he might receive the uncreated divine life. But man fell into the vanity of his mind and became darkened in his understanding. Now, in such a fallen condition man is unable to touch the life of God until he repents (has his mind turned to God) and believes in the Lord Jesus to receive God's eternal life (Acts 11:18; John 3:16). (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:18, note 2)

In *The Ephesian Letter: Doctrinally Considered* Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, considered one of the most fundamental, independent evangelical seminaries in the United States today, writes of the "first of these spiritual blessings [in Ephesians]—the impartation of divine life" (73), saying,

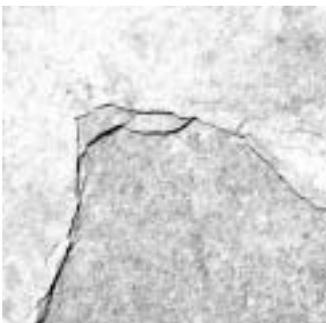
To have been "made alive with Christ" is an experience which is no less than the reception of and sharing in His resurrection life. The reception of Christ's resurrection life in conjunction with the baptism with the Spirit by which the believer is joined to the Lord, constitutes the entrance into the far-reaching realities of the New Creation. Though shrouded in mystery, the fact remains that to have partaken of the divine nature is to have been "joined to the Lord," and to have been "joined to the Lord" is to have partaken not only of the divine nature, but to have shared legitimately and eternally in all the fellowship, achievement, and glory of the Triune God. (65)

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There is a frankness of exposition in Chafer's words that is missing from much of today's fundamental exegesis of Ephesians. Chafer is not reluctant to draw out the mystical implications of Paul's word that we have been made alive together with Christ, including the fact that we have been joined to the Lord, a reference to 1 Corinthians 6:17, and that in this joining we have become partakers of the divine nature, a reference to 2 Peter 1:4. He also clearly sees the central role that the divine life plays in God's purpose and plan. Whereas many commentators view redemption purely from the standpoint of sin, that is, as a divine palliative for the ravages of sin, and thus view the purpose of redemption as being the restoration of man to his original condition before the fall, Chafer views our enlivening with the divine life from God's eternal perspective, as does Paul.

That this salvation far exceeds the ruin of sin is seen in the fact that by sin man fell from the level of fellowship with his Creator on the earth; but by saving grace he is exalted to fellowship with God in heaven. The probationary life in Adam was precarious and insecure; but the child of God has a new life imparted, which is Christ in him, and which is in no way related to that Adamic life which was ruined through sin. The life of Christ *imparted*, like the merit of Christ *imputed*, is held on no probationary condition, but is the free and unalterable gift of God to all who *believe*. (74-75)

In Christ's sin-destroying and life-releasing death, the adamic life was terminated, not restored: He is the last Adam! And in Christ's enlivening and life-imparting resurrection, the adamic life was superceded by a higher life, the divine life. It is through the organic operation of grace that the believers have been joined to the living and resurrected Christ. By virtue of our identification with Him, all of the believers have been made alive together with Him. In this regard, the corporate goal of the organic operation of grace, the producing of the Body of Christ, can be clearly seen. Our enlivening is not for the purpose of individual spiritual pursuit but for the corporate expression of God in Christ.



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## The Organic Operation of Grace in Joining Jews and Gentiles in One Body

The corporate expression of Christ is the one Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4). Christ is not divided and neither is His expression. In humanity's fallen and deadened condition, however, division is the rule; there is no exception. In the eyes of God, the principle division among humanity is between the created race, the Gentiles, and the called race, the Jews, even though the impact of division also can be seen in matters related to race, ethnicity, gender, culture, language, and beliefs. Apart from the organic operation of grace, however, it is not possible for the middle wall of partition to be broken down. This wall exists in actuality through the law of commandments in ordinances, and it exists figuratively in self-imposed ordinances drawn from one's own particular history and existence in the fallen, corporate adamic life.<sup>5</sup>

Only the organic operation of grace has the power to join all of God's chosen elect, both Jews and Gentiles, into one Body. The Gentiles, who were once far off, have become near in the blood of Christ (2:13). By breaking down the middle wall of partition, abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, Christ has made both Jews and Gentiles one in Himself, so making peace (vv. 14-15). The peace that He made on the cross is not something apart from Him; Christ Himself is our peace. The peace we now enjoy is an issue of the organic operation of the grace which joins the believers in one Body. Both Jews and Gentiles have been created in Christ into one new man, having been reconciled in one Body to God through the cross. Furthermore, this one new man is in the process of being renewed unto the full knowledge of Him who created him in righteousness and holiness through the dispensing of the divine life and nature into redeemed humanity (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24).

Christ created the one new man, the church, by working God's divine nature into humanity. The working of the divine nature into humanity was something new. Hence, it was a creating. In the old creation God did not work His nature into any of His creatures, not even into man. In the creating of the one new man, however, God's nature was wrought into man to make His divine nature one entity with humanity.

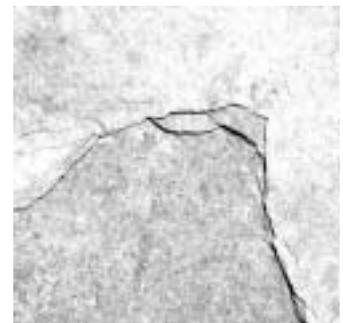
Christ is not only the Creator of the one new man, the church, but also the sphere in which and the means by which the one new man was created. He is the very element of the new man, making God's divine nature one entity with humanity. The Greek word rendered *in* here can also have an elemental significance, meaning also *with*, implying that the new man was created with Christ as its divine essence. (Recovery Version, Eph. 2:15, notes 5 and 6)

The grace that enlivens us is the grace that joins us in one Body. We are enlivened by being joined to the Triune God through the impartation of His divine life and nature. The life and nature that are in each member of the Body are also in every other member of the Body. Thus, when we are joined to the Triune God in the divine life, we are joined to every other member of the Body of Christ.

## The Organic Operation of Grace in Fitting Together the One Body

From the viewpoint of the Triune God, the organic operation of grace has fully accomplished three aspects of His organic salvation: Grace has redeemed, grace has enlivened, and grace has joined. God's elect have been redeemed by Christ's work of grace on the cross, even if this grace has not yet been received in time by all of God's chosen elect. God's elect have been enlivened with the divine life, even if this grace has not yet become a part of every believer's daily experience and enjoyment. And God's elect have been joined in one Body, even if the manifestation of this grace has been frustrated by divisions that arise from not taking Christ as our unique center and focus. Although grace fully has joined and enlivened those whom it has redeemed, there are

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other aspects of the organic operation of grace that must be worked out through our cooperation with the Triune God who is operating in us for the willing and working of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). In particular, these include the fitting together, the growth, and the building up of the organic Body of Christ. Of these three aspects, the fitting together of the members of the Body is one of Paul's paramount considerations in carrying out his stewardship of grace. In Ephesians 2:21 he declares that "all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord."

Although the phrase *being fitted together* seemingly is innocuously embedded within Paul's broader thought in 2:11-22 concerning the building of the church, its presence and significance should give us all, as believers, real pause to consider our calling and responsibility before God in relation to whether or not we really are doing the will of the One who has called us according to His own purpose and grace (2 Tim. 1:9). The significance of this phrase can be seen when it is cross-referenced with Paul's thought in Ephesians 4:16 and 4:7. In verse 16 he speaks of the Body "being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part," and in verse 7 he identifies the measure in each one part with the grace that was given to "each one of us...according to the measure of the gift of Christ." The operation in the measure of each one part is the operation of Christ as grace, who is joined to and uniquely supplying every member of the Body through the Body. The unique measure of Christ as grace in each one part must be brought into function in order for the Body to be knit and fitted together. When the members of the Body are practically knit and fitted together, the Body grows and then builds up itself in love.

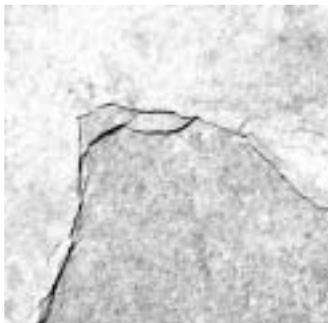
*Before the Body of Christ can be built up, it must grow in the divine life, and before the Body can grow in the divine life, it must be fitted together so that each part can supply, according to the operation in its measure, its unique portion of the divine life to all the members of Body.*

**B**efore the Body of Christ can be built up, it must grow in the divine life, and before the Body can grow in the divine life, it must be fitted together so that each part can supply, according to the operation in its measure, its unique portion of the divine life to all the members of Body. Without the organic operation of grace in the measure of each one part, there is no genuine growth and no genuine building up. The real indication of our growth in the divine life is not measured by individual "spiritual" attainment, but rather by the extent to which we are supplying the members and are being supplied by the members of the Body of Christ. It is a great offense to our gracious Lord, who has joined us into one Body through the impartation of His divine life, for us to remain divided by creeds, traditions, and organizations because of our neglect of the organic operation of His divine life as grace.

To be fitted together in 2:21 is to be "made suitable for the condition and situation of the building" (Recovery Version, note 3), and to be joined together in 4:16 "implies the thought of joining by fitting" (Recovery Version, note 2). When the members of the Body are fitted together through the operation of grace in the measure of each one part, there is an effectual functioning that operates for the growth of the Body. "*Each one part* refers to each member of the Body. Through the growth in life and the development of gifts, each member of the Body of Christ has its own measure, which operates for the growth of the Body" (Recovery Version, note 7). It is a great blessing to be fitted into the Body; it is a great blessing to find and accept our place in the Body, for it is there that we experience the organic operation of grace to its fullest.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is, in itself, a demonstration of the operation in the measure of grace in the apostle Paul. What he received through the dispensing of the Triune God he supplied to the Body of Christ: "If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you" (3:2). The Greek word for *stewardship* in this verse is

the same word as *economy* in v. 9 and in 1:10. In relation to God, this word denotes God's economy, God's administration; in relation to the apostle, it denotes the stewardship



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(*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, note 2)

**A**s a joint of the rich supply, Paul was fitly framed into the Body, and according to the gift of the grace of God, he dispensed the riches of Christ as grace to the believers for their enjoyment in his ministry (4:16; 2:21; 3:7). He received and enjoyed the grace of God, even though he was less than the least of all saints (v. 8), and out from this enjoyment, an ability and function were produced which he then ministered for the growth of the Body.<sup>6</sup> The words of Ephesians are a supply of grace, and they can still minister grace for our needful building up if they are received in sincerity and simplicity by means of all prayer and petition (4:29; 6:17-18). Just as Paul was fitted together with the members of the Body of Christ, we all need to have the simple but laudable goal of being a member in the Body, functioning for the growth of the Body, according to the organic measure of the gift of Christ in us.

### The Organic Operation of Grace in the Growth of the Body

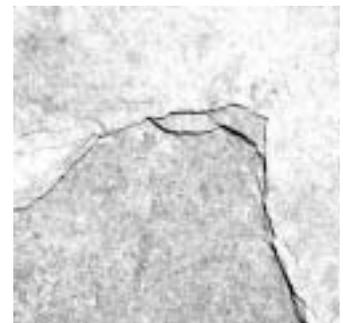
In the current state of individualized Christianity, it is difficult to comprehend the reality that genuine growth in the divine life depends on the extent to which we are fitted together with the members of the Body of Christ. But the growth of the Body is simply that—the growth of the Body. Paul was not in the realm of individual spiritual growth; he only saw the Body, only cared for the Body, and only desired that the Body would grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ (4:15). “To grow in life is to grow into the Head, Christ....First, we grow up into the Head; then we have something that is out from the Head for the building up of the Body” (Recovery Version, v. 16, note 1).

As the organic operation of grace fits the members of the Body together, a unique function that supplies unique grace to the other members of the Body grows out from each member and causes the Body to grow in grace. We need to be those who are corporately growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). “To grow in grace is to grow by the bountiful supply of eternal life provided by the divine power (1:3-4), and to grow in the knowledge of the Lord is to grow by the realization of what Christ is. This is to grow by the enjoyment of grace and the realization of truth” (Recovery Version, v. 18, note 1).

**I**n his stewardship, Paul does not present the matter of our organic growth in such purely spiritual terms that there is no practical touchstone for determining whether or not the Body is growing in the divine life and in its experiential knowledge of the Lord. Instead, the extent of our growth can be measured practically by the extent to which we are arriving at “the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

In [4:3] the oneness of the Spirit is the oneness of the divine life in reality; in [4:13] the oneness is the oneness of our living in practicality. We already have the oneness of the divine life in reality. We need only to keep it. But we need to go on until we arrive at the oneness of our living in practicality. This aspect of oneness is of two things: the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. As revealed in Jude 3, 2 Tim. 4:7, and 1 Tim. 6:21, *the faith* does not refer to the act of our believing but to the things in which we believe, such as the divine person of Christ and His redemptive work accomplished for our salvation. The full knowledge of the Son of God is the apprehension of the revelation concerning the Son of God for our experience. The more we grow in life, the more we will cleave to the faith and to the apprehension of Christ, and the more we will drop all

*Just as Paul was fitted together with the members of the Body of Christ, we all need to have the simple but laudable goal of being a member in the Body, functioning for the growth of the Body, according to the organic measure of the gift of Christ in us.*



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the minor and meaner doctrinal concepts that cause divisions. Then we will arrive at, or attain to, the practical oneness; that is, we will arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:13, note 2)

**T**he oneness of the faith in practicality is not something that can be taught as mere doctrines; it is arrived at through the organic operation of grace as it grows in our corporate apprehension of all that Christ is in our experience. It is not a coincidence that some of the most dogmatic Christians, especially those who stress minor doctrinal concepts above the central matters of the faith, are among the most immature and most divisive. Often we do not know of what kind of spirit we are, being more ready to call down fire to consume our fellow believers than to bind up the wounds of the brokenhearted by receiving those who are weak in faith, not for the purpose of passing judgment on their considerations but rather to pursue things for building up one another (Luke 9:54-56; Isa. 61:1; Rom. 14:1, 19).<sup>7</sup>

As we grow in the divine life by growing in the organic operation of grace, many minor points of doctrinal difference will fall away as our knowledge and appreciation of Christ become a corresponding knowledge and appreciation of this same Christ who lives in our fellow believers. At such a time, receiving the believers, no matter what their state of doctrinal clarity and understanding is, becomes more important than correcting, adjusting, and ultimately stumbling them (vv. 13, 20-21). This is because the supply of grace that can be imparted from even the weakest member of the Body of Christ is a supply that the Body, nevertheless, still needs. Since we all must arrive, all the members are integral to the growth of the Body through the organic operation of grace.

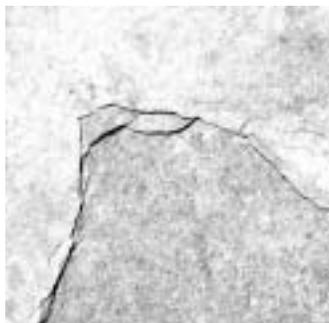
*As we grow in the divine life, many minor points of doctrinal difference will fall away as our knowledge and appreciation of Christ becomes a corresponding knowledge and appreciation of this same Christ who lives in our fellow believers.*

#### **The Organic Operation of Grace in the Building Up of the Body**

As grace organically operates, joining and knitting the members together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, the capacity for the building up of the Body resides in the Body itself (Eph. 4:16). The rich supply comes through the joints, the gifts whom Christ has given to the Body as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers (vv. 11-12).

**I**n principle, every member of the Body can function in these capacities because the supply of grace is imparted through the speaking of words of grace (v. 29). The members of the Body, as apostles, in being sent here and there in their daily living, can announce the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and bring the economy of the mystery to light in the opening of their mouths (3:8-9; 6:19). The members of the Body, as prophets, can speak for Christ and even speak forth Christ as truth to their neighbors (4:25). The members of the Body, as evangelists, can announce peace as the gospel in cooperation with the Spirit (2:17), and as shepherds and teachers, they can teach, admonish, and minister grace in their speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). As members of the Body, no corrupt word should proceed out of our mouth, “but only that which is good for building up, according to the need, that it may give grace to those who hear” (4:29).

Grace is Christ as our enjoyment and supply. Our word should convey such grace to others. The word that builds up others always ministers Christ as grace to the hearer. The apostle’s exhortation in vv. 17-32 took grace and reality (vv. 21, 24, 29) as its basic elements. The apostle wanted us to live, as Jesus did, a life full of grace and reality (John 1:14, 17). Grace is God given to us for our enjoyment, and reality is God revealed to us as our reality. When we live and speak reality (vv. 21, 24), we express God as our reality, and others receive God as grace for their enjoyment (v. 29). (Recovery Version, note 3)



The Body of Christ, as an organic consummation of grace, is built up by the organic

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operation of grace in the members of the Body. The church, as the building of God, the dwelling place of God, is an organic building; it grows. It is not organized or institutionalized. The members of the Body are rooted in Christ by being joined in the divine life, and thus they are able to be built up in Him (Col. 2:7). "To be rooted is for the growth in life. This rooting has been completed already. To be built up is for the building of the Body of Christ. This is still going on. Both these matters are in Christ" (Recovery Version, note 1).

In Matthew 16:18 the Lord declared that He would build the church, but in Ephesians 4:16, Paul declared that the church, which is the Body of Christ, builds up itself. There is not a contradiction between Paul and Christ in these two verses; rather, Paul's revelation in Ephesians is the organic fulfillment of the Lord's speaking. The building Christ is simply the building Body. The two shall be one. "This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church" (5:32).

**T**hrough the organic operation of grace, we have been redeemed by our union with the redeeming Christ; we have been enlivened together with the resurrected Christ; we have been joined as one Body in Christ; we are being fitted together according to the measure of the gift of Christ; we are growing up into Him in all things; and out from Him we are being built up. Without being in Christ, there is no redemption, no enlivening, no joining, no fitting together, no growth, and no building. But in Christ, through the organic operation of grace, which is the living and moving of Christ as grace, there is a divine economy unto the building up of the Body of Christ. The building Body is simply the building Christ. What a great mystery!

#### **The Organic Consummation of Grace in the Glorious Expression of the Triune God in the Body**

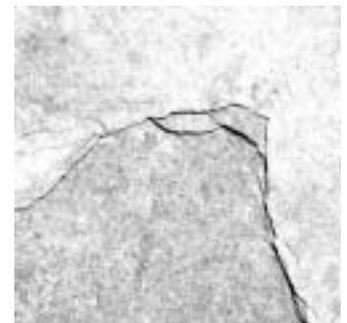
The organic consummation of grace is the Body of Christ which fully expresses the riches of the grace of the Triune God as glory. While the organic operation of grace is revealed throughout the entire book of Ephesians, the organic consummation of grace is revealed in the very first chapter: It is the church as the fullness of the One who fills all in all; it is the church which is unto the praise of the glory of His grace, eternally expressing the Triune God as those who have been graced in the Beloved.

**T**he Father's selection and predestination are unto the praise of the glory of His grace (1:6); the Son's redemption is so that we would be to the praise of His glory (v. 12); and the Spirit's sealing and pledging are unto the redemption of the church as God's acquired possession, to the praise of His glory (v. 14). "Glory is God expressed (Exo. 40:34). *The glory of His grace* indicates that God's grace, which is Himself as our enjoyment, expresses Him. As we receive grace and enjoy God, we have the sense of glory" (Recovery Version, v. 6, note 2). It is the dispensing of the Triune God as grace that produces glory, the expression of God.

Christ, who is the infinite God without any limitation, is so great that He fills all things in all things. Such a great Christ needs the church to be His fullness for His complete expression.

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

*Without being in Christ, there is no redemption, no enlivening, no joining, no fitting together, no growth, and no building. But in Christ, through the organic operation of grace, which is the living and moving of Christ, there is a divine economy unto the building up of the Body of Christ.*



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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, v. 23, note 3)

The consummation of the organic operation of grace is an enlarged expression of the Triune God in Christ and through the church as the Body of Christ. Throughout eternity future, God desires to express Himself through the church as His masterpiece (2:10), revealing His multifarious wisdom to the rulers and authorities (3:10), and heading up all things in the heavens and on the earth in Christ (1:10). This is according to His eternal purpose, which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:11). Only the Triune God, who has been wrought into His many sons, the many members of His beloved Son, is worthy of praise, honor, and glory. In order for the believers to be to the praise of the glory of His grace means that the Triune God, according to His economical arrangement, has been thoroughly dispensed and wrought into us as grace.

**E**phesians is an epistle of grace: It reveals the organic operation of grace, it supplies grace, and it even provides a practical way for us to enter into grace. Paul begins his Epistle by pointing out a divine reality: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2). This is not merely a formal salutation; it is an encapsulation of the divine economy. Out from the unique source in the universe, God the Father, and out from the unique source of redemption, the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a flow of grace, that is, our creating and redeeming God is flowing out to His chosen and redeemed, and He is bringing us into a condition and realm of peace, a condition of oneness with Himself. To know the Triune God as grace is to enter into grace, and Paul shows us in his concluding word how simple it is to enter into grace: "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility" (6:24).

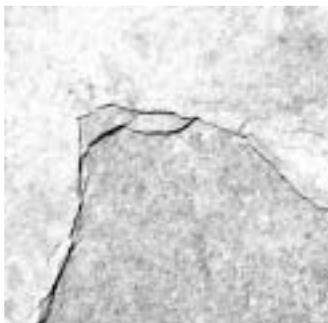
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The enjoyment of the Lord as grace is with those who love Him. In this book the phrase *in love*, which is rich in feeling, is used repeatedly (1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2)...One of the main points revealed in this book is that the church, which is the Body of Christ, is also the bride of Christ, Christ's wife. With the Body, the emphasis is on taking Christ as life; with the wife, the emphasis is on loving Christ. Therefore, this book emphasizes and also concludes with our love toward the Lord. (Recovery Version, 6:24, note 2)

To love the Lord in incorruptibility, that is, to simply love the Lord, treasuring the incorruptible things that He has accomplished in His person and work on our behalf, is the way for us to enter into grace. Since love is the source of grace, loving the Lord is the most excellent way to know and experience the organic operation of grace. Even the love with which we love the Lord is not from ourselves; it is from God who is love and who has been dispensed and imparted into us. God first loves us, and then we love Him in return with His very love that brings us into the enjoyment of grace. We should not be ashamed to tell the Lord that we love Him. We should tell Him that we love Him every day. Such an intimate word to the Lord is a gracious response to the Lord's dispensing of Himself into us, and it is a gracious entrance into a richer and deeper flow of the divine life as grace. From the loving heart of our Father God, grace will flow and bring us into the economical operation of grace that will consummate in the church as an organic expression of all that He is in Christ. "Lord Jesus, I love You." **LFC**

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The context of verses 7 and 10 indicates that God desires to display the riches of His grace in kindness toward us in the ages *to come* and that He does this through grace which produces *the church as His masterpiece in Christ*. Paul's reference to grace is a reference to the operation of grace that will bring in the corporate consummation of God's salvation, not to the initiation of His salvation in our individual experience.



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<sup>2</sup>Our understanding of God's purpose greatly influences our understanding of grace. If one views God's purpose narrowly in relationship to the matter of sin, then a narrow judicial view of grace is often the emphasis that is assigned to the role of grace in Ephesians. The content of Ephesians, however, emphasizes the organic operation of the divine life more than it emphasizes sin. It does not ignore sin but rather views the human condition from the perspective that we are dead in trespasses and sins and thus alienated from the life of God.

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

Even though redemption and justification deal with our sinful condition before God, it is clear from Ephesians that the mere forgiveness of our sins is not the goal of God's salvation. The goal is sonship, and sonship depends upon the dispensing of the life of the Triune God into His tripartite elect. Thus, in eternity past God predestinated the believers unto sonship, not unto redemption. In His heart He was not motivated negatively by sin, being personally untouched and untouchable by even the slightest taint of sin. Rather, in love His heart was focused positively on imparting His divine life into chosen vessels to produce a glorious expression of Himself.

<sup>3</sup>In *The Doctrines of Grace*, written in 1900, John Watson speaks of faith and union with Christ as a "mystical fellowship of the soul with God" (7), and he touches the deeper aspects of grace that all too often are missing in discussions today. He states,

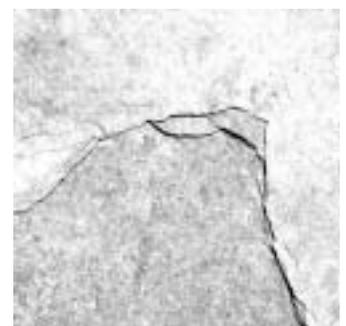
When the soul is united to Christ so that Christ and the soul are one in standing, in mind, in character, and in life, then the soul has come home again with Christ to the Father's House and the Father's bosom. It has the same communion with God which Christ has. This union can only be effected by faith, just as it is rendered impossible by unbelief. Faith is the bond which connects the soul with Christ, so that the soul being now in Christ Jesus, is partaker of the virtue of all that He has done, and heir to the fulness of all that He is. Through faith the soul is hidden in Christ, through faith the soul becomes a part of Christ, a member of His Body under the direction and protection of the Head, a branch in the vine receiving its sap and life from the stock. He that refuses to believe remains outside Christ; he that consents to believe is in Christ Jesus, and in idea and in prophecy is before God as Christ Jesus Himself. (162-163)

Despite his insight into the reality of our union with Christ, there is a crucial component in his discussion that misaims in relation to the biblical revelation. By identifying the soul—the mind, emotion, and will—as the focal point of our union with Christ, rather than our regenerated human spirit, which is distinct from our soul (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12), Watson deprives his readers of the key to understanding and experiencing this union. Our union with Christ is a union in life, and while this union ultimately impacts our thoughts, our likes and dislikes, and our choices, it does not originate in our soul.

When we were regenerated, our human spirit, not our soul, was born of the Spirit who now witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God (John 3:6; Rom. 8:16). If our appreciation and experience of our union with Christ are focused on our changeable thoughts, our fickle emotions, and our perverted will, the level of discouragement in our pursuit of the Lord will certainly rise, and we may seek to offset this discouragement with greater, though possibly more peculiar, emotive responses.

If, however, there is a realization that our human spirit is one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17) and that He is with our spirit as grace, we can, under the Lord's cleansing blood, enjoy a daily fellowship with Him, coming forward to the throne of grace to find grace for timely help (2 Tim. 4:22; 1 John 1:9; Heb. 4:16). The riches of the Lord's grace can be experienced particularly

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in our calling upon His name (Rom. 10:12). To earnestly call upon the Lord is to earnestly acknowledge our need for Him; it is to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace which can only be realized in our experience by our identification with the One who is the source and sphere of these divine riches (2 Tim. 2:22). The central importance of the human spirit is also clearly revealed in every chapter of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. See "The Mingled Spirit" in *Affirmation & Critique* 2:4 (1997): 39-46.

<sup>4</sup>This is not to denigrate the work of Christ on the cross, but rather to put it in perspective in relation to God's economy: the purpose of Christ's death is for the impartation of Christ's life, which is realized in our receiving and enjoying the Spirit. To the Corinthians Paul preached Christ crucified, but his words demonstrated the Spirit and power (1 Cor. 2:2-4), and to the Galatians he openly portrayed Christ crucified, but the Spirit was received (3:1-2). The grain of wheat did not just fall into the ground and die; it also brought forth many enlivened grains on the day of resurrection (John 12:24).

For Jesus as the Son of Man to be glorified was for Him to be resurrected, that is, to have His divine element, His divine life, released from within the shell of His humanity to produce many believers in resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3), just as a grain of wheat (v. 24) has its life element released when it falls into the ground and grows up out of the ground to bear much fruit, that is, to bring forth many grains. (Recovery Version, John 12:23, note 1)

The Son of Man came to the hour of His death and glorification for this reason (v. 27), and we greatly limit the operation of God's economy by objectively "lingering around the cross" and failing to advance in our experience and enjoyment of the divine life that was released through the effectiveness of Christ's death.

<sup>5</sup>God's love for fallen humanity, the world, is demonstrated by the fact that in both His original creation and in His new creation, He views humanity as a corporate entity, worthy of His grace.

God created man as a collective entity (Gen. 1:26). The corporate man created by God was damaged through man's fall; hence, there was the need for God to produce a new man. This was accomplished through Christ's abolishing in His flesh the ordinances and through His creating of the new man in Himself. (Recovery Version, Eph. 2:15, note 8)

<sup>6</sup>Ministry is not a matter of doctrinal training and expertise; it is a matter of being constituted with the riches of Christ as grace, out from which a stewardship of grace, a ministry, spontaneously will proceed. Ministry is an organic operation; we can only truly minister the Christ whom we have experienced and enjoyed.

<sup>7</sup>This is not to suggest that there is not a need for sound and healthy teaching. We must be able to cut straight the word of the truth and give a defense of the hope which is in us (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15). However, we should not use our teachings as an excuse for division. If the Lord has received someone, no matter how weak he is in faith, we should receive him (Rom. 14:1, 3; 15:7). This is a response of grace that has its source in the God of love who abides in us (1 John 4:8, 12).

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