

# GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE CONCERNING THE CHURCH AND THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH REGARDING THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TRINE GOD

BY RON KANGAS

Although the Holy Scripture as the written word of God is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), divinely inspired, and although the revealed truth in the Word is unchanging and universally applicable to everyone at every time, in a very real sense the kind of Bible we have actually and experientially is determined by the kind of person we are, by the character of the mind-set we have, and by the perspective from which we approach the Word. Of course, the divine revelation in the Scripture, being objectively true, is not relative or perspectival or subject to historical contingencies. God's word, as certain as Himself, abides forever. Nevertheless, our person, mind-set, and perspective may truncate the Word not in itself but in our comprehension of it, and thus our understanding of the Bible may be severely limited.

Those who know the Lord and His word in the way of life and truth, who are advanced in the growth of life, and who are rich in the experience and enjoyment of Christ as life have come to realize that our person, with our disposition, temperament, proclivities, and peculiarities, causes the Bible to become a certain kind of book to us. An ethical person may be drawn to portions of the Word that seem to call for ethical improvement. A person preoccupied with personal development may seek for help in becoming a so-called true self. A reader concerned for social justice may concentrate on scriptural passages, especially in the Old Testament, that summon God's people to righteousness and care for the disenfranchised. A reader who considers human existence as a life of pain and anguish may focus on passages that speak of suffering. One whose main interest is abstract doctrine may be devoted to portions of the Word that appear to emphasize this. A pious person may be fond of the Psalms, whereas a philosophical person may be inclined toward Job or Ecclesiastes. Again and again, we see that the type we are determines what kind of Bible we have, a fact that

Watchman Nee understood very well.

The kind of person we are determines the kind of Bible we read. If we want to know what a person is like in character and habit, all we have to do is to show him a chapter of the Scriptures and see what he gets out of it. The kind of person he is will determine what kind of reading he will have. (*Study 25-26*)

This view is echoed by Witness Lee: "The kind of Bible we have depends on the kind of person we are. Different kinds of people have different kinds of Bibles. No one can change this principle" (*Enjoy 150*).

The principle is the same with the serious matter of mind-set, that is, "a fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretation of situations" (*American Heritage Dictionary*). One's mind-set may be a product of various factors—disposition, culture, education, peculiarity, personal experiences, and theological orientation. In particular, theological orientation may build up a mind-set that predisposes a reader of the Scriptures to filter everything through the lens of his mental structure. For example, several years ago a group of scholars published what was called the New Reformation Study Bible, and in promoting this product, they asserted that their study Bible would bring "the light of the Reformation to Scripture" (title page), rather than the other way around, which would have been more reasonable and faithful. The "light of the Reformation," as embodied in the system of Reformed theology, became a mind-set that caused the Bible to become a certain kind of book to them, namely a volume replete with Calvinist theology. The effect is similar with any kind of mind-set. This is one reason that we need to be "transformed by the renewing of the mind" (Rom. 12:2) and to be "renewed in the spirit of [the] mind" (Eph. 4:23).<sup>1</sup>

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The importance of perspective is illustrated by the experience of the apostle John.

I was in spirit on the Lord's Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, saying, What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches...And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. (Rev. 1:10-12)

Because perspective, angle of vision, and point of view are especially crucial in realizing and understanding divine and spiritual things, it was necessary for John to turn. Only after he had turned could he see the vision.

To see anything requires the right position with the right angle. First, the apostle John heard the voice (v. 10), and then, when he turned to see the voice, he saw the golden lampstands. He was rightly positioned, but he still needed the right angle to see the vision concerning the churches; so he turned. It is the same with us today. (Recovery Version, v. 12, note 1)

It is important for us to realize that, in principle, this is the situation with believers today, especially in their reading a portion of the Word such as the book of Ephesians.

The fact that what the Bible is to us depends greatly on our point of view can be readily illustrated. Recently, I listened to a well-known preacher and pastor of a megachurch sermonize on Colossians 1:9, a verse that speaks of the full knowledge of God's will. His perspective was not that of God, whose great, perfect, eternal will is revealed in such chapters as Ephesians 1 and Revelation 4, but was that of an individual believer seeking to know "God's will" for his or her life. Since the perspective was wrong, the understanding and the application were likewise in error. The same phenomenon can be observed with what is widely known as "the purpose-driven life"; the emphasis is not on God's eternal purpose (e.g. Eph. 3:11) according to the desire of His heart but on the individual human life and on the message that, God's purpose notwithstanding, God "has a plan for your life," and that is what one should care about in reading the Scriptures. Other perspectives are the result of one's psychological or spiritual condition or one's interest in personal spirituality or self-development. In cases such as these, believers read and study the Bible from a human point of view, and the result, at best, is a fragmented understanding of truncated truth.

If we would be trained to understand and experience the glorious vision presented in the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, we need a totally different perspective, a divine point of view that is in accord with the special characteristic of this marvelous book. This characteristic is one in which the writer (and hopefully the reader)

views God, humanity, and the entire universe from the perspective of the eternal purpose of God and the good pleasure of God. Whereas Romans begins with and speaks from the condition of fallen humankind, Ephesians begins with and speaks from God's eternal purpose (see Lee, *Ephesians* 8-9). If we approach Ephesians from the level of fallen humanity in need of God's salvation, we will not understand this book properly. To be sure, some may point to the truth of being saved by faith and of being reconciled to God in Christ, but these are not the central thought in this Epistle. Ephesians was written from the perspective of the heavenlies, from eternity, and from God's eternal purpose. This book speaks to us from the heart of God, from His good pleasure, from the mystery of His will, and from His eternal purpose, His determined intent. If we remain like the proverbial frog in a well who mistakes a small patch of sky for the immensity of the universe, we will be limited, even bound, by a drastically diminished view. All readers of the book of Ephesians need to be delivered from "the well" of their disposition, mind-set, perspective, and preconceived notions and be brought, in spirit, into eternity, into God's heart, and into God's eternal purpose.

As Paul's writing in Ephesians indicates, such a deliverance has at least three prerequisites. The fact that the mingled spirit—the regenerated human spirit indwelt by and mingled with the divine Spirit—is mentioned in every chapter reveals that readers of this Epistle, like the apostle John in Revelation 1, need to be in spirit, having a spirit of wisdom and revelation (1:17), being a dwelling place of God in spirit (2:22), seeing the revelation of the mystery of Christ in spirit (3:5), being strengthened into the inner man (v. 16), being renewed in the spirit of the mind (4:23), being filled in spirit (5:18), and praying at every time in spirit (6:18). This is the first prerequisite. The more we fulfill the requirement of living and walking in the mingled spirit, the more we will, experientially, be in Christ organically, and thus in our experience we will be with Him where He is (1:1, 3, 20; 2:5-6) and thereby fulfill the second prerequisite of living in union with the resurrected and ascended Christ. Furthermore, since the subject of Ephesians is the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (1:22-23), and since the reality of the Body of Christ is the mingled spirit corporately understood and the Body is uniquely one in the union, mingling, and incorporation with the Divine Trinity (4:3-6), we are able to fulfill the remaining prerequisite—that of living in the reality of the Body of Christ and of keeping the oneness of the Spirit, which is the unique oneness of the Body of Christ. As those who are, or at least aspire to be, in spirit, in Christ, and in the Body of Christ, we may now come to the subject of this article—God's eternal purpose concerning the church and the apostle's prayer for the church regarding the experience of the Triune God.

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## God's Eternal Purpose concerning the Church

Chapter 3 of Ephesians is one of the deepest and most profound portions of the Word of God, conveying a number of divine thoughts related to God's purpose concerning the church and the believers' experience of the processed and consummated Triune God for the church. Regarding God's purpose, Paul was commissioned "to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is" (v. 9), and regarding the experience of the Divine Trinity, Paul was burdened to pray for the believers to be strengthened into the inner man so that Christ could make His home in their hearts (vv. 16-17). In this chapter, verses 8 through 11 are focused on God's purpose, and verses 14 through 21 are centered on the believers' experience.<sup>2</sup>

### The Church

Significantly, in both portions of Ephesians 3, Paul's primary concern was the church, for, as we will see, God's eternal purpose is to have the church for the corporate expression of Himself in Christ with many glorified sons conformed to the image of the first-born Son. This concentration on the church is not surprising, since the subject of the entire book of Ephesians is the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (1:22-23). Such a church is the one new man (2:15; 4:24), the dwelling place of God (2:21-22), the fullness of God (3:19), the counterpart of Christ (5:22-33), and the warrior (6:10-20). In all these aspects of the church, the Body of Christ is the governing factor, for the church is the Body as the one new man, the Body as the dwelling place of God, the Body as the fullness of God, the Body as the counterpart of Christ, and the Body as the warrior. Each chapter of Ephesians unveils the mystery of the Body of Christ—the organism of the Triune God—from a particular point of view.

Ephesians 1 reveals that the Body of Christ is the issue of the dispensing of the processed Trinity and the transmitting of the transcending Christ. The Father's dispensing in His choosing and predestinating issues in His many sons as His house in sanctification (vv. 3-6). The Son's dispensing in His redeeming and saving issues in the believers as God's inheritance in transformation (vv. 7-12). The Spirit's dispensing in His sealing and pledging issues in God as the believers' inheritance unto their perfection (vv. 13-14). The transcending Christ's transmitting in His rising and ascending issues in His Body as His expression unto the believers' consummation (vv. 19-23).

The Body of Christ is the fullness of the all-inclusive Christ, the One who fills all in all (vv. 22-23). The church is the Body, and the Body is the fullness; these two levels of *is* are not in parallel but in succession. The Body is the fullness of the Head, and the fullness is the expression of the Head. This fullness—the fullness of Christ—issues from the enjoyment of the riches of Christ (vv. 7-8); this means that the fullness of Christ is Christ experienced by us, assimilated by us, and constituted into our being to become our element for His expression. Christ, as the One who fills all in all, needs the Body to be His fullness; this Body is the church as His expression (v. 23). 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, His Body, to be His fullness for His complete expression. If we have even a glimpse of the Body of Christ as revealed in Ephesians 1, we will realize that we need to become universal Christians with a universal view of the universal Body of Christ (vv. 17-23). "What God is doing today is to obtain the Body of Christ,

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not merely you as an individual, nor merely the church in a locality, nor merely the church in a country. He wants to obtain the church in the entire universe" (Lee, *Words* 57).

Ephesians 2 reveals that the Body of Christ is the masterpiece of the Triune God as the one new man (vv. 10, 15-16). The Body of Christ as the one new man is God's masterpiece, His poem, created in Christ Himself through His death and resurrection to express His infinite wisdom and divine design (vv. 10, 15). On the cross Christ created the one new man in Himself by abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances (vv. 14-16). Since the Body is a matter of Christ as the unique life, and the one new man is a matter of Christ as the unique person, in the one new man there is only one person—the all-inclusive Christ (v. 15).

Ephesians 3 reveals that the Body of Christ becomes the fullness of the Triune God by our being supplied with the riches of Christ and by Christ's making His home in our hearts (vv. 8, 17). God has an economy, an administrative arrangement, to dispense the unsearchable riches of Christ into our being so that we may become His fullness, His expression (vv. 2, 7-9, 19). For this reason, Paul prayed to the Father as the source that He would strengthen us with

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power through His Spirit as the means into the inner man so that Christ the Son would freely move and work in us to make His home in our hearts, issuing in our becoming the Body of Christ as the fullness of the Triune God (vv. 14-19). For the outworking of this grand divine intention, we need to pray daily to be strengthened into our inner man so that the Triune God may carry out His unique work to build Himself in Christ into our being for His corporate expression.

**E**phesians 4 reveals that the Body of Christ is the mingling of the processed and consummated Triune God with the regenerated believers and that this one Body is built up through the one ministry. The one Spirit, the one Lord, and the one God and Father are mingled together with the believers into one organic entity to be the Body of Christ (vv. 4-6). The unique oneness of the Body of Christ is the oneness of the Spirit, and the oneness of the Spirit is actually the Spirit Himself, who is in our regenerated human spirit mingled with the divine Spirit (vv. 3-4, 23). As such a mingling of divinity and humanity, the Body of Christ is built up through the one ministry, which perfects the believers to grow up into Christ, the Head, in all things and to function out from Him in order to supply the Body for the building up of itself in love (vv. 11-16).

The church as the Body of Christ is four-in-one: the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body (vv. 4-6). Here we have four persons—one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father—mingled together as one entity to be the Body of Christ, the organism of the Triune God. With the Body of Christ, the Father is the origin, the Son is the element, and the Spirit is the essence, all of whom are mingled with the Body. The Father is embodied in the Son, the Son is realized as the Spirit, and all three are in us; therefore, the Body of Christ is actually a divine-human constitution. Because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all one with the Body of Christ, the Triune God and the Body are now four-in-one.<sup>3</sup>

The four-in-one entity in Ephesians 4:4-6 corresponds with the golden lampstands in Revelation 1:20. In figure, the golden lampstand signifies the church as the embodiment of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The lampstand is of pure gold, signifying the divine, eternal, incorruptible nature of God the Father (Exo. 25:31; 2 Pet. 1:4). The shape, the solid form, of the lampstand signifies God the Son as the embodiment of God the Father (Exo. 25:31). The seven lamps signify God the Spirit being the seven Spirits (v. 37; Rev. 4:5). As a whole, this figure indicates that the church is the Triune God mingled with His redeemed people to become the lampstands to express God in a corporate way.<sup>4</sup>

Ephesians 5 reveals that the Body of Christ is composed of the children of light to be the bride of Christ for the

satisfaction of Christ. As Paul says in verse 8, we were once not only dark but darkness itself because we were one with Satan, but now we are not only the children of light but even light itself because we are one with God in Christ the Lord (John 8:12; Matt. 5:14). As children of light walking in love and light, we are being prepared to be the glorious bride of Christ by the Spirit's sanctifying and cleansing us through the washing of the water in the word (Eph. 5:2, 8, 18, 26-27).

**E**phesians 6 reveals that the Body of Christ is the corporate warrior of the Triune God for the defeating of God's enemy (vv. 10-20). If we are enlightened by the revelation in this chapter, we will realize that spiritual warfare is not an individual matter but a matter of the Body. The church as the Body is a corporate warrior, and only this corporate warrior is qualified to wear the whole armor of God. The spiritual warfare mentioned here has its source in the conflict between Satan's will and God's will. In order to stand with the Lord in this conflict and testify of His victory (Heb. 2:14), we must allow our will to be subdued and transformed by Christ so that it submits to the headship of Christ. The church as the Body of Christ takes the lead to be subdued and submissive in this way so that God may be glorified and the enemy may be put to shame.

As we consider the crucial aspects of the divine truths in Ephesians 3, we need to have this overall view of the church as the Body of Christ and consider Paul's speaking regarding the church from this perspective. In verse 6 he declares that "in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the Body"; in verse 10, that "now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church"; and in verse 21, that "to Him be the glory in the church." Such a church was precious to Paul as it was to God, who obtained the church "through His own blood" (Acts 20:28), and in his Epistle to the Ephesians (and to the church universal), he was burdened to release the heavenly vision concerning the Body of Christ. As he presents the divine view of the church in chapter 3, Paul uses a number of important terms—*purpose*, *mystery*, *economy*, *stewardship*, *gospel*, *unsearchable riches of Christ*, and *the multifarious wisdom of God*—and at this juncture we need to consider these expressions in relation to the will and desire of God to obtain the church as the Body of Christ.

### *The Eternal Purpose of God*

In Ephesians Paul uses the word *purpose* three times, once as a verb and twice as a noun. In 1:9 he says, "Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself." In verse 11 he goes on to say, "In whom also we were designated as an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the

purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will." In 3:11 he refers to "the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is significant that Paul speaks of God's purpose in relation to God's will, good pleasure, and counsel. In order to enter into Paul's understanding of God's purpose, we need to see the intrinsic relationship among God's purpose, will, good pleasure, and counsel.

In chapter 1 Paul speaks of the good pleasure of God's will (v. 5), the mystery of His will (v. 9), and the counsel of His will (v. 11), and in 5:17 he reminds us of the crucial importance of understanding what the will of the Lord is. The meaning of *will* in these verses is not that God has a strong will but that God has a wish, with a desire and an intention. In simple terms, God's will is what God wants; it is what God wishes to do and what He wants to do and have. A will is an intention, and the will of God is God's intention. Because God's will was hidden within Himself, it was a mystery, and that is why Paul mentions "the mystery of His will." The will of God in Ephesians is the same as that in Revelation 4:11: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created." From this we see that because the Triune God had a will—something that He wanted and intended to have—He created the universe and all things therein.

God's will is intimately and inextricably related to God's good pleasure, for God's good pleasure is "of His will" (Eph. 1:5), indicating that the will comes first and that the good pleasure is embodied in it. God has a will, in which is His good pleasure, the desire of His heart. Hence, with affection and love, we often speak of the desire of God's heart, the longing deep inside Him for joy, pleasure, delight, and satisfaction. If human beings need and desire pleasure, then God certainly needs and desires pleasure, something to make Him happy. The underlying principle here is that every living thing desires pleasure. In actuality, the more living we are, the greater is our need for pleasure; the degree of our livingness determines how much pleasure we need. God is no exception to this. As the most living One, God has a deep need for pleasure, and the book of Ephesians is unique in making known His good pleasure, the desire of His heart, and in speaking from the standpoint of the good pleasure of God's heart. It was pleasing to God, a delight to Him, to make known, through the apostle Paul, the mystery of His will in which resides His good pleasure.

As we have noted, in Ephesians Paul speaks not only of the

good pleasure of God's will and of the mystery of God's will but also of the counsel of God's will, unveiling the eternal truth that in Christ "we were designated an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (v. 11). "God's will is His intention; God's counsel is His consideration of the way to accomplish His will or intention" (Recovery Version, v. 11, note 4). The divine counsel (Acts 2:23) was the outcome of a divine council. According to God's will, in which is His good pleasure, the three of the Godhead had a council among themselves in eternity past, and a decision was made, called a counsel, which was a resolution as the issue of the divine council. This counsel—the counsel of God's will—is therefore God's determined will to carry out His eternal intention and thereby to fulfill the desire of His heart.

This divine counsel, this determined will of God, is God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11). According to the counsel that

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IN WHICH RESIDES HIS GOOD PLEASURE.

issued from the council among the three of the Godhead, God made a purpose, His determined intent, by purposing something in Himself (1:9). God's purpose is of His will and good pleasure and according to the counsel of His will. Thus, the will, the good pleasure, the counsel, and the purpose are intrinsically related and inseparable.

God's good pleasure was what He purposed in Himself unto the economy of the fullness of the times (v. 10), indicating that God Himself is the initiation, the origination, and the sphere of His eternal purpose, which nothing can overthrow, for which everything is working, and regarding which He did not take counsel with anyone. (Recovery Version, v. 9, note 4)

God's purpose is His eternal purpose (3:11), the eternal plan made in God Himself in eternity past. God's determined intent is called the eternal purpose because it was planned in eternity past and is for eternity future; therefore, it is the purpose of eternity, the purpose of the ages. According to the counsel of God's will, His eternal purpose must be accomplished in time. We may use the expression *the bridge of time* to denote a lengthy (to human calculation) interval between the two ends of eternity, eternity past and eternity future. Thus, time bridges

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the two ends of eternity, and along the span of this bridge a process is taking place by which God's eternal purpose is being accomplished. God's purpose, the purpose of the ages, in eternity past and for eternity future is now being completed on the bridge of time.

Now we come to the central thought of the divine revelation in the book of Ephesians: God's eternal purpose is to have the church, the Body of Christ. The determined will of God is to have the church. God's good pleasure, the desire of His heart, is to have the church. God's eternal will, what He wants to have and what He intends to do, is intensely focused on the church. The church as the Body of Christ is the will of God, the good pleasure of God, the determined will and intent of God, and the purpose of God. In eternity past God intended to have the church. In eternity past God's good pleasure was to obtain the church to fulfill the desire of His heart. In eternity past God's counsel, His determined will, was to produce the church. In eternity past God's purpose—the eternal purpose—was nothing other than to have the church, the organic Body of Christ, in all the aspects unveiled in Ephesians. Employing Paul's descriptive language of the one new man, we may say that God's eternal purpose is to have the church, the Body, as a corporate man to express God in His glory and to represent Him with His authority. In eternity and for eternity, God has purposed to do one thing—to gain a group of His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and glorified people to be the living, organic Body of Christ and the one new man for the expression and manifestation of God the Father in the Son as the life-giving Spirit. This marvelous purpose is aptly described by Witness Lee:

The eternal purpose of God is that He would have a church. In the whole universe only the church is the subject, the center, and the content of God's eternal plan...In eternity past and for eternity to come, God planned and purposed to have a church in Christ and for Christ. Therefore, the church is not a temporary matter but an eternal matter. The church is in this age and throughout this age, yet it is from eternity past and for eternity future. It is an eternal matter in the eternal purpose of God, and it is the center, the subject, of God's eternal plan. God planned in eternity past to have a church, and God expects to have the church in eternity to come. (*Principles* 8)

God's eternal purpose to have the church as the Body of Christ was made in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:11). The short phrase *in Christ Jesus*, along with similar expressions, is central to Paul's thought in the book of Ephesians. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens *in Christ* (1:3). God chose us *in Him* before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him (v. 4). We have been graced *in the Beloved*; *in*

*whom* we have redemption through His blood (vv. 6-7). In the economy of the fullness of the times, God will head up all things *in Christ*, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth *in Him*; *in whom* we were designated as an inheritance (vv. 10-11). *In Christ* we have heard the word of the truth, the gospel of our salvation (v. 13). God caused the operation of the might of His strength to operate *in Christ* (vv. 19-20). God made us alive together with Christ, raised us up together with Him, and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies *in Christ Jesus* (2:5-6). In the ages to come God will display the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us *in Christ Jesus* (v. 7). Now we are God's masterpiece, created *in Christ Jesus* for good works (v. 10). *In Christ Jesus* we who were once far off have become near in the blood of Christ (v. 13). This wonderful Christ has created the two—the Jews and the Gentiles—in *Himself* into one new man (v. 15). In Christ as the cornerstone, all the building is growing into a holy temple *in the Lord* (vv. 20-21). *In Christ Jesus* the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the Body and fellow partakers of the promise through the gospel (3:6). In Christ we have boldness and access through faith in Him (v. 12). To God there is glory in the church and *in Christ Jesus* (v. 21). In 4:1 Paul referred to himself as a prisoner *in the Lord*, and in verse 17 he spoke and testified *in the Lord*. We have been taught *in Him* as the reality is *in Jesus* (v. 21). We should be kind to one another and forgive one another, even as God *in Christ* forgave us (v. 32). We were once darkness, but now we are light *in the Lord* (5:8). Children should obey their parents *in the Lord* (6:1). In order to participate in the spiritual warfare, we must be empowered *in the Lord* (v. 10). Paul concludes by saying that Tychicus, a faithful minister *in the Lord*, would enable the believers to know Paul's situation (v. 21). Clearly, Christ Himself is the sphere and the realm in which God carries out His purpose and in which we are one with Him in the divine enterprise.

God's eternal purpose was made in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:11). Here the phrase indicates, or at least implies, that in eternity past Christ existed simultaneously with God (John 1:1-2), for the purpose God made in Christ is what He purposed in Himself (Eph. 1:9). For God to purpose in Himself is to make His purpose in Christ. This points to Christ's eternal deity and divine existence in the Godhead with God the Father. Related to this is the fact that Christ is the embodiment of God, since the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily (Col. 2:9). Also, as Matthew 16:16 reveals, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; whereas *the Son* refers to Christ's person, *the Christ* refers to His commission to accomplish the very purpose that God made in Him. Furthermore *Christ Jesus our Lord* implies the processes through which the incarnated Son of God has passed and our relationship with Him in the Body of Christ. Thus, if we would know the eternal purpose made by God in

Christ, we must ourselves be in Christ, living in vital, living fellowship with Him.

If we study Ephesians 3:11 in context, we will realize that there is a relationship among God's purpose, God's creation, and the church. Verse 9 speaks of "God, who created all things"; verse 10, of the church; and verse 11, of God's eternal purpose. God's eternal purpose is to have the church, and for this purpose He created the universe and all things in it. God created all things for the church, the Body of Christ. God's intention in His creation of all things, especially of humankind, was to have the church as the mingling of divinity and humanity in Christ. The motive of God's work in creation was to carry out His will, fulfill His desire, and accomplish His purpose, all of which are related to the church. Creation is for the church:

God is a God of purpose, and He has a purpose concerning creation. Creation was not an accident, but the expression of a definite purpose on the part of God. God purposed and creation was with a view to the accomplishment of that purpose. Modern theology makes redemption more important than creation. Yet creation was part of God's original purpose, redemption was only remedial. Redemption was brought in to restore that which had been diverted from God's purpose. God sought to arrive at a purpose by creation, but something intervened.

Redemption brings things back to God's original intention. (Nee, "Purpose" 1181)

God's original intention was to have the church as the Body of Christ, and God's creation is an expression of that intention. Hence, to know the eternal purpose of God is to know the reason for the existence of the universe, of humankind, and of ourselves.

### *The Mystery Hidden in God*

According to the context of Ephesians 3, the church as God's eternal purpose and goal is the mystery, "which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things" (v. 9). In Ephesians *mystery* is a crucial word. In eternity God planned a will, but it was hidden in Him; hence, it was a mystery—the mystery of His will (1:9). God's hidden purpose is the mystery, and the unveiling of this mystery in the mingled spirit is the revelation of the mystery (3:3, 5). God's mystery is His hidden purpose, and with this mystery there is an economy, the economy of the mystery (v. 9). Christ is a mystery, and the church, as the Body of Christ to express Him, is the mystery of Christ (v. 4; Col. 4:3). Christ and the church as one spirit are the great mystery (1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 5:30-32).

The mystery of the universe is God, the mystery of God is Christ, and the mystery of Christ is the church (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 4:11; Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4). In the New Testament there are two main mysteries. The first mystery, revealed in the book of Colossians, is Christ as the mystery of God—God embodied, God defined, God explained, God expressed, and God made visible. The second mystery, revealed in the book of Ephesians, especially in chapter 3, is the church as the mystery of Christ. According to verse 4, the church has a particular title—the *mystery of Christ*. Christ and the church, as the great mystery is the meaning of the universe and of human life. Although Christ is mysterious, the church is the manifestation of Christ (1:22-23). The church, as the Body of Christ, is the expression of Christ (4:15-16). When we see the church, we see Christ; when we come into the church, we come into Christ; when we contact the church, we contact Christ. The church is a corporate unit produced out of Christ, who is the mystery of God (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4; 5:30-32). The all-inclusive Christ is the mystery of the mysterious

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FOR THE EXPRESSION AND MANIFESTATION OF GOD THE FATHER  
IN THE SON AS THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT.

God, and such a Christ as the mystery of God produces a unit, which is the church. Mystery produces mystery; Christ, who is the mystery of God, brings forth the church, which is the mystery of Christ.

God's hidden purpose is a mystery, and the unveiling of this mystery is the revelation of the mystery (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3, 5). The mystery of Christ, the church, was hidden in other generations but has been revealed in the New Testament age to the apostles and prophets in their spirit. If we would see the revelation of the hidden mystery, we need to turn to our spirit and exercise our spirit through prayer (1:17-23; 3:14-21).

The great mystery—Christ and the church—is the meaning of the universe and of human life (Rev. 4:11; Eph. 5:32). God's intention in His creation of all things, including man, was that man would be mingled with God to produce the church (Zech. 12:1; Eph. 3:10). The desire of God's heart is to have the mystery of Christ—the Body of Christ as the increase and expression of Christ (1:5, 9, 11, 22-23). The Body life is the ultimate satisfaction of our spiritual experience (5:30). Unless we reach this ultimate point, we cannot be fully satisfied. We will be fully satisfied only when we realize that we are part of the mystery

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of Christ and live as members of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5). In order to know the Christian life, we must know the mystery of Christ (Col. 1:27; Phil. 1:19-21). The mystery of Christ should be our daily life; without this mystery, our life would be merely the life of a human being, not the life of a Christian (Eph. 3:4; 1 Tim. 3:15-16).

### *The Economy of the Mystery*

Related to the mystery of Christ—the church as God’s hidden purpose—there is the economy of the mystery (Eph. 3:9). In the most simple terms, an economy is an arrangement for getting things done. As the Greek word *oikonomia* indicates, God’s economy is His household management, His household administrative arrangement. In relation to His purpose, God’s economy is God’s planned administration to carry out His eternal purpose according to His will, good pleasure, and counsel. More particularly, as Ephesians 1 and 3 make clear, the divine economy involves the divine dispensing of the vast spiritual wealth of God in His Divine Trinity into the believers in Christ as members of the Body of Christ. Thus, God’s economy is the plan and arrangement of His will, desire, counsel, and purpose to dispense Himself into us to make us the Body of Christ as His corporate expression.

God’s economy is His plan and arrangement to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people so that He may have the church, the Body of Christ, as the mystery of Christ to be His corporate expression; hence, there is the economy of the mystery (1:3-23; 3:9). The economy that God, according to the desire of His heart, planned and purposed in Himself concerning the church is to head up all things in Christ through the church. This heading up is accomplished by the dispensing of the abundant life supply of the Triune God as the life factor into all the members of the church as the Body of Christ (1:10).

The highest definition of God’s economy according to the intrinsic significance, the crystallization, of the divine revelation in the Holy Scriptures is that in Christ God became man so that in Christ man may become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead to produce the organism of the Triune God, the Body of Christ, which will consummate as the New Jerusalem (Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4; 12:4-5; Rev. 21:2). The center of God’s economy is the all-inclusive Christ, and the goal of God’s economy is the Body of Christ (Col. 1:15-19; 2:9, 19). Thus, the divine economy is God’s eternal plan to dispense such a Christ as the Spirit into His chosen and redeemed people to produce, constitute, and build up the organic Body of Christ (Eph. 1:10; 3:8-10; 1 Tim. 1:4). God’s aim in this economy is to have a group of human beings who have His life and nature inwardly and His image and likeness outwardly, causing them to become a corporate entity, the Body of

Christ, to be one with Him and live Him for His corporate expression (Gen. 1:26; John 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:4; Eph. 4:16). This economy is related to what we may regard as the primary contents of the New Testament—the Triune God with His eternal economy according to His good pleasure to dispense Himself into the regenerated believers in Christ to make them the same as He is in life and nature and thus to make them His duplication so that they may express Him in a corporate way (3:9-11, 14-21). In this process God and man become one organic entity, and this entity is God yet man and man yet God (1 Cor. 6:17; 12:12). This organic entity is the Body of Christ—the goal of the economy of the mystery hidden in God.

In Ephesians 3:2 we see that that the economy of the mystery has become the stewardship of grace given to the apostles and to all the believers (cf. Col. 1:25; 1 Cor. 9:17). Paul uses the Greek word *oikonomia* with two denotations. In relation to God, *oikonomia* denotes God’s economy; in relation to the believers in Christ, *oikonomia* denotes the stewardship, the dispensing ministry of the new covenant. This means that when the economy of the mystery came to the apostles, it became the stewardship of God; hence, the stewardship of God, the stewardship of the grace of God, is according to the economy of God. Actually, the economy of the mystery and the stewardship of the grace of God are one, and this oneness indicates that we should be doing exactly what God is doing to fulfill His eternal purpose—carrying out His economy through the dispensing ministry of the stewardship of the grace of God.

The exercise of this stewardship involves the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19). The mystery of the gospel is Christ and the church for the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose. As revealed in Colossians, the mystery of God is Christ, the Head (1:18). As the mystery of God, Christ is the history of God, the story of God. As the mystery of God, Christ is the definition, explanation, and expression of God (John 1:18). As the mystery of God, Christ is the Firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15), the Firstborn from the dead (v. 18), the embodiment of the Triune God (2:9), and the life-giving Spirit dwelling in our spirit to be one spirit with us (1 Cor. 15:45; 6:17). As the mystery of God, Christ is the constituent of His Body, the church, which is the one new man (Col. 1:18; 3:10-11, 15); Christ has the first place in all things (1:18); and He is the all-inclusive Christ who dwells in us as the mystery of God’s economy (vv. 26-27).

The mystery of Christ is the church, the Body of Christ (Eph. 3:4, 6, 10). Christ, as the embodiment of God, is the expression of God, and the church, as the Body of Christ, is the expression of Christ (1:22-23). In God’s economy, mystery produces mystery: Christ, the mystery of God, brings forth the church, the mystery of Christ. Thus, as the

hidden mystery in God's eternal purpose, the church is a mystery within a mystery, for the church is the third stage of one mystery (3:4, 9, 11). The first stage is God Himself as the mystery of the universe, the second stage is Christ as the mystery of God, and the third stage is the church as the mystery of Christ (John 1:18; Col. 2:2; 4:3). The church, therefore, is the mystery of Christ, who is the mystery of God, who is the mystery of the universe.

Christ, the mystery of God, and the church, the mystery of Christ, are the greatest mystery in the universe; nothing is greater or more important than this profound mystery. As we have pointed out, related to the mystery of Christ, the church, there is the economy of the mystery, which becomes the stewardship of the grace of God to the believers. If we would be faithful in this stewardship, we need to declare boldly the mystery of the gospel—a divine proclamation to all humankind that includes the entire New Testament economy for the producing and building up of the organic Body of Christ for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

### *Announcing the Unsearchable Riches of Christ as the Gospel*

"To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel" (Eph. 3:8). This is a crucial and often neglected aspect of the mystery of the gospel, for it is a gospel centered not on the needs of fallen human beings and their pitiful situation but on God and His will, good pleasure, counsel, purpose, and economy regarding the church as the Body of Christ. In order to announce the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel for the producing of the church, we ourselves must first enjoy these riches and then be constituted with them. Then, and only then, will we be able to announce this kind of gospel. The apostle Paul, by God's grace, became a Christ-enjoying and Christ-proclaiming person in and for the Body of Christ.

The apostle announced not the doctrines but the riches of Christ. The riches of Christ are what Christ is to us, such as light, life, righteousness, and holiness, what He has for us, and what He accomplished, attained, and obtained for us. These riches of Christ are unsearchable and untraceable. (Recovery Version, v. 8, note 3)

The apostle Paul enjoyed and announced the person of Christ with His unsearchable riches as the gospel to produce the church as the fullness of Christ, the expression and overflow of Christ, for the exhibition of Christ as the multifarious wisdom of God according to the eternal plan of God (vv. 8-11, 16-19; 1:22-23; Acts 17:3, 18; 26:22-23;

13:47; Gal. 1:15-16; Phil. 1:18; Col. 1:27-28; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30). The unsearchable riches of Christ are typified by the riches of the good land, the land of Canaan (Deut. 8:7-9).

The waterbrooks, springs, and fountains signify Christ as the flowing Spirit (John 4:14; 7:37-39; Rev. 22:1), and the valleys and the mountains signify the different kinds of environments in which we may experience Christ as the flowing Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 6:8-10). Wheat typifies the incarnated Christ, who was crucified and buried to multiply Himself (John 12:24), and barley, being the first-ripe grain (2 Sam. 21:9), points to the resurrected Christ as the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20). Vines typify the Christ who sacrificed Himself to produce wine to cheer God and man (Judg. 9:13; Matt. 9:17). The fig tree speaks of the sweetness and satisfaction of Christ as the life supply (Judg. 9:11); the pomegranates signify the fullness, the abundance and beauty, and the expression of the riches of Christ as life (Exo. 28:33-34; 1 Kings 7:18-20; S. S. 4:3b, 13); the bread signifies Christ as the bread of life (John

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6:35, 48); the olive tree typifies Christ (Rom. 11:17) as the One who was filled with the Spirit and anointed with the Spirit (Luke 4:1, 18; Heb. 1:9); olive oil typifies the Holy Spirit, by whom we walk to honor God and whom we minister to honor man (Gal. 5:16, 25; 2 Cor. 3:6, 8; Judg. 9:9); and milk and honey (6:3) speak forth the goodness and sweetness of Christ (see note 8<sup>2</sup> in Exo. 3). Stones signify Christ as material for building God's dwelling place (Isa. 28:16; Zech. 4:7; 1 Pet. 2:4). The iron and copper are for making weapons (Gen. 4:22; 1 Sam. 17:5-7) and typify our spiritual warfare by which we fight the enemy (2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:10-20). Iron also signifies Christ's ruling authority (Matt. 28:18; Rev. 19:15), and copper, Christ's judging power (Rev. 1:15 and note). The mountains from which copper is mined signify Christ's resurrection and ascension (Eph. 4:8 and note 1). (Recovery Version, Deut. 8:7, note 1)

By enjoying the unsearchable riches of Christ, the believers in Christ are built up to be Christ's Body, the church, which is Christ's fullness, His expression (1:22-23), and which is also the dwelling place of God (2:21-22; 1 Tim. 3:15) and the kingdom of God (Matt. 16:18-19; Rom. 14:17). Ultimately, God's dwelling place and God's kingdom will consummate in the New Jerusalem in eternity

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for the fulfillment of God's eternal economy; this miraculous structure of treasure is the goal of our enjoying and ministering the unsearchable riches of Christ as the treasure of the gospel (Rev. 21:1-3, 22; 22:1, 3). The fulfillment of God's eternal purpose concerning the church depends on our experience and enjoyment of the unsearchable riches of Christ and on our announcing these riches as the gospel, the goal of which is the accomplishment of the economy of the mystery, which is according to the desire of God's heart.

### *The Multifarious Wisdom of God Being Made Known through the Church*

According to God's intention and purpose, the church as the Body of Christ functions not only as the corporate expression of the Triune God but also as the means, or the channel, through which the Lord applies His victory over the enemy, Satan, and his evil kingdom and puts him and his fallen angelic underlings to open shame, showing to the whole universe that, ultimately, everything that Satan has done to damage and derange the divine purpose has only served, in God's wisdom, to advance it. Ephesians 3:10 unveils this function of the church: "In order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church." This word refers specifically to the evil angelic rulers and authorities—Satan and his angels. According to the New Testament, Satan has his kingdom, his angels, and his sphere of rule, which includes the air and the earth. Through the church God will make His wisdom known not merely to human beings but to the rebellious angels who are the followers of God's enemy.

**T**he church as the Body of Christ is the unique means used by God to fulfill His purpose and to settle all His problems, thereby fulfilling God's intention in the creation of humanity (Gen. 1:26). In the economy of God, the church is for the expression, the glory, of God the Father in the divine sonship with the Father's life and nature (Eph. 1:4-5; John 17:22-24). In Christ, the Father imparts His holy nature into us to make us as holy as He is in order to be the holy city, New Jerusalem, the consummation of the Body of Christ (2 Pet. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Heb. 2:10-11; Rev. 21:2). In addition, the Father imparts His life—the divine, eternal, uncreated, indestructible life—into us to make us His sons, having Christ as our life, so that we may grow in this life unto the maturity of life to be the eternal city of life (Eph. 4:15-16; Heb. 6:1; Rev. 22:1-2). With respect to God's enemy and his dark kingdom, the church is God's means to display His multifarious wisdom to the angelic rulers and authorities for the shame and defeat of the adversary and foe. All the problems and challenges caused by the devil and all the chaos he has brought into God's creation have pro-

vided our wise God splendid opportunities to manifest His wisdom. In this way God deals with and subdues His enemy through the church, causing him and his followers to know and acknowledge the multifarious wisdom of God displayed in the producing and building up of the church as the Body of Christ and then displayed through this glorious church to the entire universe with all its inhabitants—human, angelic, and demonic:

Eventually, Satan, God's enemy, will be subdued and will come to know God's multifarious wisdom...Without such a one God's manifold wisdom could not be manifested in full. It is through the troubles originating from Satan that God has an opportunity to exhibit His wisdom...It is through the church as the mystery of Christ that God's multifarious wisdom will be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies...The church through which God's wisdom is so marvelously displayed is God's masterpiece (Eph. 2:10). In the eyes of God the most wonderful thing in the universe is the church, for through the church God's multifarious wisdom is made known to Satan and his angels. The day is coming when, through the church, Satan and his angels will be put to shame. They will realize that everything they have done has given God the opportunity to manifest His wisdom. (Lee, *Conclusion* 2062-2063)

### *The Apostle's Prayer for the Church regarding the Experience of the Triune God*

After releasing such a tremendous revelation of God's eternal purpose concerning the church in relation to God's will, good pleasure, counsel, purpose, and economy, and after disclosing the hidden mystery concerning the church as the mystery of Christ for the expression of Christ and the defeat of the enemy, Paul did the best and highest thing—he bowed his knees to the Father and prayed:

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God. But to Him who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which operates in us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen. (3:16-21)

**I**n considering this great prayer, I do not intend to engage in verse-by-verse exposition; rather, my more modest aim is to comment first on the emphasis in Ephesians on the believers' experience of the Triune God in His economy

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and then to highlight the salient points of Paul's prayer as they conjoin to his writing about God's purpose for the church.

### *The Believers' Experience of the Triune God for the Fulfillment of God's Eternal Purpose*

The revelation regarding the Trinity in the holy Word is not mainly for doctrinal understanding but for the dispensing of the Triune God in His Divine Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people for their experience and enjoyment (2 Cor. 13:14). It is impossible for us to know the Triune God merely by doctrine; however, we can know Him by experiencing and enjoying Him (1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4-5). The Bible reveals that the Triune God is not merely the object of our faith; He is subjective to us, dwelling in us to be our life and life supply (Rom. 8:11). If we would understand the Divine Trinity, we must be in the process of the growth in life, in the line of life, pursuing the growth in life (1 John 2:12-14). We need therefore to be impressed that the Bible was written according to the governing principle of the Triune God working Himself into His chosen and redeemed people as their life and life supply (Psa. 36:8-9).

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

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

Chapter 1 unveils how God the Father chose and predestinated the members of His Body in eternity, God the Son redeemed them, and God the Spirit sealed them as a pledge, thus imparting Himself into His believers for the formation of the church, which is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 3-14, 18-23). An essential truth in God's economy is that the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—has wrought Himself into us through the Father's predestination, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's sealing and

pledging. The Body of Christ comes into being by the dispensing of the Triune God as life and the life supply into the believers. The threefold mentioning of the praise of God's glory signifies the threefold dispensing of the Triune God (vv. 6, 12, 14).

Chapter 2 shows that in the Divine Trinity all the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, have access unto God the Father through God the Son in God the Spirit (v. 18). Through God the Son, who is the Accomplisher, the means, and in God the Spirit, who is the Executor, the application, we have access unto God the Father, who is the Originator, the source of our enjoyment. In this way we become a poem written by the dispensing of the Father as the source, the Son as the course, and the Spirit as the flow (v. 10). The Father's dispensing to produce the masterpiece, the Son's dispensing to produce the new man, and the Spirit's bringing us to the Father in one Body result in the building up of the church and the fulfillment of God's eternal economy (vv. 10, 15-16, 21-22).

THE CHURCH IS GOD'S MEANS TO DISPLAY HIS MULTIFARIOUS WISDOM TO THE ANGELIC RULERS AND AUTHORITIES FOR THE SHAME AND DEFEAT OF HIS ADVERSARY AND FOE. ALL THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES CAUSED BY THE DEVIL AND ALL THE CHAOS HE HAS BROUGHT INTO GOD'S CREATION HAVE PROVIDED OUR WISE GOD SPLENDID OPPORTUNITIES TO MANIFEST HIS WISDOM.

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

Chapter 4 portrays how the processed God as the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father is mingled with the Body of Christ so that all the members of the Body may experience the Divine Trinity (vv. 4-6). The Body of Christ is the sphere for the development of the Triune God. The divine dispensing of God the Father in His being over all, of the Son in His being through all, and of the Spirit in His being in all enables all the members of the Body of Christ to experience and enjoy the Triune God. These verses reveal one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father united, mingled, and incorporated as one entity to be the organic Body of Christ through the believers' experience of the Triune God for the Body of Christ.

Chapter 5 exhorts the believers to praise the Lord, God

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the Son, with the songs of God the Spirit and to give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, to God the Father (vv. 18-20). This is to praise and thank the processed God in His Divine Trinity for our enjoyment of Him as the Triune God, and through the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity, we are constituted as children of God, walking in God as love and light (vv. 2, 8).

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

From this brief sketch of this Epistle in light of the truth concerning the Triune God, we can see that, according to Paul's understanding, the Divine Trinity is not for theological speculation or doctrinal formulation but for the genuine spiritual experience that issues in the growth and building up of the Body of Christ for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose according to the divine economy.

### *The Principle of Prayer and the Significance of Prayer*

In order to appreciate the prayer for experience in chapter 3, we need to know the principle of prayer and the significance of prayer. The principle of prayer is that, in the words of the Lord Jesus, we abide in Him and His words abide in us, with the result that whatever we ask for in prayer will be honored and answered (John 15:7). As we abide in the Lord and in the fellowship of the Body of Christ in the mingled spirit, the Lord makes His will and desire known in such a way that they are not only realized by us but wrought into us to become our will and desire, making us one with God in our prayer. We then express in prayer our will and desire, which are actually the Lord's will and desire constituted into us and uttered by us in our prayer to Him. Our prayer actually is the prayer of the Lord within our prayer, for we are praying not out from ourselves but out from Him, asking Him to do what He wills and desires to do. This is the principle of prayer—the church being one with the Lord in prayer and speaking forth His will and desire. In this matter God chooses not to act alone or unilaterally but in union with the church as the Body of Christ in its ministry of prayer. The Lord is delighted to hear and answer such prayer, the only kind of prayer that is real and genuine in His sight and the only kind of prayer that can carry out His eternal intention.

**I**n its significance, genuine prayer is much deeper and more profound than most believers suppose, for true prayer is based upon our union with Christ and His bur-

den for His Body. Prayer is the mutual contact between man and God (1 John 5:14-15). Prayer is man breathing God, obtaining God, and being obtained by God; real prayer is an exhaling and inhaling before God, causing us and God to contact each other and to gain each other (1 Thes. 5:17). The more we pray, the more we are filled with the Triune God (Eph. 3:14-19). The real significance of prayer is to contact God in our spirit and to absorb God Himself (6:18; Jude 20). Prayer is man cooperating and co-working with God, allowing God to express Himself through man and thus accomplish His purpose (James 5:17). A praying person cooperates with God, works together with God, and allows God to express Himself and His desire from within him and through him (Rom. 8:26-27; James 5:17; Eph. 1:16-23; 3:14-21). The kind of prayer we have depends on the kind of person we are; our prayers reveal who we are, what we are, and where we are (Luke 9:54-55; 1 Tim. 2:8). The governing principle of our prayer should be that prayer brings us into God (Luke 11:1-13). Furthermore, a life of genuine prayer stops our natural being; such a prayer life revolts and rebels against our natural being (Matt. 16:24; Luke 21:36). Prayer is the real denial of the self; to pray is to deny ourselves, realizing that we are nothing and that we are not able to do anything (Mark 8:34; 9:29). Genuine prayer causes us to be mingled with God (Jude 20; Eph. 6:18). We need to pray in the spirit with the prayer of Christ; there must be a prayer in our prayer like the wheel within the wheel in Ezekiel 1:16 (James 5:17). Genuine prayer is not merely spiritual but also divine, for the Triune God is praying in us, and we are praying in the Triune God (Rom. 8:26-27; Jude 20). The way to experience the indwelling Christ and to be constituted with Christ is to pray in a genuine way (Col. 1:3, 9, 27; 4:2-3, 12). When we pray, Christ, the Head, has a way to carry out His administration through His Body (1:18; 2:19; 3:1-2; 4:2; Heb. 2:17; 4:14; 7:26; 8:1-2; Rev. 5:5-7). In genuine prayer we enter into the reality of the Body of Christ according to God's economy. Because Paul had been perfected to pray in this way, he could be one with the Lord in the Body to pray for the church regarding the experience of the Triune God.

### *Crucial Aspects of Paul's Prayer for the Church*

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 is intimately related to God's will, good pleasure, purpose, and economy. God's eternal purpose is to work Himself into us as our life and our everything so that we may take Him as our person, live Him, and express Him; this is the desire of God's heart and the focal point of the Bible (1:9; 3:11; Phil. 1:20-21). God's economy according to His heart's desire is to build Himself into man and to build man into Himself (2 Sam. 7:12-14; Eph. 3:17). God's unique work, His central work, is to work Himself in Christ into His chosen people, making Himself one with them (Gal. 4:19). We need God to build Himself in Christ into our humanity, working

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Himself into us as our life, our nature, and our person (Eph. 3:17). God's intention is to work Christ as the Spirit into us, that Christ may be expressed through His Body and head up the whole universe under His headship (vv. 16-19; 1:22-23, 10).

In 1:15-23 Paul's prayer is for the saints to receive revelation concerning the church; in 3:14-21 his prayer is for the saints to experience Christ for the church. The spirit in 1:17 is for revelation, whereas the inner man in 3:16 is for experience. In 3:16 our spirit is a person, the inner man, for us to experience Christ for the church; by this person we can experience Christ so that the church may be built up. As a person, our spirit is for us to live by and experience what we have seen.

In order to experience Christ in a subjective way, we need to be strengthened with power into the inner man (v. 16). The inner man is our regenerated spirit with God's life as its life. We need to be strengthened into the inner man with the power that raised Christ from the dead, that seated Him in the heavenlies, that subjected all things under His feet, and that gave Him to be Head over all things to the church (1:19-22). The more we are strengthened into the inner man, the more the parts of our inner being are brought back into our inner man.

Paul prayed that we would be strengthened into the inner man with the result that Christ could make His home in our hearts and thereby occupy, possess, permeate, and saturate our whole inner being with Himself (3:17). Since our heart is the totality of our inward parts, the center of our inward being, and our representative with regard to our inclination, affection, delight, and desire, when Christ makes His home in our hearts, He controls our entire inward being and supplies and strengthens every inward part with Himself. The more Christ spreads within us, the more He settles down in us and makes His home in us, occupying every part of our inner being, possessing all these parts, and saturating them with Himself. In order for the revelation in Ephesians 2 concerning the new man to be practical in our daily life, we need to let Christ make His home in our hearts. For Christ to make His home in our hearts means that He is transmitted into us in a full way (1:22).

When Christ spreads into our hearts, He becomes our person for the one new man in God's eternal purpose (3:17). Thus, we need to take Christ not only as life in our spirit but also as the person in our heart. The only way for Christ to be our person is for Him to make His home in our hearts. If we take Christ as our person, allowing Him

to spread into our hearts, the person living in our hearts will not be the self but Christ (Gal. 2:20).

The Christ who is making His home in our hearts is unlimited and immeasurable (Eph. 3:18). As Christ makes His home in our hearts, we apprehend with all the saints the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth; these are the dimensions of the universe, the dimensions of the immeasurable Christ. Although Christ is immeasurable, He is nevertheless making His home in our hearts. Christ in His unlimited dimensions is the universal cube, perfectly balanced, and our experience of Him in the Body must be "cubical," three-dimensional, so that all that we are and do is beneficial for the Body.

When Christ makes His home in our hearts, we will be filled unto all the fullness of God (v. 19). The fullness of God is the Body of Christ as the expression of the Triune God to the uttermost, the ultimate consummation of the corporate expression of the Triune God. The Body of Christ is

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the unlimited expression of the unlimited Christ. If we let Christ make His home in our hearts, we will be filled with the Triune God to such an extent that we will become His full expression.

The genuine church life is the issue of the unlimited and immeasurable Christ personally making His home in our hearts (v. 17; 4:16). The content of the church is the Christ whom we take as our person, the Christ who is wrought into our being. If we would have the reality of the Body of Christ, we must allow Christ to make His home in our hearts. In order for Christ's word in Matthew 16:18 concerning the building up of the church to be fulfilled, the church must enter into a state where many saints allow Christ to make His home in their hearts, possessing, occupying, and saturating their entire inner being.

The more Christ occupies our inner being, the more we will be able to be built up with others in the Body for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 2:21-22; 4:16). Then the concluding word of Paul's great prayer will be answered in us, with us, and through us: "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen" (3:21). **AC**

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Watchman Nee speaks strongly on the effect of a clever mind upon one's study of the Bible:

One undeniable fact in studying God's Word is that the kind of person we are determines the kind of Bible we have in our hands. A man often approaches the Bible with his rebellious, confused, and seemingly clever mind. What he gets out of the Bible is the product of his mind; he does not touch the spirit of the Word. If we want to meet the Lord through the Bible, our rebellious and uncooperative mind must be broken. (*Breaking* 57-58)

<sup>2</sup>For nearly half a century I have been seriously and intensely occupied with the great subject of God's purpose, especially as it relates to the life and experience of believers today. Although I do not purport to be a scholar or a professional theologian, I am at least somewhat conversant with the major theological trends during the past century. This course of study has caused me to respect and appreciate the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, both of whom were selfless servants of Christ who, under the Lord's blessing, arrived at a profound understanding of the Word of God as a whole and of the purpose of God in particular. For more than forty years I have been studying their writings, concentrating on the teaching concerning God's will, heart's desire, purpose, and economy and the ultimate goal of God's operation in and with the believers—the Body of Christ consummating in the New Jerusalem. It is no exaggeration to say that I have been constituted with their ministry of the Word in such a way that I can no longer distinguish my thoughts from theirs. Therefore, I wish to acknowledge my profound debt to these two servants of the Lord, who, as ministers of the age with the ministry of the age, have brought to seeking believers the vision of the age. What a great blessing! Virtually everything that I know of God's purpose I owe to them, and because this is the case, it is impossible for me to identify the source of every thought and expression in my writing on this subject. Perhaps it will suffice to acknowledge to the reader that, in a very practical sense, the substance of this article comes from the ministry that has been wrought into me by the Spirit of life. Thus, I can claim no credit, only responsibility for the way in which the vision that I have inherited is here formulated and articulated.

<sup>3</sup>We must be clear, however, that this divine-human organism is a matter not of God in the Godhead but of the Triune God in His economy, that is, in His plan and arrangement to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people to make them His corporate expression. This certainly does not mean that the church joins the Godhead to be an object of worship or that the eternal and immutable Godhead undergoes any kind of change or is jeopardized in any way. God in His Godhead is forever unique and unalterable; nevertheless, God in His economy has made it possible for Him to enter into and to be one with chosen and redeemed people and to bring them into Himself and make them one with Him. This is union, mingling, and incorporation, which issue in an organic, four-in-one entity—the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the Body as a corporate,

divine-human person not in the Godhead but in God's wondrous economy according to His eternal purpose.

<sup>4</sup>According to the revelation in the New Testament and the consistent teaching and practice of the apostle, the unique Body of Christ is expressed in many localities as the local churches (Eph. 4:4; Rev. 1:4, 11). A local church is an expression of the Body of Christ in a particular locality (Matt. 16:18; 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 12:12-13, 20, 27). The one universal church—the Body of Christ—becomes the many local churches—local expressions of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 16:1, 16). Every local church is part of the unique, universal Body of Christ, a local expression of this one Body (1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27). Universally, all the local churches are one Body, and locally, every local church is a local expression of the universal Body; therefore, a local church is not the Body but only a part of the Body, an expression of the Body. This means that although the local churches are many in existence, they are still one Body universally in element (Gal. 1:2; Eph. 4:4). In the sight of the Lord Jesus, all the local churches are one, because Christ has only one Body (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23). We need to be impressed with the marvelous divine fact that the unique Body of Christ is expressed in many local churches (Rev. 1:11-12, 20) in the divine oneness, as it is with the Triune God (John 17:11, 21, 23), and in the divine nature, element, essence, expression, function, and testimony. There are many local churches, but, as expressions of the unique, universal Body of Christ, they have one divine nature, one divine element, one divine essence, one divine expression, one divine function, and one divine testimony. The one Body is expressed as local churches, and the local churches, being many, are one Body.

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