

Four Great Matters in the Bible

by Witness Lee

The One into whom we believe is the divine and mysterious Triune God. Because it pleased the Triune God to reveal Himself to His children, He used the limited language of mankind to make known, in time, His heart's desire in the Bible. When we study the whole New Testament in depth, we can see that He revealed four great matters: first, the economy of God; second, the dispensing of God; third, the union of God with the believers; and fourth, the corporate expression of God.

The Divine Economy

If we were to ask a number of students and teachers of the Bible what the central line in the Bible is, they would have different opinions. Our feeling about what the central line is depends on our understanding of the Bible, and our understanding of the Bible depends on what we are. Many Christians in the Far East prefer the book of Proverbs, while those in the West prefer the Psalms. A New Testament in Chinese will frequently have Proverbs attached to it, while a New Testament in English will frequently have the Psalms accompanying it. What one sees in the Bible can be according to his preference and based upon his culture and his natural disposition. In order to see the central line of the divine revelation, we need to empty ourselves.

The first thing mentioned in the Bible is a record of God's creation. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In fact, however, the first thing was not God's creation. The beginning in Genesis is the beginning of time. Time has a beginning, but eternity does not. Eternity is without beginning and without ending. Only God really knows what eternity is because He is the eternal God. The Gospel of John also uses the phrase *in the beginning*. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word." In John 1:1 *in the beginning* refers to eternity past.

In the beginning of time God created, but in eternity past the Word was with God and was God.

We need to consider what God was doing in eternity past. Chapters 1 and 3 of Ephesians give us a glimpse of what He was doing before time began. I would like us to read Ephesians 1:9-11 and 3:11. Ephesians 1:9-11 says,

Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him; 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.

Ephesians 3:9-11 says,

To enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things, 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, according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A number of crucial terms are used by Paul in these verses—God's will, God's purpose, God's good pleasure, God's counsel, and God's economy.

God's Will Being God's Wish, God's Desire

God's will is God's wish, God's desire. God's will is what He wishes to do and wants to do. God's good pleasure is of God's will. Ephesians 1:5 speaks of "the good pleasure of His will." His good pleasure is embodied in His will, so

His will comes first. God's will was hidden in God as a mystery, so verse 9 speaks of "the mystery of His will." In eternity God planned a will. This will was hidden in Him; hence, it was a mystery. God's will as a mystery hidden in God issues in God's economy, dispensation (3:9). From God's will issues God's economy through His purpose, good pleasure, and counsel.

God's Purpose Being God's Intent Set Beforehand

God's purpose is God's intent set beforehand. God's good pleasure was purposed in God Himself (1:9). This shows that God's good pleasure is embodied not only in God's will but also in God's purpose. We have been predestinated according to God's purpose of the ages, which is His eternal purpose (v. 11; 3:11). God's purpose is eternal. It is the eternal plan of God made in eternity past before the beginning of time.

God's Good Pleasure Being What God Likes, What Pleases God

God's intention in His economy is to dispense Christ with all His riches to His believers chosen by God for the constitution of the Body of Christ, the church, to express the processed Triune God.

God's good pleasure is what makes God happy. It is what God likes, what pleases God. God has predestinated us unto sonship according to the good pleasure of His will (1:5). This means that God likes to have sons. His predestination is unto sonship. *Unto* means "for" or "in view of." God's predestination of us is for His sonship or in view of His sonship. God is happy and glad about gaining sons. It is His good pleasure to have us as His sons. God has made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself (v. 9). First, there is God's will, second God's purpose, and third God's pleasure.

God's Counsel Being God's Resolution Consummated in the Council by the Divine Trinity

God's counsel is God's resolution consummated in the council by the Divine Trinity. A council requires more than one person. A counsel is the decision of a council. A council is a meeting, and the counsel is the resolution made by the council, the meeting. If God is only one, how could He have a council? How could He have a meeting for

discussion to make a resolution? This indicates that God is not only one but also three. He is the Divine Trinity.

Acts 2:23 says that Christ was delivered up and crucified by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God. This indicates that in eternity past the Triune God had a meeting; there was a council among the three of the Godhead. The determined counsel was determined in a council held by the Trinity before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8), indicating that the Lord's crucifixion was not an accident in human history but a purposeful fulfillment of the divine counsel determined by the Triune God. We should not think that Christ was crucified, killed, cut off, merely according to Pilate's judgment. His being cut off was determined in a council held by the Trinity in eternity past.

The three of the Godhead had a council among themselves, and a decision was made called a counsel. God had a will with a purpose according to His good pleasure. Then the Divine Trinity Himself had a council, a meeting, to make a decision, a resolution. This resolution is the counsel. In Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let Us make man..." This shows that the creation of man was also according to the council among the three of the divine Godhead. Such a council can be compared to today's Congress in the United States government. The president cannot act without a counsel made by the Congress in a council.

God's Economy Being God's Household Administration, God's Plan and Arrangement

After God's will, purpose, good pleasure, and counsel, there is God's economy. God's economy is God's household administration, God's plan and arrangement. With an administration, there is the need of a plan, and with a plan, there is the need of an arrangement. Based upon God's will, He made a purpose. In His will and purpose, there is His good pleasure. Then the Divine Trinity had a council to make a decision, which is the divine counsel. Based upon that counsel, God made a plan with an arrangement, and this plan with this arrangement is His household administration, His economy.

God's economy (dispensation, plan) is to head up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). It is to bring all the items in the universe under the headship of Christ. God's economy is God's dispensation, plan, arrangement, of the mystery of His will (3:9; 1:9). What God wanted in eternity past was a mystery. Based upon that mystery, God made an arrangement, and that arrangement is His economy.

God's economy is God's distribution of Himself in Christ

in faith (1 Tim. 1:4). At the apostle's time, there were different teachings. Thus, he asked Timothy to remain at Ephesus to charge certain ones not to teach differently but to take care of God's economy in faith (vv. 3-4). Anything other than God's economy is based upon human works, but the economy of God is based altogether upon our faith in Christ. It is based not upon our doing but upon our believing. The entire Bible reveals to us the economy of God, which is what God intends to do, what God intends to give us, and what God intends to work into us.

The Intention of God's Economy

The intention of God's economy is to dispense Himself into His chosen people, making Himself one with them. The Bible reveals that God dwells within His chosen people and that He desires to make Himself fully one with them. God's intention in His economy is also to dispense Christ with all His riches to His believers chosen by God for the constitution of the Body of Christ, the church, to express the processed Triune God (Eph. 3:8-10). This is the central line of the divine revelation. Finally, the intention of God's economy is to head up all things in Christ (1:10). Today the entire universe is a mess, but when the new heaven and new earth come, everything will be headed up in Christ under His headship. In the church, Christ is heading us up so that eventually all things can be headed up in Christ in the new heaven and new earth.

God's Economy and the Apostle's Stewardship

In chapter 3 of Ephesians, Paul uses the Greek word *oikonomia* with two denotations. First, this word refers to God's economy. Second, it refers to the stewardship of the apostle. Eventually, God's economy becomes the stewardship of the apostle. God's economy was made in eternity (vv. 9-11). The apostle's stewardship (Gk., economy) of God's grace was given in time to carry out God's eternal economy in grace (v. 2; 1 Cor. 9:17). The economy of God is with God Himself, but the stewardship of the apostle was not merely given to Paul as one person. The stewardship has been given to all the believers.

The economy of God has become our stewardship to dispense the grace of God. The riches of Christ are the grace. The stewardship of grace is mentioned in Ephesians 3:2, and the unsearchable riches of Christ are mentioned in verse 8, so the stewardship of grace is the ministry to distribute, to dispense, the unsearchable riches of Christ to the believers as grace for their enjoyment.

We need to get into all of these items of God's doing in eternity past. In eternity past God was exercising His will for His purpose in which is His good pleasure and for which He had to make a counsel. Based upon this He

made an eternal economy to dispense the riches of Christ into God's chosen people, the believers, so that He could have a church, a Body, an organism for His expression. Eventually, by this dispensing, He will head up all things in Christ. For the accomplishment of His economy, God dispenses Himself into us in a fine way. God's dispensing of Himself into us, His chosen and redeemed people, will consummate in the New Jerusalem.

The Divine Dispensing

The divine economy is the issue of God's will, purpose, good pleasure, and counsel; hence, God's will, purpose, good pleasure, and counsel are all for the divine dispensing. The intention of God's economy is to dispense God Himself into His chosen people, making Himself one with them. God's intention in His economy is to dispense Christ with all His riches to His believers chosen by God for the constitution of the Body of Christ, the church, to express the processed Triune God (3:8-10). First, the divine dispensing dispenses Christ with all that the processed Triune God is, has, and has achieved. Second, this dispensing constitutes the organic Body of Christ. The church as the Body of Christ is not only built up but also constituted. Constitution takes place by the gradual dispensing of a life element.

God's intention in His economy is also to head up all things in Christ. Christ is the Head not only of the church but also of all things (1:10, 22). God gave Him as a gift to be Head over all things to the church, His Body. He is the Head of the Body. Our own body is a picture of this. Every part of our body is related in some way to the head organically through the nerves. Christ's heading up of all things takes place organically by the growth of the Body.

The Divine Dispensing Being the Consummation of the Divine Economy

The book of Ephesians unveils the dispensing of God as no other book in the whole Bible. In the first four chapters especially, the most crucial thing is the divine dispensing. In order to study the book of Ephesians in a thorough way, we need to study and understand the divine dispensing. In the entire book, the word *dispensing* is not used, but the fact of dispensing is there.

I use the word *dispensing* in the sense of food being eaten, digested, and assimilated into our being. Eventually, when the element of the food we have eaten is assimilated into our being, that food becomes us. Dispensing is not just to distribute. It means that the things we take in have been assimilated into us to become us.

The divine dispensing is the consummation of the divine economy. In other words, God's plan is accomplished

through His dispensing. The divine dispensing consummates God's economy, God's plan. In 3:8-9 Paul says,

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 and to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things.

These verses reveal God's dispensing. Paul received grace to announce the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel. *To announce* means to distribute. Paul's distributing of the riches of Christ to the believers was according to God's economy. This is the apostleship to carry out God's economy.

The Divine Economy Being the Issue of God's Will, Purpose, Good Pleasure, and Counsel

The divine economy is the issue of God's will, purpose, good pleasure, and counsel; hence, the intention of God's will, purpose, good pleasure, and counsel is for the divine

and assimilate it into our body, how could we enjoy it? The food must be dispensed into our body so that we can enjoy it. Second Corinthians 13:14 shows us a kind of dispensing. God the Father as love is embodied in God the Son as grace. The grace is dispensed into us through the fellowship of the Spirit. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is just the flowing and the dispensing of what the Triune God is and has into us. The Triune God is love with grace, and the grace with love becomes the flow. This flow is the fellowship, and the fellowship is the dispensing of the Triune God into our being for our experience and enjoyment.

The Divine Nature Being Dispensed into the Believers in Christ through God the Father's Choosing, and the Divine Life Being Dispensed through God the Father's Predestination

The divine nature is dispensed into the believers in Christ through God the Father's choosing, and the divine life is dispensed through God the Father's predestination (Eph. 1:4-5). Ephesians 1:4 says that God the Father chose us in Christ to be holy. He chose us for sanctification. To be holy

is a matter of dispensing. Without the divine nature of God being dispensed into our being, we do not have the element to be sanctified. By nature we are like a muddy piece of clay. How can we become golden unless some element of gold is mingled with us? Nothing in the entire universe is holy but God Himself. When God's divine, holy element is dispensed into us persons of clay, we become holy. To be holy we need the sanctifying element to be dispensed into our being. Ephesians 1:5 says that God predestinated us unto sonship. Predestination

means to mark out beforehand. If you go to a supermarket to get some peaches, you first choose the peaches that you want and then mark them out. We were chosen by God and marked out for sonship. Sonship is a matter of dispensing. If God's life as the divine element were not dispensed into us, how could we be His sons? In order to be God's sons by birth, we must have God's divine element as life dispensed into us. Verses 4 and 5 strongly indicate that God's holy nature and life must be dispensed into our being so that we can be made holy and so that we can be His genuine sons.

The Divine Element, of Which the Believers in Christ Are Made God's Excellent Inheritance, Being Dispensed into the Believers through God the Son's Redemption unto God's Economy of the Fullness of the Times, to Head Up All Things in Christ

The divine element, of which the believers in Christ are made God's excellent inheritance, is dispensed into the believers through God the Son's redemption unto God's economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things

The divine dispensing of the divine economy constitutes the organic Body of Christ, the church, with all that the processed Triune God is, has, and has achieved unto His glory and for His full expression.

dispensing. Everything God has accomplished is for one purpose. This purpose is to dispense Himself into His chosen people.

The Divine Dispensing of the Divine Economy Being Consummated through the Divine Trinity

The divine dispensing of the divine economy is consummated through the Divine Trinity. When I first began to speak on the Divine Trinity in this country, I told people that the Trinity should not be considered as a mere theological doctrine. The Divine Trinity is not for doctrine but for our enjoyment. Second Corinthians 13:14 illustrates this: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." The Trinity—God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit—is revealed here with love, grace, and fellowship. This revelation is for our experience and enjoyment of the Triune God.

The Trinity is for our experience, but if the Trinity could not be dispensed into us, how could we experience Him? Food is for our enjoyment, but if we could not eat, digest,

in Christ (vv. 7-10). God the Son, Christ, has redeemed us. This implies that we were lost. Before we were saved, we had fallen into at least four categories of things: sin, self, Satan, and the world. Christ redeemed us through His redeeming death from these negative things into Himself. We were in sin, self, Satan, and the world, but now we are in Christ!

The phrase *in Christ* implies a sphere, a realm, and an element. We were in Adam, and Adam was our sphere. In Adam we were fallen, but now we have been redeemed into Christ. Christ has become our sphere and our realm. Christ is also our element. His element is the divine element, the divine substance. To be in Christ means that we are in the divine element. Day by day Christ Himself is being worked into us so that He can become our element. If we did not have Christ as our element, how could we be called Christians? We are Christians because we have Christ as our element. A cup is golden because it has the element of gold within it. If a cup does not have any element of gold, it cannot be called a golden cup.

Today we are in Christ, who is our element. This element has made us an excellent treasure to become God's inheritance (v. 11). In ourselves, we are pieces of clay, unworthy for God to inherit. What God desires to inherit is something excellent. Since Christ has become our element, this element makes us excellent. Thus, we are inherited by God as His inheritance. In order to be such an inheritance, the divine element, which is Christ Himself, must be dispensed into us.

When I was young, I doubted concerning my salvation because I did not have much of the divine element. One day I was reading John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. When I got to the chapter where Christian received some kind of "certificate," which indicated that he had been saved, immediately I stopped reading and began to consider if I had this certificate. The "certificate" was faith. At that time I began to doubt my salvation, and I was very troubled. I then checked with the Scriptures in portions such as John 3:15-16 and 36, and I read them repeatedly. I doubted my salvation because I did not have very much of the element of Christ. Christ had not been that constituted into my being, so I doubted. Today, however, I have no doubts about my salvation because I have had an accumulation of Christ within me; I have a greater amount of Christ within me. Christ has been and is being dispensed into me as the element.

The Divine Essence, of Which the Believers in Christ Enjoy the Processed Triune God, Being Dispensed into the Believers through God the Spirit's Sealing and Pledging

First, the Father's nature has been dispensed into us.

Second, the element of Christ has also been infused into us. Third, the divine essence, of which the believers in Christ enjoy the processed Triune God, is being dispensed into us through God the Spirit's sealing and pledging (Eph. 1:13-14). This sealing and pledging is very subjective.

The Spirit as the seal is the consummation of the Triune God. This seal is a wet seal, full of the divine ink. The Spirit as the seal is also the sealing ink, the divine ink, as the essence. With the seal there is the nature of the Father, the element of the Son, and the essence of the Spirit. The nature is in the element, the element is in the essence, and the essence has been sealed into us.

The Divine Dispensing of the Divine Economy Constituting the Organic Body of Christ

The divine dispensing of the divine economy constitutes the organic Body of Christ, the church, with all that the processed Triune God is, has, and has achieved, as the issue of the processed Divine Trinity unto His glory and for His full expression, which consummates in the New Jerusalem.

Ephesians 1 is full of the truth of God's dispensing. In verses 4 through 5 God's nature is dispensed into us with His life. In verses 7 through 11 Christ's element has been dispensed into us through His redemption. In verses 13 through 14 the Spirit's essence has been sealed into our being. In verses 15 through 18 Paul prays for the church regarding revelation. Then from verse 19 to the end of the chapter, Paul speaks concerning the power which was wrought in Christ and which is now toward the believers. This power is the extract of the Triune God—God the Father in the Son as the Spirit. The Divine Trinity has become such a power. Just as electricity is the power that has been installed in our homes, the Triune God is the power that has been installed in our being.

This power raised Christ from among the dead, seated Him in the heavenlies, subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him as a gift to be Head over all things to the church (vv. 20-22). All that transpired on Christ, with Christ, and in Christ is for the transmission to the church. Thus, the church is the great issue of the Divine Trinity's transfusion. The church as the Body of Christ is the result of the Triune God's transfusion. We may even say that the Body of Christ is the extract of the Divine Trinity.

The church as the Body of Christ is the fullness of the One who fills all in all (v. 23). I believe that the phrase *all in all* in Ephesians 1:23 is similar to the phrase *all and in all* in Colossians 3:11. In Colossians 3 Christ is all the members who comprise the new man and in all the

members. In Ephesians 1 the church is the fullness of the One who is *in* all the believers and who *is* all the believers. The dispensing of the Divine Trinity issues in the Body of Christ as the fullness of the processed Triune God, who is all the believers and who is in all the believers.

The Organic Union with God in Christ

As Christians, we have an organic union with Christ, an organic oneness in life. When we believed in Christ, an organic union took place between us and Him. By believing in Christ we believed into Him and thereby became one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). This is what we mean by the expression *organic union*.

Our organic union with Christ also involves our being baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). God's intention in His economy is to put us into Him and to come into us and live in us. Therefore, to be baptized into Christ is to enter into an organic union with the embodiment of the Triune God, which is able to transform our whole being.

When we believe in the Lord Jesus, we believe into Him. By believing into Him we enter into Him to be one with Him organically, to partake of Him, and to participate in all that He has accomplished for us.

In addition to believing into Christ, which is inward and subjective, we also need to be baptized into Him, an act which is outward and objective. We need both the inward action of believing and the outward action of being baptized. In this way we make one complete step to enter into Christ. In Galatians 3 Paul often speaks about faith and believing, but at the end of this chapter he speaks of being baptized into Christ. The step that begins with believing into Christ is completed by being baptized into Him. In this way there takes place in full an organic union between the believers and Christ.

Believing into the Son of God, Who Has the Eternal Life, and into the Son of Man, Who Was Lifted Up as the Bronze Serpent on the Cross, to Have an Organic Union with Him

The believers have believed into the Son of God, who has the eternal life, and into the Son of Man, who was lifted up as the bronze serpent on the cross, to have an organic union with Him. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone who

believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life." This verse speaks of believing into the Son of God. The Greek preposition *into* signifies union with Christ by believing into Him.

First John 5:11 tells us that eternal life is in the Son of God. The testimony of God is not only that Jesus is His Son but also that He gives us the eternal life which is in the Son. The Son of God is the means for God to give us His eternal life. Because the life is in the Son (John 1:4) and the Son is the life (11:25; 14:6; Col. 3:4), the Son and the life are one. If we have the Son of God, we have eternal life, because eternal life is in the Son. Actually, eternal life is the Son, and the Son is the embodiment of the Triune God. Therefore, when we receive the Son of God by believing into Him, we have the eternal life that is in Him.

John 3:14 and 15 say, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that everyone who believes into Him may have eternal life."

These verses speak of having eternal life, the divine life, the uncreated life of God, by believing into the Son of Man. Here the Lord Jesus applies to Himself the type of the bronze serpent (Num. 21:4-9), showing that when He was in the flesh, He was in "the likeness of the flesh of sin" (Rom. 8:3), which likeness was the form of the bronze serpent. It had the form of the serpent but not the poison. Christ was made in the likeness of the flesh of sin, but He had no participation in the sin of the flesh (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). When in the flesh He, the Son of Man, was lifted up on the cross, He dealt with Satan, the old serpent (John 12:31-33; Heb. 2:14). Now we may have eternal life by believing into Him. The Greek word rendered *that* at the beginning of John 3:15 is better translated "so that" or "in order that." This indicates the goal of the lifting up of the Son of Man. The Son of Man was lifted up in order that everyone who believes into Him may have eternal life.

The issue of our believing into Christ as the Son of God and the Son of Man is that we have an organic union with Him. When we believe in the Lord Jesus, we believe into Him. By believing into Him we enter into Him to be one with Him organically, to partake of Him, and to participate in all that He has accomplished for us. This means that by believing into Him we are identified with Him in all that He is and in all that He has passed through, accomplished, obtained, and attained. Therefore, by believing into Christ we have an organic union with Him and thereby become one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). This is the meaning of the expression *organic union*. By faith in the Son of God and the Son of Man we have been brought into an organic union with Him.

*Being Baptized into the Name
(Denoting the Person) of the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit, into an Organic Union
with the Processed Triune God*

To be baptized is to be baptized into the name (denoting the person) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, into an organic union with the processed Triune God. This is revealed by the Lord's word in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Baptism is to bring repentant people out of their old state into a new one by terminating their old life and germinating them with the new life of Christ so that they may become kingdom people. John the Baptist's recommending ministry began with the preliminary baptism by water only. Now, after the Lord Jesus accomplished His ministry on earth, passed through the process of death and resurrection, and became the life-giving Spirit, He charged His disciples to baptize the disciplined people into the Triune God.

The word *into* in 28:19 indicates union, as in Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27, and 1 Corinthians 12:13. The same Greek word is used in Acts 8:16; 19:3, 5; and 1 Corinthians 1:13, 15. To baptize people into the name of the Triune God is to baptize them into spiritual and mystical union with Him. In Matthew 28:19 there is one name for the Trinity. The name is the sum total of the Divine Being, equivalent to His person. To baptize believers into the name of the Trinity is to immerse them into all the Triune God is.

By the time the Lord Jesus gave the charge to His disciples recorded in 28:19, He had already died an all-inclusive death on the cross, had been buried, had entered into Hades to overcome the power of death and everything related to it, and had come out of death and had entered into resurrection. Furthermore, He, the pneumatic Christ, had already breathed Himself as the life-giving Spirit into the disciples (John 20:22). Having done all this, He charged them to disciple the nations and to bring them into the Triune God so that they may have an organic union with Him.

The Corporate Expression of God

God's good pleasure, God's heart's desire, is to have many sons for the expression of His Son so that He may be expressed in the Son through the Spirit. For this purpose, God has manifested Himself, first in Christ as an individual expression in the flesh and then in the church, the Body of Christ, as the enlarged corporate expression in the flesh. Ultimately, God will be manifested in the New Jerusalem as the consummated corporate expression in the new heaven and new earth.

In Christ as the Individual Expression of God in the Flesh

God's manifestation was first in Christ as an individual expression in the flesh. Concerning this, Colossians 2:9 says, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." In this verse *fullness* does not refer to the riches of God; instead, it refers to the expression of the riches of God. What dwells in Christ is the expression of the riches of what God is. We need to see that the fullness of the Godhead is the expression of the Godhead and that this expression is in Christ individually.

Christ is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead. This means that the fullness of the Triune God dwells in Christ in a bodily form. The fact that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that it dwells in Him in a way that is both real and practical. This implies the physical body that Christ put on in His humanity. It indicates that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ as the One who has a human body. Before His incarnation, the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him as the eternal Word, but it did not dwell in Him bodily. After He became incarnate, the fullness of the Godhead began to dwell in Him in a bodily way. Thus, He is the manifestation of God, the individual expression of God, in the flesh.

The expression *the fullness of the Godhead* refers to the entire Godhead, to the complete God, including the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Because the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, it would not be correct to say that the fullness of the Godhead includes only God the Son and not also God the Father and God the Spirit. Since the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead must be the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. As the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, Christ is not only the Son of God but the entire God.

John 1:1 and 14 also reveal that God was manifested in Christ as an individual expression in the flesh. Verse 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In verse 14 this Word, which is God, became flesh. This refers to the incarnated Christ. In the beginning He was not only with God, but He is the very God. The incarnated Christ is God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16).

John 1 further says, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (v. 18). This tells us that Christ, being the only begotten Son of God, is the expression of God. No one has ever seen God, yet He declares God. The Father is the invisible God, the hidden God; Christ is the manifested God.

When we say that Christ is the Word, we are saying that He is the expression of God. I may have a great deal of feeling within me, but if I have no words, my feelings cannot be expressed. But when my feelings are expressed in words, then you are able to understand them. Christ is the Word of God. Although no one knows God, Christ as the Word speaks for God, defines God, and even declares God.

Because God is abstract, mysterious, and invisible, there is the need for God to be the Word in order to explain Himself, define Himself, and reveal Himself. The Word in John 1:1 refers to the defined God, the explained and expressed God, the God revealed and made known to human beings. This Word is our Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. The Word is the embodiment of the Triune God. Although the Triune God is mysterious, He is nonetheless embodied in the Word. The Word is the definition, explanation, and expression of the mysterious and invisible God. The Triune God embodied in the Word is explained, defined, and expressed.

The church is, then, the increase, the enlargement, of the manifestation of God in the flesh. This is God manifested in the flesh in a wider way. This is according to the New Testament principle of incarnation.

In John 1:14 the Word, the embodiment of the Triune God, became flesh. In the incarnated Christ God is expressed in a man in the flesh. This is according to God's plan. God's plan is to manifest Himself in man and through man in the flesh. Verse 14 continues to say that the Word, after becoming flesh, "tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality." This indicates that the Word was incarnated to declare God. As the manifestation of God, Christ declared God in a way that was full of grace and reality. He declared God by presenting Himself as grace and reality. God, the very God of enjoyment, becomes grace and reality to us in Christ for our enjoyment. Through enjoying Him we gain Him as grace and reality. He declares God to man in the way of enjoyment.

When we enjoy God in Christ as grace and realize Him in Christ as reality, we find the unsearchable riches of Christ. John 1:16 says, "Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace." In the incarnated Christ dwells all the fullness, the expression, of the riches of

God (Col. 2:9). Through His incarnation in Christ, we can receive the riches of grace and reality out of His divine fullness.

Christ as the Father's only begotten Son declared God by the Word, life, light, grace, and reality (John 1:1, 4, 9, 14). The Word is God expressed, life is God imparted, light is God shining, grace is God enjoyed, and reality is God realized. It is by these things that God is declared in the Son as His individual expression. Christ explained, defined, declared, and expressed God by being the Word incarnated to be life and light to man with grace and reality for man's enjoyment. It is in this way that God was declared to man in the Son.

In the Church—the Body of Christ—as the Enlarged Corporate Expression of God in the Flesh

We have pointed out that the fullness of God is the expression of God. According to John 1:16, the fullness of God came with Christ, who is the embodiment of God's fullness. With Christ, the expression of God was an individual matter. This expression needs to be enlarged from an individual to a corporate expression. The church is to be the enlarged corporate expression of God in the flesh. This means that the church should be the fullness, the expression of God, in a corporate way. In the church God is expressed not through an individual but corporately through the Body of Christ. Because the fullness of God is embodied in the church, the church is the corporate expression of the Triune God.

First Timothy 3:15 and 16 indicate that God is manifested in the church—the Body of Christ—as the enlarged corporate expression in the flesh:

The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.

In Greek the antecedent of *who* is omitted but easily recognized, that is, Christ who was God manifested in the flesh as the mystery of godliness. The transition from *the mystery* to *who* implies that Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh is the mystery of godliness (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20). This mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church, and such a living is also the manifestation of God in the flesh.

These verses imply that not only Christ Himself as the Head but also the church as the Body is the manifestation

of God in the flesh. When a church grows in Christ with the growth of God (Col. 2:19), it will function as the house and household of the living God for His move on the earth and as the supporting pillar and holding base of the truth, bearing the divine reality of Christ and His Body as a testimony to the world. Then the church becomes the continuation of Christ's manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the great mystery of godliness—Christ lived out of the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh.

In 1 Timothy 3:15 the Greek word for *house* may also be translated "household." The household, the family, of God is the house of God. The house and the household are one thing—the assembly of the believers (Eph. 2:19; Heb. 3:6). The reality of this house as the dwelling place of the living God is in our spirit (Eph. 2:22). We need to live in our spirit so that God can be manifested in this house as the living God.

The church, as the house and household of the living God, is the pillar and base of the truth. The pillar supports the building, and the base holds the pillar. The church is such a supporting pillar and holding base of the truth. The truth is the reality, referring to the real things that are revealed in the New Testament concerning Christ and the church according to God's New Testament economy. This economy is composed of Christ as the mystery of God (Col. 2:2) and the church as the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are the contents of the reality of God's New Testament economy. The church as the house and household of the living God is both the pillar that bears the truth, the reality of God's New Testament economy, and the base that upholds the pillar.

Such a church is the continuation, the enlargement and expansion, of God manifested in the flesh. This manifestation of God is the church as the house of God and the pillar and base of the truth. The church is, then, the increase, the enlargement, of the manifestation of God in

the flesh. This is God manifested in the flesh in a wider way. This is according to the New Testament principle of incarnation, which is God manifested in the flesh.

First Timothy 3:16 begins with the words, "And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness." The conjunction *and* here indicates that the speaking about the church in verse 15 is not finished yet and that the church is something even more than the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth. The church is also the mystery of godliness. According to the context, godliness refers to the living of God in the church, that is, God as life lived out in the church to be expressed. The church life is the expression of God. Both Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are the mystery of godliness, expressing God in the flesh.

In the New Jerusalem as the Consummate Corporate Expression of God in the New Creation

The final stage of God's manifestation will be in the New Jerusalem as the consummated corporate expression in the new creation. Revelation 21:1-3 says,

I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them.

In eternity past God purposed to have a corporate expression so that He might be fully expressed and glorified (Eph. 3:9-11; 1:9-11). For this, He created the heavens, the earth, and mankind. Eventually, the old heaven and the old earth will pass away through fire and be renewed into the new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:10-13) into which the New Jerusalem will come for God's eternal expression. **A^cC**

Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16).

Taken: This refers to Christ's ascension into glory (Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9-11; 2:33; Phil. 2:9). According to the sequence of historical events, Christ's ascension preceded His being preached among the nations. However, it is listed here as the last step in Christ's being the manifestation of God in the flesh. This must indicate that the church too is taken up in glory. Hence, it implies that not only Christ Himself as the Head but also the church as the Body are the manifestation of God in the flesh. When a church is well taken care of according to the instructions given in the first two chapters [of 1 Timothy],...the church will function as the house and household of the living God for His move on the earth, and as the supporting pillar and holding base of the truth, bearing the divine reality of Christ and His Body as a testimony to the world.