

The Will of God as Revealed in Romans and Ephesians: Producing Many Sons for the Constitution of the Body of Christ

by David Yoon

Many Christians today are preoccupied with knowing the will of God in relation to their personal life and goals in a manner that makes God's will subordinate to their own aims and desires. To seek God's will in this way downplays His true role as a purposeful Sovereign and relegates Him to that of a dutiful Benefactor. Such a self-centered view of God's will attests to the ignorance of many to the unique, lofty, and eternal will of God concerning Himself and His intention as revealed in the Bible. A frame of reference centered on one's personal universe runs the risk of trivializing the will of God as a matter that involves only the sundry and mundane details of earthly life while neglecting its monumental significance as a biblical subject that is primarily concerned with God, His good pleasure, His eternal purpose, and His grand economy.

The New Testament reveals that the will of God governed His creation and is thus the purpose of man's existence. Revelation 4:11 records the angelic elders' praise to God: "You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created." All things in the universe, including time, space, creation, and human beings, came into being for the accomplishment of God's will. Paul advances a similar thought in Ephesians 1:4-5: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." These verses imply that the world was founded for man's existence in order to execute God's will.

The New Testament also unveils that the will of God is His determination for the fulfillment of His heart's desire. *The good pleasure of His will* in Ephesians 1:5 closely associates God's will with His good pleasure, His heart's desire, which indicates that God's heart's delight

is embodied in His will. This is confirmed by Romans 12:2, which says that "the will of God" is that which is "well pleasing" to Him—that which delights His heart and satisfies His need for pleasure. The intimate association of God's will with His good pleasure suggests that the accomplishment of His will satisfies the desire of His heart. Therefore, the will of God is the purpose behind all creation, is the *raison d'être* of the human race, and is God's intention according to His heart's desire. Given the universal import of God's will, the primary question concerning the will of God should not be how His will is related to our individual plans but how we can contribute to the fulfillment of His great will. In order to answer this question, we need to know what the will of God is.

Apprehending the will of God brings us out of a narrow view bounded by the concerns of our temporal life. It brings us into an expansive vista, the heavenly vision, of His eternal purpose. Failing to align our life with God's will makes us a senseless contradiction, unmooring our life from the reason for our existence. However, aligning our life with God's will accords our life the highest meaning. We will come to know not only the intensity of God's determination to fulfill His purpose but also the depth of His delight in its fulfillment, as His intention, determination, desire, and pleasure become our very own.

The apostle Paul, whom God appointed to know His will (Acts 22:14), wrote extensively concerning this subject. Two of his Epistles reveal the full compass of God's eternal will: Romans and Ephesians. J. Christiaan Beker points out in *Heirs of Paul* that these two Epistles appear to be "compendia of Paul's thought rather than occasional letters" and recalls that Philip Melancthon designated Romans as a "compendium of Christian doctrine"; Beker also points out that F. F. Bruce defined

Ephesians as “the quintessence of Paul’s thought” (89). The prominence that the will of God occupies in Romans and Ephesians is suggested by the fact that among Paul’s Epistles, with the exception of Hebrews, no other book speaks of the divine will more frequently than these two books.¹ Moreover, in both books Paul highlights the crucial importance of knowing the will of God by contrasting it with the evil age and by issuing an imperative to prove God’s will. In Romans 12:2 he charges the believers, saying, “Do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect.” A similar exhortation is sounded in Ephesians 5:15-17: “Look therefore carefully how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” In the same chapter Paul says, “Walk as children of light...proving what is well pleasing to the Lord. And do not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness” (vv. 8-11). In Romans 12 the apostle contrasts being fashioned according to this age with being transformed to the image of Christ. Similarly, in Ephesians 5 he contrasts the evil days of the present age with understanding the will of the Lord and contrasts the unfruitful works of darkness with proving what is well pleasing to the Lord. Paul’s intention in writing these Epistles is identical—to rescue the believers out of the present evil age and to bring them into the will of God, His good pleasure (Gal. 1:4).

The will of God is the intrinsic connection between Ephesians and Romans; it is a crucial theme woven into both Epistles. This is evidenced by the fact that both books speak of the revelation of the mystery of God’s hidden will. In Ephesians 1:9 Paul declares that God has made known to us “the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure.” In eternity God planned a will, but it was concealed within Him; hence, it was a mystery. By revelation, this mystery, which had not been made known to the sons of men, was made known to God’s holy apostles and prophets in spirit, including the apostle Paul (3:4-5), and he was commissioned to “enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God” (v. 9). The expression *the economy of the mystery* suggests that God’s economy issues from and is based upon the mystery. *The mystery* refers to the mystery of God’s will in 1:9. A comparison of 1:9 with 3:9 shows that in Paul’s understanding, the will of God is closely associated with the economy of God: the divine will is the intent of God, whereas the divine economy is God’s endeavor, plan, and arrangement to carry out His eternal will. A strikingly similar thought is conveyed in Romans 16:25-26, where Paul speaks of “the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages but has now been manifested, and through the prophetic writings,

according to the command of the eternal God, has been made known to all the Gentiles for the obedience of faith.” *Mystery* here refers to the same mystery of God’s will in Ephesians, which had been hidden in God but was made known to the believers.

The mystery of God’s will in Ephesians 1:9, which God has made known to us, is also “the mystery of the gospel” in 6:19, which the apostle intends to make known to others. The gospel that the apostle preached is nothing less than the will of God, the full intent of God. Paul draws a similar connection between his gospel and the revelation of the mystery in Romans 16:25: “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, that is, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery.” This shows that the apostle’s gospel in Romans is the unveiling of the mystery of God’s will. Therefore, Ephesians and Romans contain an identical theme—the gospel as the revelation of the mystery of God’s will.

Commentators have noted the remarkable amount of common material found in Romans and Ephesians. This includes the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God in predestinating the believers in eternity past (Rom. 8:28-29; 9:19-21; Eph. 1:4-5; Kershner 58; Paget 140; Azar LeBlanc 1); the sinful condition of man under God’s wrath (Rom. 1:18—3:20; Eph. 2:1-3; 4:17-19; O’Brien 320; Harvey 615); the love, mercy, kindness, and grace of God lavished on the believers through Christ’s redemptive death (Rom. 2:4; 3:24; 5:5-8; 9:16; Eph. 2:4-9; Knight 201); the proper ethical relationships among the believers (Rom. 12:13—13:14; Eph. 4:25—6:9; Moritz 108; Arnold 114); and the doxology that ascribes glory to God (Rom. 11:33-36; 16:27; Eph. 3:20-21; Pullan 180-181). These resemblances between the two books, expositors have asserted, present the most convincing argument for the authenticity of Paul’s authorship of Ephesians and thereby validate the integrity of the inspiration of the New Testament (Pullan 180). These observations of similarities between Romans and Ephesians nevertheless fail to penetrate the core content of Paul’s understanding of the will of God. At a more profound level, Romans and Ephesians share the vision that God’s unique, universal will, His determined intent according to His good pleasure, is to gain many sons in order to constitute them the Body of Christ as God’s corporate expression.

In revealing the will of God, Romans and Ephesians speak from two different viewpoints: Romans speaks from the viewpoint of man to God, from earth to heaven, and from time into eternity, whereas Ephesians speaks from the viewpoint of God to man, from heaven to earth, and from eternity into time. Romans is written from the standpoint of the predicament of sinful human beings

under God's condemnation in time, whereas Ephesians is written from the standpoint of the good pleasure of God's will purposed in eternity. The two books begin from divergent perspectives: Romans begins with fallen humanity in need of God's salvation, and Ephesians begins with our purposeful God and His plan to fulfill His intention. However, these two Epistles converge at the Body of Christ composed of the sons of God as the goal of God's will. Ephesians states that the good pleasure of God's will is what He "purposed in Himself" in eternity past "unto the economy of the fullness of the times" (1:9-10). Ephesians underscores the certainty that God's infinite resolve will eventually work out His will. In contrast, Romans emphasizes that despite the miserable plight of fallen human beings, God's intention stands firm and unchanged, for He, in His sovereign mercy and by His complete salvation, is transforming sinners into sons of God to be the members of the Body of Christ.² Thus, Romans and Ephesians complement each other in revealing the will of God to produce the Body of Christ composed of the sons of God.

God's Complete Salvation

The will of God is accomplished by His work of full salvation. Romans highlights and Ephesians intimates that God's complete salvation according to His economy includes two main aspects: judicial redemption and organic salvation. Judicial redemption rescues perishing humanity from God's righteous wrath and punishment, and organic salvation brings them into participation in His divine life, nature, and glory. Romans 5:10 speaks of the distinction between these aspects of God's full salvation: "If we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled." Judicial redemption rescues us from eternal perdition through the vicarious death of Christ, and organic salvation regenerates and transforms us into His glorious image through the inner operation of His divine life. Christ's efficacious redemptive work not only serves as the sole and sufficient basis for our justification before God, our deliverance from God's condemnation, and our reconciliation to God; it also lays the foundation and opens the way for us to enjoy salvation in God's life for the purpose of accomplishing His great will.³

Judicial Redemption

Both Romans and Ephesians reveal that the judicial aspect of God's salvation is by His grace, on the basis of the redemption of Christ, in His blood, and for our reconciliation to God. According to Romans, all have sinned, fallen short of the glory of God, and come under God's righteous judgment (2:2; 3:23). God, however, commends His own love to us in that while we were yet sinners,

Christ died for us as our vicarious Redeemer and was raised for our justification (4:25; 5:8).⁴ Hence, we were justified "freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (3:24), and "by faith apart from the works of the law" (v. 28). Consequently, we "were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (5:10). "Having now been justified in His blood, we will be saved through Him from the wrath" (v. 9; cf. 1:18), and "having been justified out of faith," we have peace toward God and have obtained access into grace through Christ (5:1-2).

The judicial component of God's salvation is also unveiled in Ephesians. We once walked according to the age of this world, conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, and were under God's righteous wrath because of our disobedience (2:1-3). But God, because of His great love and rich mercy, caused the riches of His grace to abound to us, sending His Son to give us "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses" (1:7-8; 2:4). In Christ Jesus we who were once far off from God

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"have become near in the blood of Christ" (v. 13); by His redemptive work on the cross, we were reconciled to God (v. 16), and through Christ we have "access in one Spirit unto the Father" (v. 18).

Sonship—the Good Pleasure of God's Will

Although both Romans and Ephesians speak of judicial redemption, they do not present it as the end of God's full salvation but as a procedure that enables us to participate in His organic salvation for the fulfillment of His eternal will. God's judicial redemption counteracts the effects of the fall, but more significantly, it also brings man back to God's original intention, the eternal will, which He purposed in Himself (Eph. 1:7-9). Thus, according to both Ephesians and Romans, God's predestination according to His will is associated not with redemption but with sonship. Ephesians 1:4-5 says that before the foundation of the world—even before sin entered into the world and made redemption necessary—God chose us, according to the good pleasure of His will, in Christ the Son to be holy, predestinating us unto sonship, not

unto redemption. By linking God's will with sonship rather than with redemption, these verses unequivocally reveal that the will of God involves our participation in the divine sonship. God's predestination in eternity was not motivated negatively by the entrance of sin into the world but positively by the intention within Himself related to sonship. God's predestination of us unto sonship in Ephesians 1:5 is further clarified by its parallel passage in Romans 8:28-29, which says that according to "His purpose" God predestinated us "to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers." Here again predestination is linked not to redemption but to sonship. God's will is intimately linked to His good pleasure, and the desire of His heart is wholly focused on His Son, who is the Beloved, the Son of God's love, and the One in whom the Father has found His delight (Eph. 1:6; Col. 1:13; Matt. 17:5). The entire operation of God's economy of salvation was initially motivated not by His sympathy for the predicament of sin-plagued humanity but by His profound delight in His beloved Son. In eternity God so loved the Son that He desired and determined to reproduce His Son in many human beings, making Him the firstborn Son and then His many sons for an enlarged expression of Himself (cf. John 17:24). The desire for an enlarged expression of the Son through many sons does not reflect a judicial obligation but the delight of God's heart. The good pleasure of God's will is to have many sons as the mass reproduction of His firstborn Son for His enlarged expression. In God's eternal existence, He finds perfect delight in the only begotten Son, who in the Godhead embodies and expresses God as the image of God, the Word of God, the effulgence of God's glory, and the impress of God's substance (Matt. 3:17; John 1:1, 14, 18; 17:4; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3). At the same time, in His eternal economy to manifest Himself through creation, God desires to make His beloved Son the Firstborn and those who believe into the Son His many sons for an expanded corporate expression of Himself (John 12:24; Heb. 1:5-6; 2:10). In brief, the will of God is to make "the only Begotten from the Father" (John 1:14) "the Firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29) for the producing of the Body of the firstborn Son, composed of the many sons of God.

The Gospel of Sonship

Paul's understanding concerning sonship is fully developed in Romans. At the outset of this Epistle, Paul declares that he is separated unto the gospel of God concerning His Son (1:1, 3) and that he serves God in the gospel of His Son (v. 9). The central thought of Romans is the gospel of sonship for the reality of the Body of Christ. Romans unveils the processes whereby Christ was made the firstborn Son of God and we become the many sons of God, the many brothers of Christ conformed to

His image. In Romans 1:3-4 Paul states that Christ "came out of the seed of David according to the flesh" and "was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead." Christ is eternally the Son of God by virtue of His eternal existence in the Godhead; as such, Christ in His divinity did not need to be designated the Son of God. But in His incarnation Christ, the eternal Son, became the seed of David according to the flesh; that is, He became the Son of Man, a God-man possessing both divinity and humanity. Although the incarnate Christ was the Son of God in His divinity (Matt. 16:16; John 10:36), He was not the Son of God in His humanity. His humanity, though sinless, did not have divinity. After Christ died as a man in the flesh to accomplish redemption, God raised Him from the dead by imparting the divine life into His humanity, thereby begetting Him in His humanity (cf. 1 Pet. 3:18; Rom. 8:11). This is seen in Paul's declaration in Acts 13:33: "God has fully fulfilled this promise to us their children in raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; this day have I begotten You.'" Here Paul reveals that resurrection can be considered the birth of the man Jesus into the divine sonship. This parallels Paul's thought in Romans 1:3-4, where resurrection was the process by which Christ as the seed of David was designated the Son of God. In Christ's resurrection His humanity was deified, begotten by God with the divine life and brought into the divine sonship, thus pioneering the way for human beings to become sons of God.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who begot Christ in His humanity to be the Son of God through resurrection, also "regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). On the morning of His resurrection, Christ proclaimed that His disciples were now His brothers and that His Father was now their Father (Matt. 28:10; John 20:17). This proclamation indicates that through Christ's resurrection the believers were begotten as sons of God to become brothers of Christ. Therefore, Christ is not only "the only Begotten from the Father" (1:14) but also "the Firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). In His status as the second of the Trinity, His distinct identity in the Godhead, Christ eternally remains the only begotten Son and can never have brothers; in His status as the incarnate God-man, Christ became the firstborn Son through resurrection and made the believers His many brothers, the many sons of God.⁵

Christ, the firstborn Son of God, is the base, the pattern, and the model for producing many sons of God. Christ's designation in His humanity as the Son of God serves as a prototype for the believers' revelation as the many sons of God (v. 19). Christ as the seed of David was designated and revealed as the Son of God out of the resurrection of

the dead, that is, in the glory of His resurrection (6:4). Christ's resurrection was His glorification (Luke 24:26, 46; Acts 3:13-15). Since we will be "in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. 6:5), we too will be designated and revealed as the sons of God at our glorification, the redemption of our body (8:23; Phil. 3:21), for we will be "manifested with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). Today we are undergoing the process of being designated the sons of God by being conformed to the image of the firstborn Son. Ultimately, "the revelation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19) will mark the completion of our conformation, our progressive designation. The central point of the gospel of sonship in Romans is our conformity to the image of the Son of God, which consummates in our designation as sons of God.

Sonship—the Divine Birth, Growth unto Maturity, and the Right of Inheritance

The process of designation is the process of our participation in the divine sonship. According to Romans and Ephesians, Paul's thought concerning sonship extends beyond a legal pronouncement of our status as adopted sons⁶—it involves divine birth, growth in the divine life unto maturity, and the attainment of the inheritance. Romans 8 speaks of advancement in the divine life from children of God to sons and heirs of God. In the initial stage of sonship, we are children of God, having received the divine life and having been begotten of God through divine birth. At the time of our regeneration, the Spirit of the Son of God (Gal. 4:6) entered into our human spirit, and our spirit was joined to the Spirit of the Son, thereby becoming "a spirit of sonship" (Rom. 8:15). When we cry, "Abba Father," the Spirit Himself testifies to the most basic and elementary form of our organic relationship to God the Father, witnessing with our spirit that we are children of God (v. 16). Although we possess the divine life in our spirit and have become a new creation in Christ as children of God (2 Cor. 5:17), we lack maturity and thus need to grow in the divine life in order to become mature sons of God.⁷ In the developing stage of sonship, we allow the divine life to permeate our soul in order to attain spiritual maturity. Thus, we advance in status from children to sons. A primary evidence of this advancement is being "led by the Spirit" (Rom. 8:14). Being led by the Spirit in verse 14 is equivalent to walking according to the spirit in verse 4. Instead of living according to the flesh, sons of God put to death the practices of the body (vv. 4, 13). Sons are not "those who are according to the flesh," who mind "the things of the flesh," but "those who are according to the spirit," who mind "the things of the Spirit" (v. 5).

By following the leading of the Spirit of God, sons of God eventually enter into the consummate stage of sonship to become heirs of God and joint heirs with

Christ—those who are fully matured and legally qualified to inherit the Father's estate (v. 17). In order to be joint heirs of Christ, we must "suffer with Him" in order to "be glorified with Him." The whole creation groans and travails in pain together, anxiously watching and eagerly awaiting the "revelation of the sons of God"—the unveiling of the believers as glorified sons, who will be legal heirs of God's full inheritance (vv. 19, 22). We ourselves groan together with the creation, eagerly awaiting our full sonship, the redemption, or transfiguration, of our body (v. 23).

Our full entrance into sonship encompasses our entire tripartite being: spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23). Through the regeneration of our spirit, we are born as the genuine children of God; through the transformation of our soul, we grow in life to become mature sons of God; and through the redemption of our body, we are qualified to be the legal heirs of God. Our sonship is realized by the impartation of the Triune God as life into our tripartite being. At regeneration God in Christ dispenses

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Himself as the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2, 9-10) into our spirit, joining Himself to us to become one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17); hence, our spirit is life itself (Rom. 8:10). When we set our mind on the spirit, the divine life spreads from our spirit to our mind, the leading part of our soul, thereby transforming our soul through the renewing of our mind (12:2); hence, "the mind set on the spirit is life" (8:6). Eventually, if we allow the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead to dwell in us, He "will also give life to [our] mortal bodies" through the indwelling Spirit until the day when our bodies are redeemed (vv. 11, 23). Our participation in the divine sonship depends on the dispensing of God in Christ as the Spirit of life from our spirit through our soul and ultimately into our body. Sonship signifies much more than adoption through sovereign decree; it involves the organic process of God's dispensing Himself as the eternal life into our entire tripartite being. In other words, sonship is a process that commences with our divine birth with the life of God, continues with our growth and development in this life, and consummates in our full maturation in this life to attain the position to claim the divine inheritance.

Ephesians also reveals that sonship is a process involving our being born as children of God and growing in the divine life unto maturity to be heirs of God. Prior to our regeneration, we were dead in offenses and sins and alienated from the life of God (2:1; 4:18). Thus, we had no hope and were without God in the world (2:12), for we were by nature children of wrath and sons of disobedience (vv. 2-3). Yet “even when we were dead in offenses,” God, because of His abundant love, far-reaching mercy, and bountiful grace, “made us alive together with Christ” (vv. 4-5). Through the resurrection of Christ, God not only raised the crucified Jesus from the dead (1:20; Acts 2:32) but also enlivened us through the impartation of the divine life into our deadened spirit (1 Pet. 1:3). By receiving the divine life, we entered into an organic union with Christ, the Son of God, and were reborn to become God’s “beloved children” (Gal. 3:26; Eph. 5:1). We who were once alienated from the life of God (4:18) now possess His eternal life; we who were children of wrath are now “children of light” (5:8), that is, children of God, who is light (1 John 3:1; 1:5).

According to the good pleasure of His will, God did not predestinate us to be children but to be sons. The goal of God’s predestination is not only to beget genuine children of God but to produce mature sons by cultivating our growth in the divine life (1 Cor. 3:6-7). In light of the good pleasure of God’s will to have full-grown sons, Paul indicates that the primary work of the Lord’s gifts to His Body—apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers—is to perfect the saints by helping them to grow in life until we “all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). Paul then warns against the peril of remaining in a condition of spiritual immaturity: “That we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error” (v. 14). In order to be safeguarded from the winds of different teachings (1 Tim. 1:3-4), Paul charges us to hold to truth in love so that we “may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ” (Eph. 4:15). The full-grown sons of God will be heirs who are worthy to inherit “the kingdom of Christ and of God” (3:6; 5:5; Gal. 5:21). This corresponds with 2 Peter 1:3-11, which reveals that if we partake of the divine nature and pursue the growth and development of the divine life, “the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied” to us (v. 11). The accomplishment of the will of God in both Romans and Ephesians to gain many sons hinges on the believers’ growth in life unto maturity.

Salvation in the Divine Life

Our growth and development into mature sons and legal

heirs of God requires our participation in God’s salvation in the divine life. As believers, we have entered into God’s organic salvation through regeneration, yet in order to be brought on to maturity in the divine life, we need to experience all the ensuing steps of salvation in life, including sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification. Romans and Ephesians both unveil these steps of organic salvation, by which God progressively imparts Himself as eternal life into us through the indwelling life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) so that we may grow and mature in life unto our full attainment of sonship.

Dispositional Sanctification

In Romans sanctification is presented not only as our separation unto God but also as our saturation with His holy nature. Christ as the seed of David was designated the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness, that is, according to the Spirit as Christ’s divine essence (1:3-4). The Spirit of holiness saturated Christ’s humanity with the divine essence in resurrection (cf. 1 Pet. 3:18).⁸ By this Christ’s human nature was sanctified (made holy) and uplifted into the divine sonship. Similarly, we, the believers in Christ, are being designated the sons of God according to the Spirit of holiness, that is, according to the Spirit’s saturation of our tripartite being with God’s holy essence.

In Romans 6:19 Paul instructs us to present our “members as slaves to righteousness unto sanctification,” and in verses 22 through 23 he says, “Having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end, eternal life...[T]he gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” These verses associate sanctification with eternal life. On the one hand, the expression *fruit unto sanctification* in verse 22 implies that the eternal life issues in sanctification. The eternal life, the life of the holy God, is given to us in order to bear fruit unto sanctification, that is, to produce organic sanctification in us (cf. 7:4). Hence, we should present our members as slaves to Christ so that He may have the full liberty to sanctify us by saturating our inward parts with His divine life. On the other hand, the expression *sanctification, and the end, eternal life* implies that sanctification issues in the riches of God’s life, bringing us into the enjoyment of the riches of the divine life. Sanctification comes out of life and results in life; the eternal life is both the source and the issue of sanctification. Sanctification mentioned in this chapter

involves not only a change in position, that is, a separation from a common, worldly position to a position for God, as illustrated in Matt. 23:17, 19 and in 1 Tim. 4:3-5; it involves also a transformation in disposition, that is, a transformation from the natural disposition to a spiritual

one by Christ as the life-giving Spirit saturating all the inward parts of our being with God's nature of holiness, as mentioned in 12:2 and 2 Cor. 3:18. (Recovery Version, Rom. 6:19, note 2)

Dispositional sanctification is also revealed in Romans 15:16, which states that it is necessary for the Gentiles to be "sanctified in the Holy Spirit" in order to be an acceptable offering to God. Since God is the Holy One and is even holiness itself (Lev. 11:44), the Gentiles whom we offer to God for His satisfaction must match His nature; hence, they should not be merely set apart from common things but should also be permeated with God's holy nature (Rom. 12:1).

Ephesians also presents dispositional sanctification in life. In 1:4-5 Paul links sanctification and sonship: God's predestinating us unto sonship "according to the good pleasure of His will" is related to His choosing us in Christ "to be holy and without blemish before Him in love." The fact that sonship is linked with holiness implies that the accomplishment of God's will to have many sons is dependent upon our sanctification, our becoming holy. Witness Lee points out the relationship between sanctification and sonship with remarkable insight:

To be made holy—to be sanctified by God by His putting Himself into us and then mingling His nature with us—is the process, the procedure, whereas to be sons of God is the aim, the goal, and is a matter of our being joined to the Son of God and conformed to a particular form or shape, the very image of the firstborn Son of God (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15), that our whole being, including our body (Rom. 8:23), may be "sonized" by God. (Recovery Version, Eph. 1:5, note 2)

In brief, sanctification is for sonship.⁹

As Revelation 15:4 declares, God "alone" is holy (cf. 1 Sam. 2:2); He is unique, transcendent, and distinct from everything else. In order to make us holy, God in Christ must dispense Himself, the Holy One (Job 6:10; Prov. 9:10; 1 Pet. 1:15), into us in order that our tripartite being—our spirit, soul, and body—may be permeated with His holy nature (1 Thes. 5:23). By partaking of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), that is, by partaking of His holiness (Heb. 12:10), we may become God's holy sons, the same as God in His holy nature but not in the Godhead or as an object of worship. The will of God to have many sons is executed by His dispensing of His holy nature into us for our dispositional sanctification. Paul equates the will of God with our sanctification, declaring, "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thes. 4:3).

Whereas Ephesians 1:4-5 speaks of God's will in eternity past to make us holy and without blemish, 5:26 reveals

that His will is accomplished by Christ's sanctification of the church by "cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word." In the New Testament water refers to the flowing life of God (John 7:38-39; Rev. 7:17; 22:1). Hence, *the washing of the water* in Ephesians 5:26 refers to sanctification that is carried out by the flowing, the dispensing, of the divine life as water into our being. This dispositional sanctification differs from positional sanctification by Christ's redeeming blood. On the one hand, Christ sanctifies us positionally through "His own blood" (Heb. 13:12; 9:12; cf. v. 14; 10:19), washing away our sins and cleansing us from unrighteousness (1 John 1:7, 9; Rev. 7:14) so that we may be separated from common and worldly things unto God. On the other hand, Christ sanctifies us dispositionally by His life, washing away our natural blemishes, such as the spots and wrinkles mentioned in Ephesians 5:27, so that we may be saturated with His holy element to become His counterpart. At the second coming of Christ, the glorious church, the overcoming expression of the Body of Christ, composed of sons who have been sanctified and made holy in

Romans and Ephesians unveil the organic salvation, by which God progressively imparts Himself as eternal life into us through the indwelling life-giving Spirit so that we may grow and mature in life unto our full attainment of sonship.

this age, will be presented to Christ as His beloved, sanctified bride (v. 27), fulfilling God's eternal will to have sons who are "holy and without blemish before Him in love" (1:4). Then in eternity future the bride will be consummated as "the holy city," as "a bride adorned for her husband," and as "the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:2, 9-10).

Renewing

In both Romans and Ephesians Paul exposes the state of the fallen human mind and exhorts the believers to be renewed in the mind. In Romans Paul depicts at least three characteristics of the fallen, natural mind: "a disapproved mind" (1:28), a mind that is filled with vain reasonings, lacks understanding, and is thus repudiated by God (vv. 21, 24); an independent mind, a mind that attempts to do good by serving God out of the self and apart from His grace (7:25); and a mind set on the flesh and the things of the flesh, a mind that is not only death but also enmity against God (8:5-7). This dark backdrop of the mind of the old man points to the need for our

mind to be renewed. In 12:2 Paul charges, “Be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is.” Just as only God is holy, only He is new (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:5). Christ, the embodiment of God, is the new wine (Matt. 9:17); the believers are a new creation because they are in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17); and in the new man Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:10-11). In order for our mind to be renewed, God in Christ as the unique element of newness must be wrought into our being. An experiential key to the renewing of our mind in Romans 12:2 is the setting of our mind on the spirit mentioned in 8:6. When our mind is set on the mingled spirit¹⁰—the human spirit regenerated by and indwelt by the Holy Spirit to become one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17)—God as the renewing element is infused into our mind, thereby effecting an organic transformation within us. Since our mind is the leading part of our soul, a renewed mind serves as a base for the Spirit’s transforming work in our soul. As we experience the renewing of the mind, we may walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4), serve in newness of spirit (7:6), and prove the will of God, the building up of the Body of Christ (12:2, 4-5).

In Ephesians 4 Paul contrasts the vanity of the mind with the spirit of the mind. In verse 17 Paul charges the believers to “no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk in the vanity of their mind.” An unbeliever’s mind is characterized by vain thoughts and darkened understanding (v. 18), and it is devoid of reality. In verse 23 the apostle exhorts, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” The renewing spirit here refers to the mingled spirit, our regenerated human spirit joined to the life-giving Spirit. Such a mingled spirit enters and saturates our mind, thereby becoming the spirit of our mind. The Spirit is the Spirit of reality and is the reality itself (John 14:17; 1 John 5:6); therefore, when we allow the mingled spirit to spread into our mind, our mind is filled with reality, not vanity. Consequently, we may live a life according to the reality that is in Jesus (Eph. 4:21) and put on the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality (v. 24).

Transformation

As Romans 12:2 points out, the renewing of our mind results in the transformation of our soul. Transformation is not merely an outward, cosmetic change in our behavior but an inward “metabolic” change of our being effected by the gradual dispensing of Christ as the divine life into our soul. This organic metamorphosis issues in our becoming the many sons of God, the mass reproduction of Christ as the firstborn Son of God, the prototype. When we believed into Christ, He came into our spirit as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), thereby regenerating us in our spirit (John 3:6). Although we have Christ as life in our

spirit through regeneration (Col. 3:4), we need to let Him spread from our regenerated spirit into our soul so that our soul with its mind, emotion, and will would be transformed into the image of the resurrected and glorified Christ.

Although Ephesians does not use the term *transformation*, this Epistle implies the need for our soul to be transformed into the image of Christ by highlighting the importance of Christ making His home in our hearts (3:17). Witness Lee points out, “Although we have been regenerated in our spirit, we have to be transformed in our mind, emotion, and will. This transformation can take place only when Christ occupies our heart as a home” (*Practical* 38). Our heart is composed of the three parts of our soul—mind, emotion, and will—plus our conscience, a function of our spirit. In order for Christ to make His home in our hearts, He penetrates, permeates, and pervades our inward parts as the life-giving Spirit, thereby possessing and occupying our entire inner being. Consequently, His mind with its thoughts and considerations becomes our mind (1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5); His emotion with its affections and longings becomes our emotion (Eph. 3:19; Phil. 1:8; cf. 1 Cor. 16:24); and His will with its intentions and resolutions becomes our will (Rom. 1:10; Eph. 6:6). Christ making His home in our hearts in Ephesians 3:17 is tantamount to the Spirit of God dwelling in us in Romans 8:9. The transformation of our soul is practically accomplished by Christ making His home in our hearts as He spreads from our spirit into all our inward parts.

Conformation

The central aim of the gospel of God as presented in Romans is to produce many sons conformed to the image of His Son. Whereas Romans 1:3-4 depicts Christ, the first God-man, as the prototype, 8:29 reveals the believers, the many God-men, as the mass reproduction of the prototype. According to verse 29, our eternal destiny is “to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers.” Transformation issues in conformation; hence, conformation is the end result of transformation. Conformity to the image of Christ is not the result of our endeavor to live a highly ethical life; rather, it is the issue of the inner working of the divine life within us, the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in 8:2, which functions to shape us into the image of the firstborn Son. Henry Drummond understands our conformation to the image of Christ as the product of the operation of the life of Christ.

There is another kind of Life of which Science as yet has taken little cognisance. It obeys the same laws. It builds up an organism into its own form. It is the Christ-Life. As the Bird-Life builds up a bird, the image of itself, so the

Christ-Life builds up a Christ, the image of Himself, in the inward nature of man...According to the great Law of Conformity to Type this fashioning takes a specific form. It is that of the Artist who fashions. And all through Life this wonderful, mystical, glorious, yet perfectly definite process, goes on "until Christ be formed" in it. (293-294)

In Ephesians conformation is implied in the expression *learn Christ*. Ephesians 4:20-21 says, "You did not so learn Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him as the reality is in Jesus." Concerning the significance of the phrase *learn Christ*, Witness Lee provides trenchant comments:

Christ is not only life to us but also an example (John 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:21). In His life on earth He set up a pattern, as revealed in the Gospels. Then He was crucified and resurrected to become the life-giving Spirit that He might enter into us to be our life. We learn from Him (Matt. 11:29) according to His example, not by our natural life but by Him as our life in resurrection. To learn Christ is simply to be molded into the pattern of Christ, that is, to be conformed to the image of Christ. (Rom. 8:29). (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:20, note 1)

Glorification

In Romans 8:30 Paul lays out the sequence of God's work in His salvation: "Those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified." Before the ages God predestinated Christ, the Lord of glory, for our glory (1 Cor. 2:7-8). Although we were created, formed, and made for God's glory (Gen. 1:26; Isa. 43:7), through the fall we sinned and fell short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23), failing to glorify God (1:21) and changing the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of idolatrous images (v. 23). Yet God, in His sovereign mercy, called us in order to carry out His eternal selection (v. 6; 9:11) and justified us freely through Christ's judicial redemption (3:24) "in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory, even us, whom He has also called" (9:23-24). The Lord of glory imparts Himself as life into our spirit, spreads into our soul, and ultimately saturates our body. At His coming, our body of humiliation, sin, and death (6:6; 7:24) will be transfigured by Christ "to be conformed to the body of His glory" (Phil. 3:21). Just as in His resurrection "Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6:4), so also at our transfiguration we will be "glorified with Him" to be revealed as the sons of God (8:17, 19). Such a glorification is the climax of God's complete salvation and the culmination of our full sonship, "the redemption of our body" (v. 23).

Ephesians reveals glorification as a process whereby the sealing Spirit saturates us with the divine element of glory until the day of the redemption of our body. In Ephesians 1:13-14 Paul says that when we heard the gospel of our salvation and believed into Christ, we "were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise...unto the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory." Here the word *unto* means "resulting in" or "with a view to," indicating that the purpose of the Holy Spirit's sealing is the redemption of the acquired possession. This is confirmed in verse 30 of chapter 4, which says that we were sealed in the Holy Spirit "unto the day of redemption." Since we are God's acquired possession, *the redemption of the acquired possession* refers to *the redemption of our body* in Romans 8:23. On the one hand, the Spirit has sealed us once for all; hence, we bear a permanent mark, attesting that we belong to God. On the other hand, the Spirit seals us continually by gradually permeating our entire being with the glorious element of God until we are fully mature in the divine life and are completely redeemed and transfigured in our body. Glorification

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signals our entrance into the full enjoyment of the divine sonship.

In Ephesians 1:14, immediately after speaking of *the redemption of the acquired possession*, Paul adds a striking phrase: *to the praise of His glory*. Thus, Paul links our glorification with the glorification of God. At the second coming of Christ, we will fully be glorified and manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3:4). In glory we will not express ourselves but God, because God's glory will be manifested through us. In His glory we will not manifest ourselves but Him. Hence, through us God will not be deprived of glory but will, in reality, have the glory He desires and deserves. Therefore, Paul proclaims that the redemption of our body, our glorification, will be to the praise of *His* glory. We will never be an object of worship, but we will nonetheless become a cause of universal praise to God, motivating praise to God from all the positive things in the universe, for they will see in us the expression, the glorification, of God Himself. At that time, God will be glorified not only in His only begotten Son, who is the eternal expression of God in the

Godhead (John 1:18; Heb. 1:3), but also in the church as the Body of Christ through His firstborn Son with the many sons of God (2:10). This will be the answer to the Lord's prayer in John 17 for our glorification. Because God's abounding grace has glorified redeemed and regenerated humanity, there will be glory *to Him* in the church and in Christ Jesus for all eternity (Eph. 3:21).

The Body of Christ—the Goal of Sonship

According to Romans and Ephesians, our participation in God's complete salvation, in which we grow and develop into mature sons of God, is not an individualistic spiritual pursuit but a corporate experience of the church as the Body of Christ. Through the cross of Christ, we were reconciled to God not as individual believers but "in one Body" (Eph. 2:16). Through regeneration God made us alive together with Christ (v. 5), and the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16). Instead of remaining in a state of spiritual immaturity, we must grow in the divine life until we all arrive at "a full-grown man" (Eph. 4:13), the corporate new man in its full development and "at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (v. 24), which is the Body of Christ (1:23). Thus, our growing up into Christ the Head in all things causes "the growth of the Body" (4:15-16). Today Christ sanctifies us as the church (5:26) so that we may become a corporate living sacrifice that is holy and well pleasing to God (Rom. 12:1-2) as well as the corporate bride of Christ that is holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:26-27). By being renewed in the spirit of our mind, we put off the old man—the world as our old communal life—and put on the new man (4:22-24)—the church, the Body of Christ, as our new communal life (2:15-16). By the renewing of the mind, we may prove the will of God, which is the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:2, 4-5). If our mind is renewed, we will not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think but instead will "think so as to be sober-minded, as God has apportioned to each a measure of faith" (v. 3); we will be "of the same mind toward one another," not setting our mind on the high things but going along with the lowly (v. 16); and we will be "of the same mind toward one another according to Christ Jesus" in order to glorify God with "one accord" and "one mouth" (15:5-6). These verses show that the renewing of the mind is not for individual piety but for the practice of the Body life, in which we function according to our measure of faith, care for the fellow members of the Body, and glorify God with one accord. As we are transformed and conformed to the image of Christ, He makes a corporate home in our hearts (Eph. 3:17). Through glorification we will become the glorious church (5:27), and God will be glorified in the church as His corporate expression in Christ (3:21).

The corporate dimension of our enjoyment of God's

salvation indicates that our participation in the divine sonship leads us into the Body of Christ, which is an expression of our corporate sonship. In its immediate context, Ephesians 1:5 links the will of God to sonship, whereas Romans 12:2-6 links the will of God to the Body of Christ. After verse 2 exhorts the believers to "prove what the will of God is," verses 4 through 6 speak of one Body in Christ in which many members have different functions and coordinate with one another. Hence, the good, well pleasing, and perfect will of God in Romans 12:2 is to gain the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is the goal of God's economical operation and the fulfillment of His will.

The Body of Christ is the peak of the divine revelation and the focal point of Romans.¹¹ God's complete salvation depicted in Romans 1 through 8 brings us into the realization of the full sonship, and the divine sonship, in turn, brings us into the reality of the Body of Christ described in Romans 12 through 16. Our membership in the Body of Christ hinges on our sonship in the household of God (cf. Eph. 2:19), which in turn depends on our experience of God's salvation. This is clearly seen in a crucial connection between Romans chapters 8 and 12. Since chapters 9 through 11 are a parenthetical word explaining the selection of God's elect, Romans 12 is a direct continuation of Romans 8. "The sons of God" in chapter 8, led by the Spirit of God and conformed to the image of the firstborn Son, are "members one of another" and "one Body in Christ" in chapter 12. The Body of Christ is not composed of human beings who possess only the human life nor of children of God who are immature in the divine life; it is composed of sons of God who have been regenerated with the life of God and conformed to the image of His Firstborn. Christ's designation in His humanity as the Son of God and our conformation to His image are for the producing of the corporate Christ—Christ, the firstborn Son, as the Head in organic union with the many sons of God, the believers in Christ, as the members of His Body (1 Cor. 12:12). The will of God is to have a corporate expression of Himself constituted with the firstborn Son, the Head of the Body, and the many sons, the components of the Body.

The practice of the Body life in Romans 12 issues from the believers' sonship in Romans 8. This is indicated by the fact that the impartation of the Triune God as the divine life into our tripartite being—the progressive realization of our divine sonship—in Romans 8 is for the building up of the Body unveiled in Romans 12. The tripartite believers who are filled with God as life through the salvation in life in Romans 8—the vessels of mercy who are filled with the riches of God's glory in chapter 9—become the vital members of the Body in Romans 12. According to Romans 12, a proper Body life requires our body to be presented to God (v. 1), our mind to be renewed for the

transformation of our soul (v. 2), and our spirit to be burning in order to serve the Lord (v. 11). A presented body, a renewed mind, and a burning spirit in chapter 12 are the issue of the divine dispensing of God as life into our tripartite being in Romans 8. In order for our dying bodies to be presented a *living* sacrifice, they need to be released from sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life and to be enlivened through the indwelling Spirit of God, who gives life to our mortal bodies (6:6; 7:24; 8:2, 11). In order for our mind to be renewed, it must be set on the spirit and thus become life (v. 6). In order for our spirit to be burning, we must walk according to our spirit (v. 4), which is life because of righteousness (v. 10). The reality of the Body of Christ in chapter 12 depends on our enjoyment of the impartation of the Triune God as life as revealed in chapter 8.

Like Romans, Ephesians points to the Body of Christ as the aim of sonship. Just as Romans presents sonship in chapter 8 and the Body of Christ in chapter 12, Ephesians speaks of sonship in 1:5 and the Body of Christ in verse 23. In Ephesians 1 Paul offers an extended praise of God for His triune operation in His economy to dispense Himself into the believers, unfolding the successive steps of the Divine Trinity from eternity past to eternity future directed toward the Body of Christ for the fulfillment of His great will. The Father chose us, the members of the Body, to be holy and predestinated us unto sonship before the foundation of the world (vv. 4-6); the Son redeemed us through the shedding of His blood (vv. 7-12) so that “we might receive the sonship” (Gal. 4:5); and the Spirit seals us as a pledge, imparting Himself into us with a view to the eventual redemption of our body, the completion of our sonship (Eph. 1:13-14). After presenting sonship, Paul’s discourse turns to the transmission of the surpassingly great power of God to the believers (vv. 19-21), which culminates in the church, the Body of Christ, as the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 22-23). The goal of God’s triadic operation in the divine economy is to gain many sons who corporately constitute the church as the Body of Christ, an eternal, expanded expression of God in Christ. The members of this Body are the sons of God who possess His divine life and holy nature, who were redeemed by the blood of the Son of God, and who are being saturated with the Holy Spirit in anticipation of full sonship.

The Body of Christ in Romans— an Organism Produced in the Life-union with Christ

The Body of Christ is not simply an apt metaphor for the unity of the believers in the church; it is the spiritual and intrinsic reality of the church. In Paul’s understanding, the Body of Christ is not a tangential truth but a central truth that defines the ultimate purpose of the believers’ walk and service and the unique reality of the believers’ existence

both individually and corporately. In Romans and Ephesians Paul identifies the believers not merely as individual saints but as “members one of another” (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25), highlighting our status as components of the mystical Body of Christ who are joined to one another in the divine life. Although both Epistles speak of “one Body” (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 2:16; 4:4), they present the Body from two distinct yet complementary perspectives. In Romans 12:5 Paul says, “We who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” Paul’s signature phrase *in Christ* implies our mystical union with Him in the divine life. It is this life union that makes us one with Christ as the Head of the Body and with all the believers in Christ as the members of the Body. The saving life of God within us is Christ our life (Col. 3:4); hence, the divine life in us is the life of the Body of Christ, a life that joins us with all the fellow members of the Body. The Body of Christ is not a human organization but a divine-human organism produced and sustained by our union in life with Christ. Since the Body of Christ, as a corporate organic entity, exists in the

The corporate dimension of our enjoyment of God’s salvation indicates that our participation in the divine sonship leads us into the Body of Christ, which is an expression of our corporate sonship.

organic union with Christ, the actuality of the Body is realized by our continuing experience of this organic union (John 15:4-5).

In order to live in the Body of Christ in practicality, we need to remain in the organic union with Christ. Since the Body of Christ is the center of Romans, this Epistle abounds with expressions that speak of our life union with Christ, such as *in Christ* or *into Christ* (3:24; 6:3; 8:2, 39; 12:5). In chapter 16 when Paul demonstrates a fellowship of intimate concern among the saints, the members of the Body, and among “all the churches of Christ” (v. 16), which are the local churches as the practical expressions of the Body, the phrases *in Christ* or *in the Lord* are used repeatedly: “fellow workers in Christ Jesus” (v. 3); those “who also were in Christ before me” (v. 7); “my beloved in the Lord” (v. 8); those “who are in the Lord” (v. 11); “one who has labored much in the Lord” (v. 12); and “chosen in the Lord” (v. 13). Christ is the unique sphere in which the believers participate in the fellowship of the Body and labor for the Body. Therefore, only by remaining in the organic union with

Christ can the believers live in harmony with the fellow members of the Body and do the work of the Body in coordination.

A key to experiencing the organic union with Christ is the mingled spirit, which is the human spirit born of, indwelt by, and joined to the divine Spirit to be one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). If we would live in the organic union with Christ, we must walk according to the mingled spirit. In Romans 8:9-10 Christ is closely identified with the Spirit in the context of indwelling the believers. Immediately after speaking of the Spirit of God dwelling in the believers in verse 9, Paul speaks of Christ being in us in verse 10. In Paul's view the indwelling Spirit is the indwelling Christ, because, as Paul declares elsewhere, Christ is the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). Moreover, while Romans 6 reveals our organic union with Christ in His death and resurrection (vv. 1-10), Romans 8 unveils that this union can be realized only in the Spirit. Verse 8 of chapter 6 says, "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him," but 8:13 says that we put to death the practices of the body and live "by the Spirit." Since Christ as the Spirit dwells in our regenerated human spirit, this mingled spirit is the practical way to experience the organic union with Christ (Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22).

The Body of Christ is sustained by a life union with Christ as the Spirit in our spirit. Romans, a book that is focused on the Body, underscores the importance of both living and serving in the mingled spirit. For instance, for our living, we need to walk according to the spirit (8:4), set our mind on the spirit (v. 6), and cry to the Father in a spirit of sonship (v. 15); for our service, we need to serve God in our spirit in the gospel of His Son (1:9), serve in newness of spirit (7:6), and be burning in spirit, serving the Lord (12:11). The Body of Christ is an organism composed of the mature sons of God who live and serve in the mingled spirit.

The Body of Christ in Ephesians— an Organism Constituted with Christ

In each of the various aspects of the church revealed in Ephesians, the Body of Christ is the governing factor. When Paul first speaks of the church in this book, he identifies it as the Body of Christ, saying, "The church, which is His Body" (1:22-23). Marvin R. Vincent points out that here the word *which* in Greek (ἣτις) is "the double relative," which is "explanatory, *seeing it is: by which I mean*" (373). This means that the intrinsic significance of the church is the Body of Christ, which is the organic issue of the inner working of the divine life within the believers. The primacy of the Body of Christ among the aspects of the church revealed in Ephesians is further evidenced by the fact that in Ephesians no other status of the church is referred to more frequently and pervasively than the Body

of Christ (1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30). The term *Body* is mentioned eight times in the book, and it is mentioned in every chapter except chapter 6. No other biblical phrase so aptly describes the divine-human nature, mystical quality, organic function, and indivisible oneness of the church as *the Body of Christ*. Only by comprehending the church as the Body of Christ can we adequately understand the profound significance of the other statuses of the church revealed in Ephesians. It is as the Body of Christ that the church is the fullness of the One who fills all in all (1:22-23), the masterpiece of God (2:10), the one new man (v. 15; 4:24), the household of God (2:19), the dwelling place of God (vv. 21-22), the mystery of Christ (3:4), the fullness of God (v. 19), the bride, the wife, of Christ (5:22-32), and the warrior (6:10-20). The Body of Christ is the main aspect of the church presented in Ephesians; the other aspects are subsumed under the Body.

Whereas Romans speaks of one Body *in* Christ, Ephesians speaks of the Body *of* Christ (4:12), indicating that Christ is the element with which the Body is constituted. In order for us to be the Body of Christ in reality, we must be saturated with Christ until He becomes our inward element and intrinsic constituent for His organic expression. This insight is confirmed by the fact that the Body of Christ is "the fullness of the One who fills all in all" (1:23). The all-filling One in Ephesians 1:23 is the Christ who is "all and in all" in the new man in Colossians 3:10-11, which is identified as the Body of Christ in Ephesians 2:15-16. The Body as His fullness, His organic expression, issues from the enjoyment of the riches of Christ. This is clearly seen in Ephesians 3, where Paul declares that a crucial aspect of his stewardship of the grace of God is to announce "the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel" in order that "the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church" according to His eternal purpose (vv. 8, 10-11). Since Christ Himself is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), the unsearchable riches of Christ must correspond to the multifarious wisdom of God. The unsearchable riches of Christ that the believers enjoy become the multifarious wisdom of God that the church makes known. When the believers partake of the riches of Christ, they are constituted with those riches to be the church—the Body, the fullness, of Christ—as the universal display of Christ as the untraceable wisdom of God (cf. Rom. 11:33). Moreover, when the riches of Christ are assimilated into the believers through Christ's making His home in their hearts (Eph. 3:17), the manifest outcome will be glory—God expressed—in the church, the Body of Christ, and in Christ Jesus for eternity (v. 21). Therefore, the Body of Christ, His fullness, is the result of the believers' enjoyment of the riches of Christ, which are wrought into their being. To gain such an organic corporate expression for Christ is the good pleasure of God's will.

Since the Body of Christ is an organic constitution of the riches of Christ, if we would be the Body of Christ in reality, we need to be organically united with Him and constituted with His riches in order to be an organism that expresses Him. In revealing the Body of Christ as a divine-human organism, Ephesians, like Romans, underlines our union with Christ by its frequent use of the expression *in Christ* and similar phrases (1:1, 3-4, 9-10, 12-13, 20; 2:6-7, 10, 13, 15; 3:6, 11-12, 21; 4:21, 32). We are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works (2:10). Christ has created the Jews and the Gentiles in Himself into one new man (v. 15). In Christ Jesus, all the building, God's universal building, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord (v. 21); in the Lord we are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit (v. 22). In Christ Jesus both the believing Gentiles and the believing Jews are fellow members of the Body of Christ (3:6). We may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ, out from whom all the Body causes the growth of the Body (4:15-16). In brief, in our life union with Christ we are formed as the Body of Christ, are fellow members of the Body, are built into the Body, and cause the growth of the Body. This means that the existence of the Body, the fellowship among the members of the Body, the building up of the Body, and the growth of the Body all depend upon our organic union with Christ.

Our organic union with Christ is experientially realized by the mingled spirit. The connection between the life union with Christ and the mingled spirit is clearly indicated by a parallel between Ephesians 2:21 and 22. Verse 21 speaks of a holy temple in the Lord, whereas verse 22 speaks of a dwelling place of God in spirit. Since the holy temple and the dwelling place of God refer to the same divine reality—the church, the Body of Christ, as the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15)—being in the organic union with the Lord is tantamount to being in the mingled spirit. By living in our mingled spirit and remaining in our life union with Christ, we are built into the church as the Body of Christ, the habitation of God.

Ephesians, like Romans, emphasizes the mingled spirit as the unique organ employed by God to bring forth and build up the Body of Christ.¹² Chapter 1 reveals that we need to pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know the transmission of the surpassingly great power of God from the ascended Christ to the church (vv. 17-22), which transmission includes the threefold dispensing of the Divine Trinity (vv. 3-14) and produces the Body of Christ, the fullness of the all-filling Christ (v. 23). Chapter 2 unveils that we need to remain in our spirit, where we are being built together into the church as the dwelling place of God (v. 22). Chapter 3 shows that the mystery of Christ (v. 4), which concerns the church as the Body of Christ (v. 6), was revealed to

God's holy apostles and prophets in spirit (v. 5), and that we need to be strengthened into the inner man—our spirit as the hidden man of the heart (1 Pet. 3:4)—in order that Christ may make His corporate home in our hearts so that we would be filled unto all the fullness of God—the Body of Christ as the enlarged expression of God (3:16-21). Chapter 4 instructs us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind, allowing the mingled spirit to spread into our mind, in order to put on the corporate new man (vv. 23-24), which is the Body of Christ (2:15-16). Chapter 5 commands us to be filled in our regenerated spirit (v. 18) so that we as the church may be sanctified by Christ in order to be presented at His second coming as His worthy counterpart, the holy, resplendent, and glorious bride, for His heart's delight (vv. 26-27). Chapter 6 exhorts us to pray at every time in spirit in order to put on the whole armor of God so that we as a corporate warrior, the Body of Christ, may fight the spiritual warfare that is needed in order to defeat God's enemy for His unchallenged dominion in the universe (vv. 10-18).

*The Body of Christ, His fullness,
is the result of the believers'
enjoyment of the riches of Christ,
which are wrought into their being.
To gain such an organic corporate
expression for Christ is the
good pleasure of God's will.*

Conclusion


Whereas Romans shows God's progressive work of salvation among humanity in time and eventually hearkens back to God's will planned in eternity past as its source, Ephesians begins with a view of God's will in eternity past, shows the operation of God in His economy for the accomplishment of His will in time, and reveals the ultimate fulfillment of His will in eternity future. Romans climbs a heavenly ladder, unfolding our progression from being sinners under God's condemnation to maturation as sons of God, the recipients of God's judicial redemption and organic salvation, and ultimately to our functioning as the members of the Body of Christ, the corporate expression of God, manifested in the local churches. Romans begins by portraying man's fallen state; it continues with the unveiling of God's full salvation, in which the believers are called, justified, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed to the image of the firstborn Son, and built into the Body of Christ; and it ultimately reaches the high peak of the divine revelation by touching the mystery of God's will planned before time began

(16:25). Ephesians begins where Romans ends—eternity past. Ephesians opens with God’s eternal predestination of the believers according to the good pleasure of His will; it continues with the execution of His will on the bridge of time by the gradual impartation of His divine life into His chosen and redeemed elect in order to produce sons of God for the formation of the Body of Christ; and it reveals the eternal fulfillment of His will in the Body of Christ as the glorious corporate expression of God, the fullness of God. The point of convergence in Romans and Ephesians is the eternal will of God to gain the sons of God for the constitution of the Body of Christ.

Understanding the mystery of God’s will is the key to realizing the intrinsic significance of the common themes in Romans and Ephesians. For instance, the judicial redemption that Christ accomplished is not an end in itself; rather, it serves as a base for the organic salvation that He is now carrying out among His believers for their entrance into the full sonship. God in Christ as the Spirit bestowed His love, mercy, kindness, and grace upon them not merely to save them from wrath but to transform children of wrath into sons of God, conformed to the image of His firstborn Son. The ethical living of the believers is not the result of self-effort for the cultivation of individual piety but the issue of a living in the organic union with Christ as the Spirit in their spirit for the practice of the Body life.

The remarkable correlation between Romans and Ephesians in revealing the will of God certainly corroborates Paul’s authorship of Ephesians, and it affirms the internal consistency and profound harmony of the divine revelation in Paul’s Epistles specifically and in the New Testament generally. By juxtaposing Romans and Ephesians in this way, we see the central thought woven into Paul’s writings, which also is the intrinsic content of the New Testament revelation—the will of God to produce many sons of God by imparting His life into them in order to constitute them the members of the Body of Christ, the organic corporate expression of God.

The will of God is accomplished by the cooperation of God and man (1 Cor. 3:9). On the one hand, the will of God is carried out by the saving work of God, and its ultimate fulfillment is guaranteed by His irresistible will, irrevocable calling, and steadfast resolution to satisfy His heart’s desire (Rom. 9:19; 11:20), for “the counsel of Jehovah stands forever; / The intentions of His heart stand from generation to generation” (Psa. 33:11). In keeping with this, Ephesians 1:11 testifies that the God who predestinated us unto sonship for the Body of Christ “works all things according to the counsel of His will” in order to accomplish His eternal purpose (vv. 5, 9). Similarly, Romans 8:28-29 declares that God causes all things to work together for good to those who are called

according to His purpose, those whom He predestinated to be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son. God not only sovereignly arranges the environment and circumstances of the predestinated believers but also operates in them by imparting His life into their tripartite being (Phil. 2:13). On the other hand, the execution of the will of God requires us to work together with Him (2 Cor. 6:1). For this cause, following the apostle Paul’s pattern, we should pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of God, who takes pleasure in making known to us the mystery of His will (Eph. 1:9, 17; Col. 1:9). Like Paul, we should also pray for utterance, in the opening of our mouth, to make known in boldness the mystery of the gospel, the mystery of the will of God, to God’s elect so that they may see the economy of the mystery—the mystery of His eternal will to gain many sons for the Body of Christ (Eph. 6:19). May we give ourselves to participate in the divine sonship by experiencing God’s organic salvation, and may we present our bodies a living sacrifice to live in the reality of the Body by remaining in the organic union with Christ as the Spirit in our spirit so that we may prove what the will of God is and thereby fulfill the purpose of our existence and the desire of His heart. 

Notes

¹Romans speaks of “the will of God” or “His will” four times (1:10; 15:32; 12:2; 9:19), Ephesians speaks of “the will of God,” “His will,” or “the will of the Lord” five times (1:1; 6:6; 1:5, 9; 5:17), and Hebrews speaks of “His will,” “Your will,” “will,” or “the will of God” six times (2:4; 13:21; 10:7, 9, 10, 36).

²This point is developed in a clear and thorough manner by Ron Kangas (“Purpose” 10-34).

³This is clearly seen in a crucial phrase in Romans 5:18—*justification of life*. Witness Lee offers insightful comments on this phrase:

Life is the goal of God’s salvation; thus, justification is “of life.” Justification is not an end in itself; it is for life. Through justification we have come up to the standard of God’s righteousness and correspond with it, so that now He can impart His life to us. Justification changes our outward position; life changes our inward disposition. Justification unto life indicates that life is the focus of this chapter and that the organic union of life is an issue of justification. (Recovery Version, v. 18, note 2)

⁴Justification may be defined as God’s action in declaring a believer in Christ righteous and approving him according to His standard of righteousness.

⁵Although both Christ and the believers have been brought into the divine sonship, there exists a genuine distinction between them. Although Christ is not ashamed to call us His brothers (Heb. 2:11), He alone possesses the status of the only

begotten Son of God in the eternal Trinity. Furthermore, in His status as the firstborn Son of God, He has the preeminence, the first place in all things and certainly among His many brothers (Col. 1:18). We are the members of His Body (1 Cor. 12:27), but He alone is the Head of the Body (cf. Col. 1:18); we are joined to Him through faith (1 Cor. 6:17), but He alone is the Author of our salvation and our faith, the Redeemer of humanity, the Lord of all, and God over all and blessed forever (Heb. 2:10; 12:2; Col. 1:13-14; Acts 10:36; Rom. 9:5).

⁶Arno C. Gaebelein critiques this view of sonship in his commentary on Ephesians 1:4-5:

“In love having predestinated us unto the Son-place through Christ Jesus by Himself according to the good pleasure of His will”...The authorized version speaks of “adoption of children.” This hardly expresses it correctly. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are not adopted into the family of God; they are born into the family. The Greek has only one word “Son-place.” We are placed into the position of Sons. Not alone hath God given to us His own nature, but He gives us, because we have that nature in and through His Son, the place as Sons. (*Masterpiece* 27-28)

⁷For a thorough discussion on the scriptural distinction between children of God and sons of God, see Ron Kangas (“Children” 110-118).

⁸Witness Lee offers insightful comments on the role of the Spirit of holiness in the designation of Christ:

In His transfiguration Christ was designated, marked out, to be the Son of God. When Jesus was transfigured, His face shone as the sun, and He became separate from all other people. The same thing took place in His resurrection: His physical body became separate, different, from all things other than God. This was according to the Spirit of holiness. Jesus’ transfiguration was something inward, not something outward. It was according to the Spirit of holiness within Him. At the time of His transfiguration, the Spirit of holiness permeated and saturated His whole being to make Him separate, different, from anything other than God. (*Spirit* 60)

⁹The relationship between sanctification and sonship is also revealed in Hebrews 2:10-11, which speaks of Christ not being ashamed to call us brothers because “He who sanctifies,” Christ as the Firstborn, and “those who are being sanctified,” the believers in Christ as the many sons, “are all of One,” our Holy Father, who is the source of sanctification. To be led into glory is to enter into full sonship (Rom. 8:17-23), and the process of the sanctification of the brothers of Christ is linked to the process of the many sons of God being led into glory. By sanctifying us, God in Christ is leading us into glory in order to bring us fully into the divine sonship. Without sanctification, Christ, as the Holy One of God (Matt. 1:20; John 6:69), would be ashamed to call us brothers, but when we are sanctified, Christ glories in His identification with us as His brothers, joyously singing hymns of praise in us to the Father (Heb. 2:12). Hence,

we need to be sanctified in order to be holy brothers of Christ and glorious sons of God in reality so that we may fulfill our God-ordained destiny to participate in full sonship.

Like Romans and Ephesians, Hebrews unveils the church as the goal of sonship. Immediately after speaking of God’s leading many sons into glory (2:10) and Christ’s sanctifying the believers to make them His brothers (v. 11), the writer of Hebrews records the proclamation of Christ, the firstborn Son: “I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the church I will sing hymns of praise to You” (1:6; 2:12). Here Christ did not say, “In their midst,” or “In the midst of My brothers,” as we might expect; rather, He said, “In the midst of the church.” This suggests that the church is composed of the many brothers of Christ who are being sanctified, that is, the many sons who are being led into glory. Hebrews 2:10-12 reveals that sanctification is for sonship and that sonship is for the church, the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). That these crucial connections are clearly presented in both Romans and Ephesians is an affirming proof of Paul’s authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

¹⁰The mingling of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit

The intrinsic content of the New Testament reveals that the will of God is to produce many sons by imparting His life into them in order to constitute them as members of the Body of Christ, the organic corporate expression of God.

does not result in a third substance or cause either to lose their distinct characteristics. In the mingling of the two spirits, the Holy Spirit is joined to the human spirit, but the distinction between them is preserved without the loss of their own particular characteristics.

¹¹The Body of Christ as the center, goal, and peak of the gospel of God in Romans has been largely neglected by commentators. For instance, Brian Vickers claims that since Romans 5:12-21 shows how the righteous can live by faith, “this text is the focal point of the letter” (114). Gaebelein posits that Romans 8, where the full salvation of God is unveiled, is the “the highest summit of the Epistle” (*Annotated* 53) and a “blessed, most precious and glorious ending” of “the entire doctrinal section of this great Epistle” (55). Considering Romans 8 “the blessed and sublime culmination” (53), he views chapters 12 through 16 principally as “exhortations to walk in the power of this blessed Gospel” (4).

¹²In resurrection Christ—the life, element, and constituent of the Body—became the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of reality (1 Cor. 15:45; John 14:17). This Spirit of reality is the essence and reality of the Body (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4). At the time

of regeneration, the Spirit, the reality of the Body, entered into and joined Himself to our human spirit to be one spirit—the mingled spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). We thus may say that in actuality and practicality our mingled spirit is the Body of Christ. When we are in the mingled spirit, we are in the Body of Christ in actuality and practicality.

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Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"To the only **wise** God through Jesus Christ, to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Rom. 16:27).

wise: In its conclusion this book, which gives a general discussion concerning the Christian life and the church life, gives glory to the wise God. This unveils that all the matters discussed in this book, such as how God selects us, how He saves us from sin and death, how He redeems us and justifies us, how He makes us, sinners who were dead through and through, His divine sons, how He transfers us out of Adam into Christ, how He sanctifies and transforms us in Christ, how He makes us the members of Christ for the constituting of the Body of Christ, and how He causes us to be the local churches appearing in different localities as the expressions of the Body of Christ on the earth in this age—all these matters are planned, managed, and accomplished by God's wisdom, in order that He, the unlimitedly rich Triune God, may be glorified, that is, that His incomparable glory may be completely and fully expressed through us who have been perfected eternally by Him and who have become His Body and have been joined to Him as one. The focus of God's wisdom is the working of His Divine Trinity into the three parts—spirit, soul, and body—of our redeemed being that in His redemption, sanctification, and transformation we may have a full union in the divine life with Him, that His desire for the mingling of divinity and humanity, the joining of humanity to divinity, may be fulfilled for eternity. This truly is worthy of our appreciation and worship! How blessed and how glorious it is that we can participate in this! This is worthy of our unceasing singing and praise for eternity! Both our Christian life and our church life should have this as our center and goal. May God bless in this way everyone who has been chosen and perfected by Him.