

The Will of God— One Person, One Way, and One Goal

by Ron Kangas

Concerning the profound revelation of the will of God in the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul, the vast majority of genuine Christians need a deep and thorough repentance. They need to repent—to have a radical change of mind issuing in regret—in order to be delivered from small, self-centered notions of the will of God and, as the apostle Paul prayed, to “be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col. 1:9).

The plethora of books focused on knowing the will of God for one’s personal life or private interests is evidence of a widespread occupation, if not obsession, with knowing the will of God regarding one’s individual life rather than seeking, knowing, and caring for God’s will for God and the desire of His heart to have an eternal, corporate expression of Himself in Christ, the firstborn Son, with many glorified sons. Several examples may help the reader to be impressed with the fact that, with few exceptions, most believers want to know the will of God not first for His interests but for their own.

—A statement on the back cover of *Can I Know God’s Will?* informs us that in this little book R. C. Sproul “outlines timeless principles for discovering and applying the will of God in day-to-day decisions.” The author himself tells us, “The Christian asks, ‘What is the will of God for my life?’” (5), and thus we “must ask ourselves, ‘What is the will of God for our lives?’” (30). Later Sproul says,

Two other aspects now beckon us: God’s will for our jobs and for our marital status. These two practical concerns take center stage in the drama of our personal lives. How can we know God’s will in relation to these two vital aspects of our living? (57)

—“In this book [*How to Know God’s Will*],” Marion H.

Nelson testifies, “I have tried to concentrate on the correct procedure that a Christian should follow in determining the Lord’s will for his life. This book can be used somewhat like the checklist a pilot uses before he takes off in his airplane” (8). “By using this method the Christian can assume he has correctly discerned God’s will for his life with a fair degree of accuracy” (118).

—In *Walking in the Will of God* Steve McVey says, “God *does* have a specific plan for you that He wants to fulfill through you” (9). “Your Father has a plan in mind for you. It’s a great plan, because great plans are the only kind He can design. Do you want to discover and do what He has designed for you?” (10).

—In his thoughtful and substantial book *Discovering God’s Will* Sinclair B. Ferguson says, “My prayer is that through these pages you may receive help and clarification how God will guide you and perhaps grant illumination on the very areas of your life which perplex you at the moment” (13).

—In *Knowing God’s Will: Finding Guidance for Personal Decisions* M. Blaine Smith asserts, “My purpose in this book is to present a systematic study of biblical principles of guidance...Our goal will be to develop a solid foundation for making [major personal] decisions within God’s will” (21). “It is my hope and belief,” the writer continues, “that you will find this study helpful in your personal search to know God’s will” (22).

—In *Decision Making God’s Way: A New Model for Knowing God’s Will* Gary T. Meadors explains, “My study of the Bible and my observations about life have slowly merged into a model for discerning God’s will in the daily decisions confronting us” (9). “The model I present is unique. I hope that a new way of looking at discerning

God's will for the decisions you face will make you a better decision maker" (9).

—Stormie Ormartian wants us to pray about God's will for our lives. In *Praying God's Will for Your Life: A Prayerful Walk to Spiritual Well Being*, she says, "Until we are living in the will of God, we are destined to have lives that are unfulfilled and incomplete. Knowing that God has a plan for you gives your life purpose as nothing else can" (9).

—Concerned about spiritual deception, Neil T. Anderson has written *Finding God's Will in Spiritually Deceptive Times*. In a blurb on the back cover of this book he assures the reader that "you'll discover spiritual truth that will help you break free from the counterfeit guidance that surrounds you and gain confidence in the Father's wisdom and care for you."

—*The Mystery of God's Will: What Does He Want for Me?* by Charles R. Swindoll is in certain respects a solid and substantial volume, for it emphasizes the mysterious nature of God's will and the need for believers to recognize the element of mystery as they endeavor to learn God's will for their lives. The focus, however, is not on God's will for Himself or on how God's will is related to His good pleasure and eternal purpose; on the contrary, the book is centered on the individual believer and on God's will for and related to the individual, a theme that is articulated repeatedly throughout this tome. Here are samples: "God's will for you in this life" (ix); "God's will for my life" (5); "What I hope we will do is learn how to turn to God and rely on Him to work out His will in our lives" (12); "How in the world do I find the will of God for my life?" (39); "God's best for our lives" (39); "God's plan and process for their lives" (959); "The will of God in our lives" (60); "God has a plan for us, mysterious though it may be, and we want to be in the center of it" (71); "His plan for our lives" (113); "I am in the nucleus of God's plan for me" (201).

A refreshing contrast to this overwhelming emphasis on *me* and *my* is found in *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* by Henry and Richard Blackaby and Claude King. Although this volume actually is not helpful in communicating the biblical revelation of God's will, desire, purpose, and economy, the following comments are pertinent and merit serious consideration:

Jesus considered God's will to be His highest priority (see John 4:32-34). Following God's will is also important for you. Often when people want to know God's will, they will ask, "What is God's will for my life?" As one of my seminary professors, Gaines S. Dobbins, used to say, "If you ask the wrong question, you are going to get the wrong answer."

"What is God's will for my life?" is not the best question to ask. The inquiry is, "What is God's will?" Because people are naturally self-centered, we tend to view the whole world—even God's activity—in terms of our own lives. Of course, we want to know what we should do and how events will affect us. But that is actually an inverted life-perspective. Once I know God's will, then my life gains its proper perspective, and I can adjust my life to Him and to His purposes. In other words, what is it that God is purposing to accomplish where I am? Once I know what God is doing, then I see what I should do. My focus needs to be outward on God and His purposes, not inward on my life. (32-33)

Let us, then, focus not on ourselves and on our personal needs and situations but on God and His eternal purpose and raise this question: What is the will of God for God Himself; that is, what does God desire and intend? To a great extent, the answer to such a crucial question is found in the book of Colossians.

Colossians—a Book Revealing the Will of God

Colossians is a book on the will of God. The fact that this Epistle, which contains the highest revelation of Christ in the New Testament, was written from the perspective of God's will is indicated by two crucial verses that actually function as a frame in which to view the exceedingly rich content of this book. Colossians 1:9 says, "Therefore we also, since the day we heard of it, do not cease praying and asking on your behalf that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." A number of significant things should be noted here. Although Paul did not know the believers in Colossae personally and although they had received "the word of the truth of the gospel" from others (v. 5), Paul was burdened to pray for them without ceasing. Obviously, this was not a one-time prayer but a constant exercise in spirit to intercede and ask on behalf of the saints, expressing a weight of great concern within the apostle combined with a sense of urgency, even desperation that the saints would be "filled with the full knowledge" of God's will. To be sure, the will of God mentioned here is not His will related to small matters or even to the personal needs of the believers, and it certainly is not focused on "God's will for their lives" or God's plan for their individual interests. The will of God in Paul's prayer is the great will of God, the eternal will of God concerning His purpose and desire, especially concerning the centrality and universality of Christ in the divine economy. God is a God of purpose, having a will of His own pleasure (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11), and Colossians reveals what God's will is in the whole universe, including creation, redemption, the kingdom, and eternity. Paul prayed that we would be filled with the full knowledge of this will of God, the will of God *for God*. The word *filled* implies that

among believers there may be various degrees of knowledge and that the goal is that our whole being would be filled with the full knowledge—a specific, complete, and comprehensive knowledge—of the divine desire and intention. Such a filling should be “in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” “Wisdom is in our spirit and is for us to perceive God’s eternal will; spiritual understanding is in our mind, renewed by the Spirit, and is for us to understand and interpret what we perceive in our spirit” (Recovery Version, Col. 1:9, note 2). The word *all* indicates that the believers’ wisdom and spiritual understanding differ in extent and that the apostle’s longing, expressed in his prayer, was that the saints would have all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Even cursory comments such as those offered here show that Paul’s prayer in 1:9 is truly momentous. In a time when most Christians are preoccupied with God’s will for their lives and with their interest in a personal “purpose-driven life,” this prayer needs to be echoed again and again on behalf of believers everywhere.

The other crucial verse in Colossians regarding the will of God is 4:12. “Epaphras, who is one of you, a slave of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.” Whereas Paul was always asking on their behalf in his prayers, Epaphras, through whom the Colossian saints had heard of and come to know “the grace of God in truth” (1:6-7), was always struggling on their behalf in his prayers. *Always struggling* suggests intense labor and expenditure of energy as in an athletic contest such as wrestling. That Epaphras did not merely utter prayers but struggled in his prayers suggests, we may infer, resistance against these prayers, even spiritual warfare as the enemy of God and opponent of the will of God fought against the believers’ progress with respect to the will of God. In particular, Epaphras struggled in his prayers that the saints in Colossae would “stand mature...in all the will of God.” To stand mature is to be presented as those who have reached maturity or completeness. This corresponds to Paul’s labor to “present every man full-grown in Christ” (1:28). Regarding the will of God, the believers must not remain in infancy but become fully developed in every way, a condition that is extremely rare today. The believers were also to be “fully assured in all the will of God” (4:12). This is reminiscent of Paul’s word in 2:2: “That their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love and unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ.” On the one hand, believers might have the knowledge of God’s will; on the other hand, they need to be fully assured in God’s will, having a deep, unshakable inward conviction concerning every aspect of the great will of God. Once again, the word *all* is used—all the will of God. All the

will of God as revealed in Colossians involves one person, one way, and one goal, and to this we must now devote our attention.

The Will of God—One Person

As the book of Colossians reveals, the will of God is concentrated in Christ and is for Christ. In Colossians 1:9 God’s will refers to Christ. Christ is everything in the will of God; thus, the will of God is profound in relation to our knowing, experiencing, enjoying, living, and expressing the all-inclusive, extensive Christ, who is God, man, and the reality of every positive thing in the universe (2:9, 16-17). The will of God for us is that we would know and experience the all-inclusive Christ as our life, our life supply, and our everything. In God’s economy Christ is everything; God wants Christ and Christ alone—the wonderful, preeminent, all-inclusive Christ, who is all in all (Matt. 17:5; Col. 3:10-11). If we would know God’s eternal will, it is crucial for us to see that God wants nothing but Christ and that in the sight of God nothing

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The Allotted Portion of the Saints

Colossians 1:12 says, “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light.” Here Paul applies a major Old Testament type of Christ—the good land, the land of Canaan as a type of the all-inclusive Christ for the people of God to possess, inherit, experience, and enjoy.

This refers to the lot of inheritance, as illustrated by the allotment of the good land of Canaan given to the children of Israel for their inheritance (Josh. 14:1). The New Testament believers’ inheritance, their allotted portion...is the all-inclusive Christ. He is the allotted portion of the saints as their divine inheritance for their enjoyment. (Recovery Version, Col. 1:12, note 2)

It is crucial for us all to see a vision of the all-inclusive

Christ typified by the good land (Deut. 8:7-10; Col. 1:12; 2:16-17; 3:10-11). The good land enjoyed by the children of Israel is the ultimate type of Christ found in the Scriptures; it is a complete and all-inclusive type of Christ. Christ is not only our life; He is also our territory, our realm, our sphere, in which we walk (3:4; 2:6). The good land typifies the all-inclusive Christ as the inheritance to God's people for their enjoyment, and the riches of the good land typify the unsearchable riches of Christ in various aspects (Eph. 3:8). In Colossians 1:12 Paul employs the concept of the all-inclusive land, speaking of the "portion of the saints"—the all-inclusive Christ for our enjoyment. God the Father has qualified us by the redemption of God the Son and through the sanctification of God the Spirit for a share of the all-inclusive Christ, the embodiment of the processed Triune God, as the allotted portion of the saints. The word *allotted* in this verse refers to the lot of the inheritance, as illustrated by the allotment of the good land given to the children of Israel for their inheritance (Josh. 14:1). The believers' inheritance, their allotted portion, is the all-inclusive Christ; He is the allotted portion of the saints as their divine inheritance for their enjoyment (Acts 26:18). Just as the land of Canaan was everything to the children of Israel, so Christ, the reality of the type of the good land, is everything to us. We need to know in detail how Christ is typified by all the items mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:7-10.

The Image of the Invisible God

Referring to Christ, Paul goes on to say, "Who is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Although God is invisible, the Son of the Father's love, in whom He delights (v. 13), is the expression, the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance (Heb. 1:3), expressing what He is in His divine attributes. Now, "according to the image of Him who created Him" (Col. 3:10), the new man is being renewed unto full knowledge. This is in keeping with the fact that humankind was created in God's image. Since the image of God is Christ (2 Cor. 4:4), for human beings to be created in the image of God means that they were created in the image of Christ. Just as Christ is the personal expression of the invisible God, the believers in Christ are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory so that there will be a corporate expression of the invisible God (3:18), formed by the firstborn Son and the many sons conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29).

The One Having the First Place in All Things

"He is the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things" (Col. 1:18). The Christ unveiled in Colossians is the all-inclusive, extensive, preeminent One (vv. 15-18, 27; 2:16-17; 3:4, 10-11).

As the preeminent One, He must have the first place in everything. Christ is preeminent in the triune Godhead (2 Cor. 13:14). Among the three in the Godhead, the preeminence always goes to the second, the Son; the first, the Father, exalts the Son, and the third, the Spirit, always testifies concerning the Son (Phil. 2:9; John 15:26). Christ is preeminent in God's exaltation of Him. Christ has been exalted to the right hand of God in the third heaven, and in God's exaltation of Christ, He has been given to be the Head over all things (Acts 2:33; Eph. 1:22). Furthermore, God has given Him the name which is above every name (Phil. 2:9). Both in the old creation and in the new creation, both in the universe and in the church, Christ occupies the first place, the place of preeminence (Col. 1:15, 18). For Christ to be the first means that He is all; since Christ is the first both in the universe and in the church, He must be first in all things in the universe and in the church (3:10-11). God's purpose is to give Christ the preeminence in all things; thus, God's intention in His administration is to make Christ preeminent, to cause Him to have the first place in everything.

Christ must have the first place, the preeminence, in our personal universe (v. 17; 1 Cor. 10:31). For Christ to have the preeminence in all things, God needs a people; apart from God's having a people, there is no way for Christ to be made preeminent (Eph. 3:21; 1 Tim. 3:15). Today Christ, the preeminent One, must be the centrality and universality in our church life, family life, and daily life. With this goal in view, God is using the environment to make Christ the centrality (the first) and the universality (everything) to us. Under God's sovereign rule, everything is working together for our good; this is especially true of the things in our personal universe (Rom. 8:28), which includes ourselves, our families, and the church. Thus, in our personal universe many things happen day by day for the purpose of making Christ preeminent; we need to realize this and be submissive to God's heavenly rule. We need to have a clear view of Christ as the One having the first place, the preeminence in all things. If we see such a vision in spirit, our Christian life, our daily living, and our church life will be revolutionized, for we will realize that it is the will of God that Christ have the first place in all things.

The Hope of Glory

"To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). The all-inclusive, extensive Christ—the One who is our allotted portion, the image of the invisible God, and the One who has the first place in all things—actually dwells in us as our hope of glory, as our living and sure expectation that when He is manifested, we will be manifested with Him in glory

(3:4). We worship the enthroned Christ in the heavens (v. 1), but we experience, enjoy, and partake of the indwelling Christ in our spirit, being one with Him in a very subjective way (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:10; 2 Tim. 4:22). This Christ who indwells us as our hope of glory is not a small, limited Christ but the all-inclusive Christ. How amazing, yet how real!

Christ, who dwells in our spirit to be our life and person, is our hope of glory. When He comes, we will be glorified in Him. This indicates that the indwelling Christ will saturate our entire being that our physical body may be transfigured and conformed to the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21). (Recovery Version, Col. 1:27, note 3)

The Mystery of God

“That their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love and unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ” (2:2). The all-inclusive Christ is the mystery of God. As the mystery of God, the all-inclusive Christ is the history of God; the whole “story” of God is in Christ and is Christ (John 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:45; Rev. 4:5). As the mystery of God, the all-inclusive Christ is the definition, explanation, and expression of God—the Word of God (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13; Col. 2:2-3).

As the mystery of God, the all-inclusive Christ is the Firstborn of all creation (1:15; John 1:14; Isa. 9:6). Christ as God is the Creator (Heb. 1:10); however, as man, sharing the created blood and flesh (2:14), He is part of the creation. Before the foundation of the world, even before anything was created, God had foreordained that Christ become a created man in order to accomplish His purpose; hence, in God’s plan and in His eternal view, Christ is the first one created—He is the Firstborn of all creation, the Head of all the created ones (Micah 5:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8). The creation was created in Christ, through Christ, and unto Christ (Col. 1:16). All things were created in Christ, in the power of His person; all creation bears the characteristics of His intrinsic power (Rom. 1:20). All things were created through Christ as the active instrument through which the creation of all things was accomplished in sequence (John 1:3; Heb. 11:3; Rom. 4:17). All things were created unto Christ as the end of all creation for His possession. Christ is before all things, and all things cohere in Him as the holding center and hub of the universe (Col. 1:17).

As the mystery of God, the all-inclusive Christ is the Firstborn from the dead (v. 18). As the Son of God, Christ has passed through two births; the first birth was His incarnation for our judicial redemption, and the second birth was His resurrection for our organic salvation (John 1:14; Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:3-4; 8:29). Christ is the first in

resurrection as the Head of the Body; as such, He has the first place in the church, God’s new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). Christ fully expresses the Triune God because He is the Firstborn of both creations, the One through whom both the old creation and the new creation came into being; the full expression of the rich being of God, in both creation and the church, dwells in Christ (Col. 1:15, 18-19).

In God’s economy revealed in the New Testament, there are mainly two 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, God made visible. The second mystery, revealed in the book of Ephesians, especially in chapter 3, is the church as the mystery of Christ (v. 4). The church is a corporate unit produced out of Christ, who is the mystery of God (5:30-32). The all-inclusive Christ is the mystery of the mysterious God, and such a Christ as the mystery of God produces a unit, which is the church. Mystery produces mystery; Christ, who is the

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mystery of God, brings forth the church, the mystery of Christ. The great mystery—Christ and the church—is the meaning of the universe (Rev. 4:11; Eph. 5:32). Christ and the church are the meaning of the universe and of human life. The desire of God’s heart is to have the mystery of Christ, the Body of Christ, as the increase and expression of Christ, who is the mystery of God. Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ should be our daily life; without these two mysteries, our life would merely be the life of a human being, not the life of a Christian according to the will of God.

The One in Whom the Fullness of the Godhead Dwells Bodily

“In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). All the fullness of the Godhead, the expression of the riches of the Triune God, refers to the entire Godhead, the complete God. 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. The fact that all the fullness of the

Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that the Triune God is embodied in Him, making Christ the embodiment of the Triune God. As the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, Christ is not only the Son of God but the Son with the Father by the Spirit. Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God (John 1:1, 14; 14:10-11); the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all embodied in Him. Furthermore, for Christ to be the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead means that the fullness of the Triune God dwells in Christ in a bodily form. This surely implies the physical body that Christ put on in His humanity through incarnation. From this we see that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ as the One who has a human body, and it will dwell in Him bodily forever.

The Reality of All Positive Things

Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of the Sabbath, which are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ. Let no one defraud you by judging you unworthy of your prize. (Col. 2:16-18)

As with a human body, the body in 2:17 is the substance, and like the shadow of a human body, the rituals in the law are a shadow of Christ, who is the substance and reality of the gospel. This is an indication that Colossians unveils the all-inclusive Christ as the reality of every positive thing in the universe. Daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly Christ is the reality of every positive thing, implying the universal extensiveness of the all-inclusive Christ. Daily Christ is our food and drink for our satisfaction and strengthening (1 Cor. 10:3-4). Weekly Christ is our Sabbath for our completion and rest in Him (Matt. 11:28-29). Monthly Christ is our new moon as a new beginning with light in darkness (John 1:5; 8:12). Yearly Christ is our feast for our joy and enjoyment (1 Cor. 5:8). Whatever we do day by day may remind us of Christ as the reality of that thing. If we follow the practice of taking Christ as the reality of all the material things in our daily life, we will be full of Christ (2 Cor. 4:16; Phil. 1:19-21). For instance, we may enjoy Christ day by day as the reality of all our necessities: as our breath (John 20:22), our drink (4:10, 14; 7:37-39), our food (6:35, 57), our light (1:4; 8:12), our clothing (Gal. 3:27), and our dwelling place (John 15:5, 7).

According to the will of God that Christ be everything to us in our experience of God, the all-inclusive Christ is the reality of all the positive things in the universe. Because the universe with the billions of things and persons in it was created for the purpose of describing Christ, He, in revealing Himself to His disciples, could easily find in any environment something or someone to serve as an illustration of Himself (Col. 1:15-17; John 1:51; 10:9-11; 12:24; Matt. 12:41-42). Related to this, the

Old Testament uses six major categories of things as types to describe Christ—human beings, animals, plants, minerals, offerings, and foods. Human beings typify Christ, such as Adam (Rom. 5:14), Melchizedek (Heb. 7:1-3), Isaac (Matt. 1:2), Jonah (12:41), and Solomon (v. 42). Animals typify Christ, such as a lamb (John 1:29), a lion, an ox, an eagle (Ezek. 1:10), and a gazelle (S. S. 2:9). Plants typify Christ (who is the tree of life—Gen. 2:9), such as the vine tree (John 15:1), the apple tree (S. S. 2:3), the fig tree, the pomegranate tree, and the olive tree (Deut. 8:8); the different parts of a tree are also types of Christ, such as the root, the stump, the sprout, the shoot, the branch, and the fruit (Isa. 11:1, 10; 4:2; Luke 1:42; Rev. 5:5).

Minerals typify Christ, such as gold, silver, copper, and iron (Deut. 8:9, 13), and different kinds of stone: the living stone (1 Pet. 2:4), the rock (1 Cor. 10:4), the cornerstone (Matt. 21:42), the topstone (Zech. 4:7), the foundation stone, and precious stones (1 Cor. 3:11-12). Offerings typify Christ, such as the sin offering, trespass offering, burnt offering, meal offering, peace offering, wave offering, heave offering, and drink offering (Lev. 1—7; Exo. 29:26-28; Num. 28:7-10; cf. John 4:24). Foods typify Christ, such as bread, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, wheat, barley, milk, and honey (6:35; Deut. 8:8-9; 26:9). As typified by the riches of the good land (Deut. 8:7-10), the all-inclusive Christ is the one reality of all, the reality of all positive things. This is not pantheism—this is the all-inclusive Christ as the center of the will of God.

Christ Our Life

“You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ our life is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory” (Col. 3:3-4). Christ is our life, the life of the entire Body of Christ. The expression *our life* is a strong indication that we are to experience the all-inclusive Christ, the One who is the reality of every positive thing. Because Christ is our life, all He has and all He has attained become subjective to us for our daily experience.

In order to experience Christ as our life, we need to see that we have one position, one life, one living, one destiny, and one glory with Christ (vv. 1-4; cf. 1 Cor. 6:17). Our position is that we are in Christ; because we are in Him, we are where He is—sitting at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1; John 17:24; Eph. 2:6). The Son’s position is in the Father (John 10:38; 14:10); we are in the Son (1 Cor. 1:30), so we are in the Father (John 14:20; 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1). However, it is when we are in the spirit that we are in Christ, in the Father, and in heaven practically and experientially. The more we walk in spirit (Rom. 8:4), the more we will realize that there is a transmission taking place from Christ in heaven to us on earth by means of the

all-inclusive Spirit in our spirit (Eph. 1:19, 22-23; 2:22). The Christ who is sitting on the throne in heaven (Rom. 8:34) is also now in us (v. 10), that is, in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22), where the dwelling place, the habitation, of God is.

Since today our spirit is the place of God's habitation, it is now the gate of heaven, where Christ is the ladder that joins us to heaven and brings heaven to us (Gen. 28:12-17; John 1:51). Whenever we turn to our spirit, we enter through the gate of heaven and touch the throne of grace in heaven through Christ as the heavenly ladder; our spirit is the receiving end of the divine transmission, whereas the throne of God is the transmitting end (Heb. 4:16).

The life of God is the life of Christ, and the life of Christ has become our life (John 5:26; Col. 3:4). For Christ to be our life means that He is subjective to us to the uttermost (John 1:4; 14:6; 10:10; 1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 8:6, 10-11). It is impossible to separate a person from the life of that person, for a person's life is the person himself; thus, to say that Christ is our life means that Christ has become us and that we have one life and living with Him (Phil. 1:21). With Christ as the believers' life there are three characteristics, which distinguish it from the natural life. This life is a crucified life (Gal. 2:20), a resurrected life (John 11:25), and a life hidden in God (Col. 3:3-4; Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18).

Our life is the Christ who dwells within us, and this life is hidden with Christ in God; the Christ hidden in God is typified by the manna hidden in the golden pot (Exo. 16:32-34; Rev. 2:17). Christ as the hidden manna is in God the Father as the golden pot; the Father is in Christ as the Ark with His two natures, divinity and humanity; and Christ as the indwelling Spirit lives in our regenerated spirit to be the reality of the Holy of Holies (cf. John 14:16-20; 2 Tim. 4:22). When we eat Christ as the hidden manna, we are incorporated into Him for the mutual abode of God and man (John 15:5, 7; 8:31; 6:57, 63; 14:23).

That Christ is our life is a strong indication that we are to take Him as life and live by Him, that we are to live Him in our daily life. Christ must be our life in a practical and experiential way; day by day we need to be saved in His life (Rom. 5:10). To be saved in the divine life from the slavery of sin, the law of sin, is by the release of the law of the consummated Spirit (8:2). To be saved in the divine life from the present age of the world is by the sanctification of the consummated Spirit (12:2; 6:19, 22). To be saved in the divine life from our natural being is by the transformation of the life-giving Spirit. To be saved in the divine life from individualism is by being built up in the Body of Christ (v. 5). To be saved in the divine life from self-likeness is by the conformation of the life-imparting Spirit (8:29). To be saved in the divine life

from our body of humiliation is by the transfiguration in the virtue of the divine life (v. 30; Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:11). Eventually, to be saved in the divine life is to reign in the divine life (5:17), and it will result in victory over Satan (16:20).

To say that Christ is *our life* is to testify that we experience Him as life in the church as the Body of Christ, the new man. The new man is the spontaneous issue of our taking Christ as our life and living Him.

Christ as the Constituent of the New Man

As the One who indwells us and who is our life, Christ is the constituent of the new man (Col. 1:27; 3:4, 10-11). The Christ whom we experience and enjoy as our God-allotted portion becomes the constituent of the new man, the element of the new man wrought into our being. This means that as we experience and enjoy the all-inclusive, extensive, preeminent Christ, we gain Him as the content and constituent of the new man. The issue of our experi-

With Christ as the believers' life there are three characteristics, which distinguish it from the natural life. This life is a crucified life, a resurrected life, and a life hidden in God.

ence and enjoyment of Christ is the church as the new man; the more we experience and enjoy Him, the more He is constituted into us, and we become the new man.

Regarding the all-inclusive Christ as the constituent of the new man, we need to see that the church, the Body of Christ, is the one new man and that in this new man Christ is all. Here our natural being has no place. The one new man is not an organization—the one new man is a *man* (Eph. 2:15; 4:24). There is no natural person in the one new man, and there is no possibility, no room, for any natural person. No matter what kind of person we may be, as far as the one new man is concerned, we all are nobodies. Although many different kinds of people make up the one new man, all are part of Christ; there can no longer be the natural person. In the one new man there is only one person—the all-inclusive Christ (Col. 2:17; 3:4, 11). The one new man is just Christ—Christ constituted into us and Christ enlarged.

The new man is uniquely one—one in Christ and one with Christ; we are one by Christ and through Christ (Eph.

2:15). If we are not in Christ, we have no share, no part, in the new man; rather, we are through with the new man. If we are in Christ but do not live Christ, we will continue to live in our natural constitution and will have problems related to the new man. Apart from being in Christ, we could not have been created into one new man, because in ourselves we do not have the divine element, which is the element of the new man. Only in the divine element and with the divine element were we created into the one new man; it is possible to have this element only in Christ. Christ Himself is the element of the new man; hence, in Himself He created the two, the Jews and the Gentiles, into one new man. In the one new man Christ is all because He is the element with which the new man was created; therefore, the one new man is actually Christ wrought into us.

The new man comes into existence in a practical way only as we are saturated, filled, and permeated with Christ and replaced by Him through an organic process (2 Cor. 3:18). The new man is Christ in all the saints permeating us and replacing us until all natural distinctions have been removed and everyone is constituted with Christ. The all-inclusive Christ must be wrought into us organically until He replaces our natural being with Himself (Eph. 3:17; Gal. 4:19). In the new man, Christ is all the members and is in all the members. The Christ who dwells in us is the constituent of the new man. Because Christ is all the members of the new man, there is no room in the new man for any race, nationality, culture, or social status.

In order for us to experience the reality of Christ being all the members of the new man, we need to take Christ as our life and person and live Him, not ourselves (2:20; Phil 1:20-21). If Christ is the living of all the members of the one new man, then in reality only He will be in the new man. When all the saints live Christ, then in a real and practical way Christ will be all the members in the new man. In the new man Christ is all and in all.

Experiencing the All-inclusive Christ

In order to experience the Christ who is the will of God, we need to be identified with Christ, let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, and live a life in union with Christ.

Identified with Christ: The book of Colossians clearly reveals that, as those who have believed into Christ and who have been baptized into Him, we are identified with Christ and thereby one with Him in His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. In His crucifixion we have experienced a spiritual circumcision. “In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ” (2:11). The history of Christ has

become our experience, and the experience of Christ has become our history. Instead of having some kind of experience of our own, we who are identified with Christ are one with Him in His experiences, and in this way the experience of Christ becomes the experience of the Christian. In verses 12 and 13 Paul continues,

Buried together with Him in baptism, in which also you were raised together with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, though dead in your offenses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our offenses.

Buried together with Him, raised together with Him, made alive together with Him—this is the language of identification, of being one with Him through an organic union with Him. This oneness includes ascension, for as 3:1 indicates, we have one position with Christ. “If therefore you were raised together with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.” Ephesians 2:6 is pertinent here: “God raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.” Being one with the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ is the solid base for experiencing the all-inclusive Christ.

The Word of Christ Dwelling in Us Richly: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16). The word of Christ is the embodiment of the Christ unveiled in Colossians—the all-inclusive, extensive, preeminent Christ, the centrality and universality of God’s economy (1:15-18, 27; 2:16-17; 3:4, 10-11). The word of Christ, which is the word spoken by Christ, is actually the person of Christ (John 15:4, 7). In Colossians 3:16 Paul almost personifies the word of Christ; he tells us to let this word dwell in us, as if it were a living person (cf. Eph. 3:17). First we have Christ as our life; then we have His living word, personified as His person, dwelling in us (Col. 3:4). Since the word of Christ can dwell in us, it must be a living person; therefore, to let the word of Christ dwell in us indicates that we allow a living person—Christ Himself—to dwell in us (1:27). If we would allow Christ to make His home in our hearts, we must be filled with the word of Christ (Eph. 3:17; John 14:23). For the Lord’s word to abide in us means that the Lord Himself abides in us. If Christ is to abide in us in a practical way, His words must abide in us; we cannot have Christ in us experientially unless we have His words in us also.

We need to allow the word of Christ to dwell in us richly. The Greek word rendered “dwell” literally means to be in a house, to inhabit. This indicates that we

should allow the word of Christ to dwell in us, to inhabit us, to make home in us. The word of the Lord must have adequate room within us so that it may operate and minister the riches of Christ into our inner being. The word of Christ must dwell in us richly. The riches of Christ are in His word, and when such a rich word inhabits us, it must inhabit us richly.

For the word of Christ to dwell in us richly means that it inhabits us, indwells us, in a rich way. This can be illustrated by eating; when we take nourishing food into us and assimilate it, it indwells us richly (John 6:57). In like manner, for the word of Christ to dwell in us richly means that it inhabits us in the way of nourishment and enrichment (Matt. 4:4).

The word of Christ should have free course within us; the word of Christ should be given the freedom to operate within us, inhabiting us and making home in us. The word of Christ is actually the embodiment of Christ with all His riches; thus, to be saturated with the word is to be infused with and permeated by the riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8, 17).

Through the indwelling word of Christ, our culture is replaced with the all-inclusive Christ revealed in Colossians (3:10-11). Instead of our culture, opinion, concept, thought, and view, we should have the word of Christ. However, we might not allow the word of Christ to dwell in us nor permit it to move, act, and have its being in us; as a result, what prevails in our being is our culture or philosophy, not the word of Christ (John 8:37, 47). It is crucial, therefore, that we let the word of Christ enter into us, dwell in us, and replace our culture, concept, opinion, and philosophy (Col. 1:5; 2:8; 3:16). Negatively, we must set aside our cultural standards, and positively, we need to be filled with the word of Christ; this means that we must let the word of Christ fill our mind, emotion, and will and allow our whole being to be permeated and saturated with the word of Christ, thereby constituting us with the riches of the all-inclusive Christ.

Doing All Things in the Name of the Lord Jesus: Allowing the word of Christ to dwell in us richly is related to doing all things in the name of the Lord Jesus. "Whatever you do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (v. 17). The Lord's name is the expression of the sum total of what the Lord Jesus is in His person and work; *in the name of Jesus* means in the sphere and element of all that the Lord is (Phil. 2:9-10; Acts 3:6). The exalted name of Jesus is for us to believe into (John 1:12), to be baptized into (Acts 8:16; 19:5), to be saved (4:12), to be healed (3:6; 4:10), to be washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor. 6:11), to call upon (Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 1:2), to pray in (John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:24), to be gathered into (Matt.

18:20), to cast out demons (Mark 16:17; Acts 16:18), and to speak boldly in (9:27).

As the word of Christ makes home in us, the Lord causes us to become one with Him, and spontaneously we can do things in the name of the Lord. The name of the Lord Jesus denotes His person, and the Lord's person is the Spirit; thus, to do things in the name of the Lord is to live and act in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4). If we exercise our whole being to take in the word, eventually we will be filled, occupied, and saturated with the living word, which is the Spirit (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18-30; 6:17). Because the word is the embodiment of the Spirit and because the Spirit is the reality of Christ, we will automatically be filled with Christ and do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus (John 6:63; 14:16-18; Col. 3:17). To be in the Lord's name means to be one with the Lord, to live by the Lord, and to let the Lord live in us (1 Cor. 6:17; John 6:57; Gal. 2:20). In our Christian life and service, we need to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

To be in the Lord's name means to be one with the Lord, to live by the Lord, and to let the Lord live in us. In our Christian life and service, we need to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Ephesians 5:20 and Colossians 3:17 indicate that we have been put into oneness with the Lord; because we are one with Him, we can use His name and act in His name. When we are in the name of the Lord Jesus, we are in Christ, Christ is in us, and we are one with Christ (John 14:20; 1 Cor. 1:30). To do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus should always remind us that He is one with us, that we are in Him and He is in us, that He lives in us, and that we should live in Him (Phil. 1:20-21).

Living a Life in Union with Christ: God desires that we live our daily, human life in union with Christ. To live in union with Christ means that in our living we are not apart from Christ; rather, in our living we are identified with Him and are one with Him (John 15:4-5). We need to be one with the Lord Jesus just as He is one with the Father (14:10). The Father and the Son have one life and one living (6:57). The life of the Father is the life of the Son, and the living of the Son is the living of the Father. The Father's life is the Son's life, and the Son's living is the Father's living; in this way the Father and the Son have one life and one living.

Today we and Christ have one life and one living (14:19; Col. 3:4). The Son's life becomes our life, and our living becomes His living; this is a life in union with Christ. In a very practical sense, in such a union Christ becomes us, and we become Christ; this is the normal Christian living. If we live in union with Christ, we will do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, and we will express Christ in our human life (Col. 3:17—4:1). The more we live in union with Christ, the more we will receive grace, which enables us to experience the all-inclusive Christ as our life and our everything.

The living of the believers should be a living that is in union with Christ, a living that is identified with Him. If we live in such a way, we and Christ are one; we live, and Christ lives in our living. We and Christ should now have one life and one living; the Son's life becomes our life, and our living becomes the Son's living. This living in union with Christ results in the expression of Christ in our daily, normal, human life. We need to learn through the experiences of married life and family life to express Christ in our human living. In the relationship between husband and wife and between parents and children, we need to live in union with Christ and express Him. This is to live in oneness with the all-inclusive Christ, who is the will of God.

The Will of God—One Way

The will of God is not only Christ—the will of God is also the cross. God solves all problems through the cross of Christ. God does not negotiate; God terminates. The principle of the cross is that, through the death of Christ, God has dealt with all negative things by terminating them. This is God's will, and this is God's way. Thus, any believer who refuses to take the unique way of the cross cannot possibly live in the will of God, for the will of God is the cross. Furthermore, since Christ and the cross of Christ are inseparable (1 Cor. 2:2), we cannot experience Christ unless we experience the cross (Gal. 2:20).

This is absolutely according to God's eternal determination, and Peter bore witness to this in his announcing of the gospel on the day of Pentecost. "This man, delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, through the hand of lawless men, nailed to a cross and killed" (Acts 2:23).

This counsel must have been determined in a council held by the Divine 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. (Recovery Version, Acts 2:23, note 1)

Consider Peter's declaration in his first Epistle (1:19-20):

"With precious blood, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ; who was foreknown before the foundation of the world but has been manifested in the last of times for your sake." The death of Christ was not an afterthought but was determined by God before the foundation of the world. "Christ was fore-ordained, prepared, by God to be the redeeming Lamb (John 1:29) for His elect according to His foreknowledge before the foundation of the world. This was done according to God's eternal purpose and plan" (Recovery Version, 1 Pet. 1:20, note 1).

In His will God gives us one person and one way; the one person is the all-inclusive, extensive, preeminent Christ, and the one way is the cross (Phil. 2:5-11; Gal. 6:14). We not only have Christ, the unique person, who is versus all things, but we also have the cross, the unique way, which is versus all ways (Col. 1:20). The way God has ordained, uplifted, and honored is the cross of Christ. The one person—Christ—is the center of the universe, and the one way—the cross—is the center of God's government (1 Cor. 1:17-18, 23). God governs everything by the cross and deals with everything by the cross (Col. 2:14-15). By the cross God has dealt with all the negative things in the universe, and He is still governing everything through the cross (Rom. 6:6; 1 Pet. 2:24; Heb. 2:14; Eph. 2:14-16). In order to progress spiritually, we need to pass through the cross day by day in our walk with the Lord (Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Luke 14:27). In order to have the proper church life, we need to experience the cross; if we have a daily life of passing through the cross, there will be oneness and harmony both in the church life and in the family life (Col. 3:12-15).

In the book of Colossians we see a clear vision of the cross as God's way in His administration: "Through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross—through Him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens" (1:20). *Through Him* means through Christ as the active instrument through which the reconciliation was accomplished. *All things* refers not only to human beings but also to all creatures, which were created in Christ and now subsist, cohere, in Him (vv. 16-17) and are reconciled to God through Him. To reconcile all things to Himself is to make peace with Himself for all things; this was accomplished through the blood of the cross of Christ. Because of the rebellion of the archangel Satan and the angels who followed him, the heavens were contaminated; therefore, not only things on the earth but also things in the heavens needed to be reconciled to God. Because we were sinners, we needed redemption, and because we were also enemies of God, we needed reconciliation (vv. 14, 21-22).

"Wiping out the handwriting in ordinances, which was against us, which was contrary to us; and He has taken it

out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (2:14). *Ordinances* refers to the ordinances of the ceremonial law with its rituals, which are the forms or ways of living and worship (Eph. 2:15). *Nailing it to the cross* means to abolish the law of the commandments in ordinances. This was necessary for the creation of the one new man for the carrying out of God's eternal purpose.

"Stripping off the rulers and the authorities, He made a display of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). This verse portrays the fighting that took place at the time of Christ's crucifixion. Activities involving Christ, God, and the evil angelic rulers and authorities were brought to a focus on the cross; thus, the cross became God's eternal, central, and unique way. By His crucifixion Christ labored to accomplish redemption, and God the Father was working to judge sin and nail the law to the cross. At the same time, the evil rulers and authorities were busy in their attempt to frustrate the work of God and Christ, pressing in close to God and Christ; thus, a warfare was raging at the cross. God openly made a display of the evil angelic rulers and authorities on the cross and triumphed over them in it, putting them to shame.

"In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ" (v. 11). This is spiritual circumcision, the circumcision of Christ, referring to the proper baptism, which puts off the body of the flesh by the effectual virtue of the death of Christ (Phil. 3:3). The circumcision that is the putting off of the body of the flesh was not made with hands; it was accomplished by the death of Christ, and it is applied, executed, and carried out by the powerful Spirit (Rom. 8:13).

"Put to death therefore your members which are on the earth" (Col. 3:5). This is based on the fact that we have been crucified with Christ and baptized into His death (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:3, 6). Christ accomplished the all-inclusive crucifixion; now we apply it to our lustful flesh. We execute Christ's death upon our sinful members by crucifying them, by faith, through the Spirit; this corresponds with Galatians 5:24.

If we have a clear understanding of the fact that the enemy of God, in a subtle way, utilizes our self, our natural constitution, and our culture to replace Christ, we will realize that the only way for us to take is the way of the cross (6:14; 1 Cor. 2:2). The book of Colossians teaches us that in the church life Christ must be all and in all; everything that is not Christ must go to the cross (1:18; 3:10-11). Through the cross we need to become nothing, to have nothing, and to be able to do nothing; otherwise, what we are, what we have, and what we can do will become a substitute for Christ (1 Cor. 1:17-18, 23). For

those who are willing to take the cross, the cross is not a narrow way but a highway leading into eternal glory (Luke 9:23).

The Will of God—One Goal

In the will of God and according to the will of God, there is one goal, and this goal is the building up of the church as the Body of Christ (Col. 1:18; 2:19; 3:15). That this is God's unique goal was revealed emphatically by the Lord Jesus Himself. "Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Christ "loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25), and in His heavenly ministry He continually supplies the church for her building up.

Out from whom [Christ the Head] all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. (4:16)

God solves all problems through the cross of Christ. God does not negotiate; God terminates. Any believer who refuses to take the unique way of the cross cannot possibly live in the will of God, for the will of God is the cross.

This is the will of God.

The Will of God and the Building of God

There is an intrinsic connection between the will of God and the building of God, that is, the building up of the church as the Body of Christ. God is a God of purpose, having a will of His own pleasure, and He created all things for His will that He might accomplish and fulfill His purpose (Rev. 4:11; Eph. 3:9-11). The will of God is to obtain a Body for Christ to be His fullness, His expression (Rom. 12:2, 5; Eph. 1:5, 9, 11, 22-23). The church as the kingdom of God today (Rom. 14:17; Rev. 1:9) is absolutely a matter of God's will and completely fulfills God's will; in fact, the kingdom is God's will, and we are on earth to carry out this will (Matt. 7:21; 12:50). In order to do the will of the Father, we need to enter in through the narrow gate and walk on the constricted way (7:13-14). The narrow gate excludes the old man, the self, the flesh, the human concept, and the world with all its glory; only that which corresponds with God's will can enter in. As we walk on the constricted way, we are restricted by a

mysterious, invisible, inward control, and we live under this control.

The Father's eternal will is to build up the church upon Christ the Son as the rock (16:18; Eph. 2:21-22; 4:16). God's building is the desire of God's heart and the goal of God's salvation (1:5, 9; 2:8, 10, 21-22; Exo. 25:8). The desire of God's heart is to have a dwelling place on earth constituted with Christ and according to Christ. Such a dwelling place, God's building, is a matter of the Triune God as life being wrought into us so that we may become His corporate expression (Eph. 3:17, 19, 21). God's building is the mingling of God with man; the principle of God's building is that God builds Himself into us and builds us into Himself, and this enables God to express Himself in a corporate way. If we would do the will of God to build up the church, we need to be enlightened by and fully saturated with the thought that in this universe God is doing only one thing—building His eternal habitation (Rev. 21:2-3).

It surely is accurate to say that the Lord's word in Matthew 16:18 is the greatest prophecy in the Bible: "I will build My church." In His heavenly ministry the ascended Christ is directing and managing the building up of His church (Eph. 1:19-23; 4:8-16). The rock in Matthew 16:18 refers both to Christ and to the revelation concerning Christ; this means that the church is built both upon Christ and upon the revelation concerning Christ (Eph. 2:19-20). We must first know Christ, and then we can know the church as the building of God, His corporate expression. To be built up with fellow believers is the Lord's supreme and highest requirement of His faithful seekers according to the divine oneness of the Divine Trinity. Being built up with fellow partakers of the divine life is the highest virtue of one who pursues after Christ according to God's eternal economy (vv. 21-22; Phil. 3:7-12). Sadly, very few believers today realize that God's goal in His will is to build up the church as the Body.

The Head of the Body

This aspect of God's will—the one goal—is presented in Colossians along with the one person and the one way. The church is the Body of Christ, which is an organism constituted with the Triune God and His chosen and redeemed ones (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4-6). The church of God is not an organization but an organism, the organic Body of Christ. The Body is the intrinsic significance of the church; if there were no Body, the church would make no sense and have no meaning (1 Cor. 12:12, 27; 1:2).

In Colossians 1:18 and 2:19 we see that Christ is the Head of the Body. In Christ's ascension God inaugurated Him into the headship of the universe; the Head of the universe is Jesus (Acts 2:36; Eph. 1:22-23; Phil. 2:9-11).

The Head of the Body is a matter of authority. Holding the Head means that only Christ is the Head, and this requires that we come absolutely under His authority. A recognition and acceptance of Christ as the Head involves a repudiation of all other heads and a realization that the place of all the members of the Body is to hold the Head and acknowledge Him as the unique and supreme authority in all things. Actually, the Body comes into existence from the transmission of the Head, and the Body is one with the Head in the divine life and in the divine nature. Now we should not tolerate any separation from the Head. For the Body to hold the Head means that the Body does not allow itself to be separated from the Head (Col. 2:19).

It is crucial for us to realize that Christ is the Head and that we are the members of His Body (Eph. 4:15-16). To live in the Body is to live corporately with the members under the Head. To live the Body life, we must be under the Head and take the Head as our life, the principal object, and the center of our whole being (Col. 1:18; 2:19). We need to enjoy the Christ who is the Head of the Body, and the more we do so, the more we hold Him as the Head. Thus, the first principle of living in the Body of Christ is to obey the authority of the Head. Christ is the Head of the Body, and life can flow freely only when He is in full control. The Body's only duty toward the Head is obedience and submission without any opinion, idea, or proposal (John 21:20-22; Acts 13:1-4).

Suffering for the Body

The apostle filled up that which was lacking of the afflictions of Christ for His Body (Col. 1:24). If we are faithful to the Lord, we will share in His sufferings for the building up of His Body (Acts 9:15-16; 2 Cor. 1:5-6; 4:10-12; Eph. 3:13; 1 Thes. 3:3). Our goal in preaching the gospel is to obtain material for the building up of the Body of Christ; for this, we must be prepared to suffer, even to be opposed and persecuted (John 15:18-21; 16:1-3).

The Growth of the Body

The Body grows with the growth of God. "Holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God" (Col. 2:19). *Grows with the growth of God*—what an amazing utterance! Of course, in Himself God cannot grow, and He does not grow; however, in the sense of filling us with Himself, He must grow, and He does grow in us, the members of the Body of Christ, causing the growth of the Body. The growth of the Body depends on the growth of God, the addition of God, the increase of God, within us (Eph. 4:16). God gives the growth by giving Himself to us in a subjective way (3:16-17). For God to give us growth actually means that

He gives us Himself as the life and element of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 3:6-7). Without the increase of God within us, there cannot be any growth. The more God is added to us, the more growth He gives.

The growth of the Body depends on what comes out of Christ as the Head. When the Body is supplied by holding the Head, the Body grows with the growth of God. The Body grows out from the Head, for all the supply comes from the Head.

The growth of the Body is the building up of the Body. Regarding this, Ephesians 4:12-16 occupies a special place in the New Testament because it shows the mystery concerning the building up of the Body of Christ. The growth of the Body of Christ is the increase of Christ in the church, which results in the building up of the Body by the Body itself. When Christ enters into the saints and lives within them, the Christ within the saints becomes the church (Col. 3:10-11). The Body of Christ grows by the growth of Christ within us and is built up this way (1:18).

The love with which the Body builds itself up is not our own natural, human love but the love of God in Christ, which becomes the love of Christ in us, by which we love Christ and the fellow members of His Body (1 John 4:7-8, 11, 16, 19; Rom. 5:5; 8:39). Love is the inner substance of God; when we enter into God's inner substance, we enjoy God as love and enjoy His presence in the sweetness of the divine love and, thereby, love others as Christ did (Eph. 5:25). It is in such a love that we hold to truth, that is, to Christ with His Body, and are kept from being influenced by the winds of teaching and from bringing in elements that are foreign to the Body (4:14-15).

The Peace of the Body

"Let the peace of Christ arbitrate in your hearts, to which also you were called in one Body" (Col. 3:15). Genuine peace is a Body matter, and we need to care for the peace of the Body. According to Ephesians 2, Christ is peace, Christ made peace, and Christ announced peace as the gospel (vv. 14-15, 17; Col. 1:20). The peace that is in Christ, the peace that is Christ, the peace made by Christ, and the peace announced by Christ as the gospel are the peace of the Body and the peace in the Body. We have been called to the peace of Christ in one Body. Now in and for the Body of Christ we should keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). To live in the Body and to keep the oneness of the Body are to live in the peace of the Body. As far as it depends on us, we should live in peace with all men (Rom. 12:18; Heb. 12:14). In the Body life, the peace of God guards our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7).

In the one Body of Christ we were called to the peace of Christ, which is Christ Himself. By Christ's abolishing in His flesh the separating ordinances, that is, His slaying the enmity, and by His creating the Jewish and Gentile believers into one new man, peace was made between all the believers (Eph. 2:15-16), and now the peace of Christ is the oneness of the new man, the Body (4:3). For the Body life, the church life, we should let the peace of Christ arbitrate in our hearts, that is, allow the peace of Christ to decide all things in our hearts in our relationships with the members of His Body. If we permit the peace of Christ to arbitrate in our hearts, this peace will settle all the disputes among us, and we will have peace with God vertically and with the believers horizontally. Through the arbitration of the peace of Christ, our problems are solved, and the friction between the saints disappears; then the church life is preserved in oneness, sweetness, and harmony. The arbitrating peace of Christ is Christ Himself working within us to exercise His headship and His rule over us, to speak the last word, and to make the final decision (cf. Isa. 9:6-7). This peace should

*The peace that is in Christ,
the peace that is Christ,
the peace made by Christ,
and the peace announced by Christ
as the gospel are the peace of the Body
and the peace in the Body.*

bind all the believers together and become their uniting bond.

The Consciousness of the Body

As members of the Body, we need to have the consciousness of the Body and have a deep feeling for the Body (1 Cor. 12:25-26; Rom. 12:15). Since the Christ we enjoy is the Head of the Body, the more we enjoy Him, the more we become conscious of the Body (Col. 2:9-10, 16-17, 19). Like Paul, we should take the feeling of the Head as our own feeling; this is most necessary for our living the Body life (Phil. 1:8).

The feeling for the Body of Christ is closely related to one's frame of mind, that is, to one's perception of things (Col. 2:18; 3:2; Rom. 12:2-3; Eph. 4:23). For this reason, we need to be transformed by the renewing of our mind and be renewed in the spirit of the mind. As this renewing takes place, we will gradually realize that everything we do involves the Body; thus, in all that we do, we should care for the Body, taking the Body as the rule in

our mind, thoughts, words, and actions (1 Cor. 12:12-27; 2 Cor. 8:21).

The Body of Christ versus the Self

The Body of Christ is versus the self; the enemy of the Body is the self (Col. 2:18-19, 23). The hindrance to seeing the vision of the Body and to practicing the Body is the self. The greatest frustration to the building up of the Body is the self; the self is the real division, the real sect. When we have the self, we do not have the Body; when we have the Body, we do not have the self (Matt. 16:18, 24). If we would be built up in the Body, the self must be condemned, denied, rejected, and renounced (Luke 9:23-24). We should deny ourselves and identify ourselves with the Body; if we do this, the life that we live will fully be the Body life, and the Lord will gain the expression of His Body (1 Cor. 12:27; Col. 1:18; 3:15).

The Body of Christ Expressed as Local Churches

The unique, universal Body of Christ is expressed in many localities as the local churches (Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Col. 4:15-16; Eph. 4:4; Rev. 1:4, 11). The Body of Christ is the source of the local churches; the universal Body is like the father to all the churches, and the local churches are like the children to the father (Rom. 12:4-5; 16:1, 4-5, 16). The one Body is the one church of God, manifested in many localities as many local churches (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27).

A local church is an expression of the Body of Christ in a certain locality (10:32, 17; 12:12-13, 20). According to the record in the New Testament, the church in a certain locality was often the church in a certain person's house; the meetings in the saints' homes afforded every attending believer the opportunity to function, and they also strengthened the mutual fellowship among the saints (Col. 4:15-16; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Philem. 2). Although the saints in the church in Jerusalem often met from house to house, there was nevertheless only one church in Jerusalem as the expression in that city of the unique, universal Body of Christ.

Conclusion

One person, one way, one goal—this is the will of God unveiled in Colossians, the will concerning which the apostle Paul prayed for the believers and concerning which Epaphras struggled on their behalf in prayers. This will of God is not focused on the needs, problems, and situations of believers; on the contrary, it is focused on God Himself and His eternal intention, for the will of God is the will of God. God's will in Colossians involves the person of Christ, the cross of Christ, and the Body of Christ, that is, the all-inclusive Christ as our God-allotted portion, the

cross of Christ by which God solved all problems and terminated every negative thing, and the Body of Christ, the church as the corporate expression of Christ for the delight and satisfaction of God. If such a grand will of God is precious to us and if we are willing to give ourselves to it and align our lives with it, then, somehow and in some way, we will know how God wants us to live, where He wants us to be, and what He wants us to do. Because the majority of believers are self-centered in their spiritual immaturity and because the general condition of Christianity today strengthens this self-centeredness, even, or especially, in attempts to know God's will for one's individual life and personal affairs, it is not likely that there will be widespread change in the foreseeable future. However, perhaps here and there, believers in Christ, moved by the sovereign mercy of God, will turn from themselves and "their own things," care for "the things of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:21), and enter into Paul's burden, expressed in his prayer, that they "may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." It is for these blessed believers that I have made an attempt to write about the will of God—one person, one way, and one goal. May the Lord hasten the day when more seekers of Christ "stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God." [AFC](#)

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