

The Purpose of God and the Gospel of God concerning Image and Dominion

by Ron Kangas

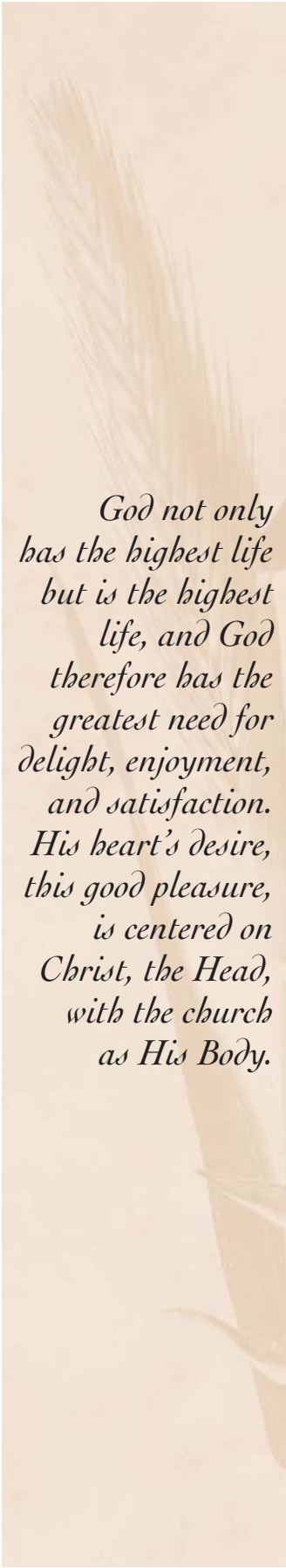
In order to know God and to know His reason for creating the universe and human beings, we need to know the will of God, the good pleasure of God, and the eternal purpose of God. Apart from this knowledge, this genuine spiritual understanding, we cannot fully know the gospel of God and the relationship between the gospel in the New Testament and two crucial words in Genesis 1:26—*image* and *dominion*.

The Will of God

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created” (Rev. 4:11). God is a God of purpose, having a will, because of which He created all things. The universe exists, not through an act of self-creation but because of God’s will. Human beings were created in His image because of His will. The will of God is the unique source of all positive things. God created all things for His will so that He might accomplish and fulfill His purpose. God’s will is God’s wish; God’s will is what He wants to do. The good pleasure of His will is embodied in His will; thus, His will precedes His good pleasure, counsel, purpose, and economy. God has made the mystery of His will known to us through His revelation in Christ, that is, through Christ’s incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Now God works all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). God’s will is His intention, and His counsel is His consideration of the way to accomplish His intention.

Colossians reveals God’s will according to His desire and intention in the whole universe, in creation, in redemption, in the coming age, and in eternity. As this Epistle makes clear, the will of God is concentrated in Christ and is for Christ. Christ is the center and the embodiment of God’s will. In 1:9 God’s will actually refers to Christ, for the will of God is profound in relation to knowing, experiencing, and living the all-inclusive, extensive Christ, who is the complete God, a perfect man, and the reality of every positive thing in the universe (2:9, 16-17). God’s will is that Christ would be the preeminent One, the One who has the first place in all things, not only in the vast universe but also in our personal universe of persons, matters, and things. God wants Christ and Christ alone (Matt. 17:5)—the wonderful, preeminent, all-inclusive Christ, who is all and in all (Col. 3:1, 10-11). God wills to work this Christ into our being as our life and our everything so that we may become the corporate expression of the Triune God (1:27; Eph. 3:16-21). God’s will is that the all-inclusive Christ would be our portion (Col. 1:12) and that we would know Christ, experience Christ, enjoy Christ, be saturated with Christ, and have Christ as our person, life, and constituent (3:4, 11).

God’s will is to have the church as the Body of Christ (1:9, 18; 2:19; 3:15). The will of God, according to which He created us, is to obtain a Body for Christ to be His fullness,



God not only has the highest life but is the highest life, and God therefore has the greatest need for delight, enjoyment, and satisfaction. His heart's desire, this good pleasure, is centered on Christ, the Head, with the church as His Body.

His expression (Rom. 12:2, 5; Eph. 1:5, 9, 11, 22-23; 4:16). To live the Body life is to “prove what the will of God is” (Rom. 12:2, cf. 4-5). If we are proper members of the Body, those acting and functioning in the church life, we will be persons in the will of God (1 Cor. 1:1-2; Eph. 1:1; 5:17). God is the Head of the Body, and we, the believers in Christ, are the members of His Body (Col. 1:18; 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16). If we would live the Body and thereby prove the perfect will of God, we need to live corporately with the members under the Head (v. 15; Col. 2:19), taking the Head as our life and the center of our whole being. This is the will of God.

God's Good Pleasure

Ephesians 1:5 says, “Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” Verse 9 goes on to say, “Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure.” God's good pleasure is the desire of His heart, the desire deep within the being of God, the desire that can be satisfied only when His will concerning Christ and the church is carried out on earth. Every living being seeks pleasure or enjoyment; the higher the life, the greater the need for enjoyment. The human life is higher than the animal life; thus, we have a greater need for enjoyment and happiness than animals. God, of course, not only has the highest life but also is the highest life, and God therefore has the greatest need for delight, enjoyment, and satisfaction. This heart's desire, this good pleasure, of God, is embodied in His will. Since God's will is centered on Christ, the Head, with the church as His Body, the good pleasure of God's will is His delight in Christ and the church. To focus on Christ, the expression of God, and on the church, the expression of Christ, is to care for the good pleasure of God's will.

God's Eternal Purpose

The eternal purpose of God—the purpose of the ages—is the issue of His will. This purpose is God's eternal plan made in eternity past. This plan is called the eternal purpose because it was planned in eternity past for eternity future. God's purpose, His plan, will be fulfilled in time, and its consummation will be the eternal New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. God Himself is the initiation, the origination, and the sphere of His eternal purpose, for He purposed this plan in Himself (v. 9). Regarding His eternal purpose, God did not seek the advice of anyone or take counsel with anyone. He alone is the unique source. Now everything is working together for God's purpose, and nothing in heaven or on earth can overthrow it. Neither the rebellion of Satan nor the fall of the man created by God can prevent the fulfillment of the divine purpose related to God's will and heart's desire.

In Romans 8:28 *His purpose* refers to the purposeful determination in God's plan. This purpose is defined in verse 29: “Those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers.” Here we can see that God's purposeful determination is that the believers in Christ—the sons of God—would be conformed to the image of His Son, not as the only begotten Son in the Godhead but as the firstborn Son in God's economy. Through organic transformation (12:2) and conformation, Christ will have many brothers (John 20:17). Thus, God's eternal purpose is to produce the many brothers of His firstborn Son; these many brothers are God's many sons, whom He is bringing into glory (Heb. 1:6; 2:10, 12).

The sons of God in Romans 8:14 are the members of the Body of Christ in 12:4-5. To be sure, the Body of Christ is the church, for which Christ gave Himself up as the Savior of the Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; 5:23, 25). God's eternal purpose in 3:11 is to have the church as the Body of Christ, which is spoken of in 1:22-23. His will, good pleasure, and eternal purpose are to have the church, the Body of Christ, through which He can

express Himself (vv. 5, 9, 11, 22-23). God's unique intention is actually to do one thing—to gain a group of people who would be the living Body of Christ for the expression of the Triune God (4:4-6, 16).

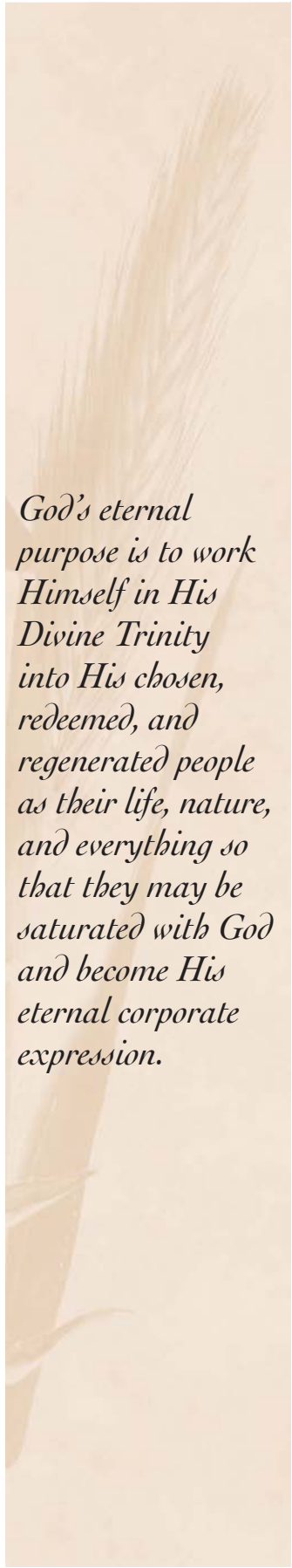
If we enter into the depths of the divine revelation in the Holy Scriptures with a clear mind, a loving heart, and a seeking spirit, we may eventually see that the purpose of God in the universe is to produce through creation and regeneration a group of people who will be the same as He is in life, nature, and expression but, of course, not in the Godhead (John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:2). In life, nature, image, appearance, radiance, glory, and outward expression, they will be the same as God, possessing His life and nature and manifesting His glory for eternity (Rev. 4:2-3; 21:10-11, 18). This determined intention of God is accomplished by the divine life being dispensed into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people. As the divine life is wrought into His children, a metabolic reaction takes place within them that causes them to be transformed into the image of the glorified, resurrected Christ and to become the same as God in life, nature, and expression. We may conclude, therefore, that God's eternal purpose is to work Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people as their life, nature, and everything so that they may be saturated with God and become His eternal corporate expression.

We need to see God's purpose in creation and redemption, both of which are for the fulfillment of God's will, good pleasure, and purposeful determination. God's purpose in creating man was that man would express Him and represent Him, for the eternal purpose of God is to have a corporate man—in fact, a corporate God-man, the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 2:15; 4:24)—to express Him and represent Him in this age, in the coming age, and for eternity in the new heaven and new earth. Creation was a part of God's original purpose, for all things were created because of God's will (Rev. 4:11) for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Redemption, however, was remedial; redemption solves the problem of sin and brings us back to God's eternal purpose, His original purpose (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:5, 7; Gal. 3:26; 4:4-7), to have many sons conformed to the image of His firstborn Son for His corporate expression through the church today and the New Jerusalem in eternity. If we realize this, we will appreciate the fact that redemption is neither God's goal nor an end in itself; rather, redemption is to recover God's chosen people back to His purpose. The divine purpose in creation and redemption is that God would have many sons for His corporate expression.

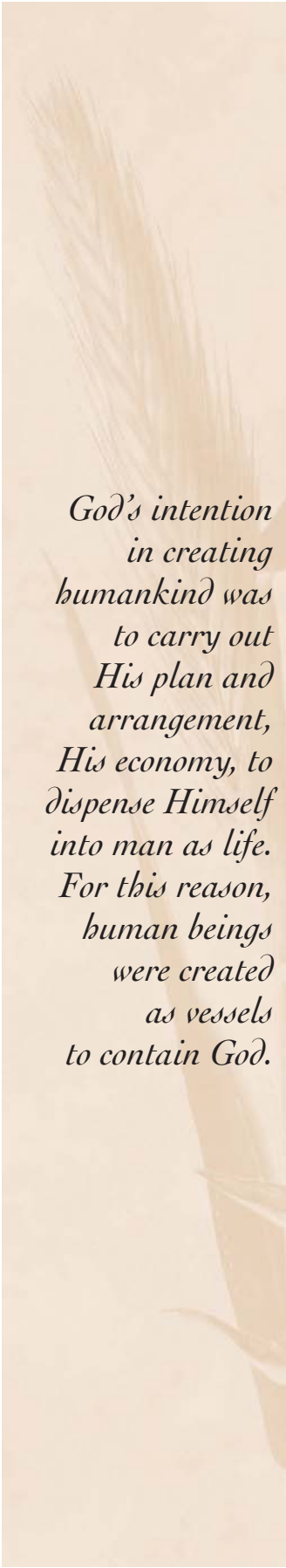
The purpose of God's salvation is for His created and redeemed ones to have the sonship, that is, to have the life of the Son (1 John 5:11-12) and be conformed to the image of His Son so that the Son would be the Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). Furthermore, God's purpose is His plan according to His will to put us into Christ and make us one with Christ to share His life and position in order that we may express the Triune God in glory. Grace is God's provision of the divine life to us in order that we may experience Christ and become His corporate expression. Such a salvation involves our being saved from a human life that is meaningless and without purpose, a life of vanity of vanities (Eccl. 1:2). The gospel of God saved us out of a human life that is without meaning into the meaning of the universe that exists according to God's will and for His purpose. The man created by God in His image had great meaning and purpose—to express God corporately and to represent Him on earth for His kingdom—but man fell, and the meaning and purpose of human life were lost. But with His salvation God rescues us from a meaningless and purposeless existence and brings us back to our original purpose, which is His eternal purpose, the meaning of the universe.

God's Purpose Revealed in Genesis 1:26

God's eternal purpose is carried out in time through a series of God-ordained periods or ages—the age from creation until the giving of the law through Moses; the age of the



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law from Moses until the coming of Christ; the age of grace, or of the church, from the first coming of Christ until His return to claim the earth as His inheritance; and the age of the kingdom. In a very real sense the most important of the first three ages is the age of the church, which is rightly understood as the age of mystery, during which the mystery of God regarding His eternal purpose is carried out mainly in a way imperceptible to the human mind and senses. God's operation to fulfill the desire of His heart by working out His eternal purpose started with the creation account in Genesis 1, especially in verse 26 with its emphasis on image and dominion. If the Triune God is to obtain a corporate expression of Himself in Christ, He needs human beings as vessels to contain and express Him and as His representatives with His authority to establish a realm—the kingdom of God—where His will is done without hesitation and where His glory is expressed without limitation. With this in view, God created man in His own image and for His dominion. If we are properly impressed with this, we will realize that whereas redemption is remedial to enable fallen human beings to be reconciled to God for His purpose, creation brought forth human beings in His image and according to His likeness for the fulfillment of His purpose. Viewed from this perspective, creation is even more important than redemption in the sense that, instead of being remedial, creation was essential and part of God's plan from the beginning. In brief, God's purpose required creation, and God's purpose, in its initial stage, was to be accomplished by the human beings created by Him. Thus, God's purpose is revealed in Genesis 1:26. God created man in His image to express Him and with His authority to represent Him.

God Creating Man in His Own Image for His Expression

“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...And God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him” (Gen. 1:26-27). *Let Us make man* indicates that a council was held among the three of the Godhead regarding the creation of man, revealing not only that God is triune but also that special consideration was given to creating human beings in God's image for His purpose of having a corporate expression of Himself in Christ. The decision to create humankind was made in eternity past, showing that the creation of man in God's image was not an afterthought but was for the eternal purpose of the Triune God. The Scriptures as a whole make clear that God's intention in creating humankind was to carry out His plan and arrangement, His economy, to dispense Himself into man as life. For this reason, human beings were created as vessels to contain God and could through the exercise of the human spirit contact God and receive Him in a marvelously subjective way (2 Cor. 4:7; Rom. 9:21, 23).

God's image, referring to God's inner being, is the expression of the inward essence of God's attributes, the most prominent of which are love (1 John 4:8), light (1:5), holiness (Rev. 4:8), and righteousness (Jer. 23:6). The human virtues that are part of the fabric of our original God-created tripartite being (1 Thes. 5:23) correspond to these, and other, divine attributes. Since human beings were created in God's image in this way, we have the capacity to express the divine attributes in our human virtues to become a corporate expression of God. God's likeness, referring to God's form (Phil. 2:6), is the expression of the essence and nature of God's person. We should not make the mistake of regarding God's image and God's likeness as two separate things. The human virtues, created in our spirit, are copies of God's attributes and are the means for us to express God's attributes. The human form as the essence and nature of our person is a copy of God's form. It is for this reason that throughout the Bible there are numerous instances of the resemblance of God and man in their images and likenesses (Gen. 18:2-13; Judg. 13:3-6, 22-23; Dan. 7:13-14; Rom. 5:14; Col. 1:15; John 1:14; Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:6-8; Acts 7:56; Matt. 26:64; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 4:3; 21:11, 18-19). This understanding is supported and strengthened by the fact that the image in which we were created is actually Christ as the image of God (Col. 1:15). Christ the Son, as God's embodiment, is the image of the invisible God, the expression of the essence of God's attributes (2:9; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3). Humankind, therefore, was created according

to Christ with the intention that Christ would enter into human beings as their life and be expressed through them in a corporate way (Col. 1:27; 3:4, 10-11; Phil. 1:20-21).

This brings us to a most striking point related to God's creation of human beings. God created man in His own image and according to His likeness so that humans would be a duplication of Himself in life, nature, and expression but, of course, not in the Godhead nor as an object of worship. Among all creatures, only humans have the capacity to contact God, to contain God, and to express God. All other living things were created "according to their kind" (Gen. 1:11-12, 21, 24-25), but human beings were created according to God's kind, as unveiled in Paul's word in Acts 17:28-29. Since God and humans are of the same kind—God's kind—it is possible for us not only to contact God but also to be joined to God, be filled with God, and live together with God in a vital organic union (John 15:1, 4-5; Rom. 6:5; 11:17-24 1 Cor. 6:17).

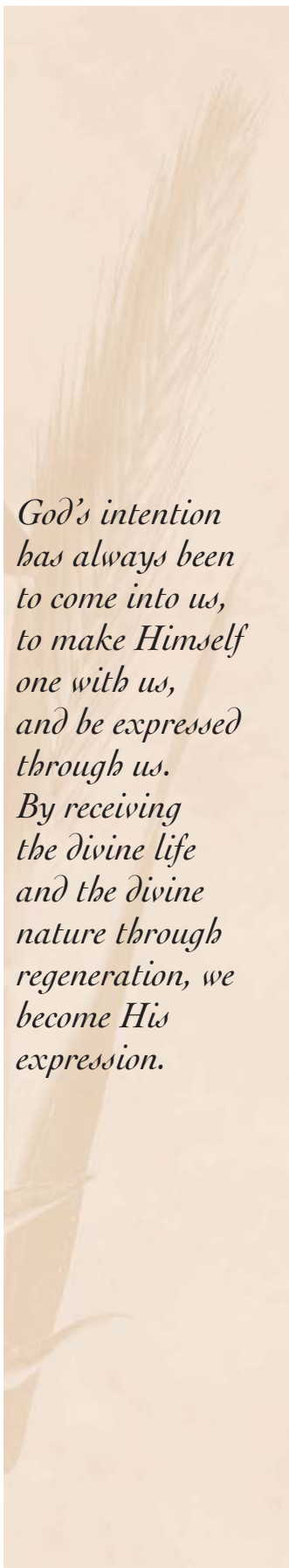
God's purpose in His creation of man in His image and according to His likeness is that man would receive the divine life signified by the tree of life and express Him in His attributes. God's intention has always been to come into us, to make Himself one with us, and to be expressed through us. By receiving the divine life and the divine nature through regeneration, we become His expression, with the divine attributes shining forth from within our human virtues. In particular, as humans created for God's purpose, we have the capacity to express God's love, light, holiness, and righteousness. We may conclude that for God to create humankind in His image indicates that God created humans with the intention that in every possible way they would become a duplicate of God, the reproduction of God for His corporate expression (John 12:24; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:10). When God beholds such a reproduction and corporate expression, He is very happy, for the desire of His heart, the good pleasure of His will, is being fulfilled.

In the Bible there is a mysterious thought concerning the relationship between God and man (Ezek. 1:26). God's desire is, in Christ, to become the same as man is and, in Christ, to make created, redeemed, and regenerated humans the same as He is (1 John 3:2). In order to fulfill this desire, God's intention is, in Christ, to work Himself into us, making Himself the same as we are and making us the same as He is (Eph. 3:17). This is a matter in God's economy—His plan and arrangement to dispense Himself in Christ as the Spirit into us—and does not in any way affect the immutable Godhead. For this expression God in Christ has made Himself man, and now in Christ He is making us God in life, nature, and expression. It is for this grand purpose that God created man in His own image and according to His likeness.

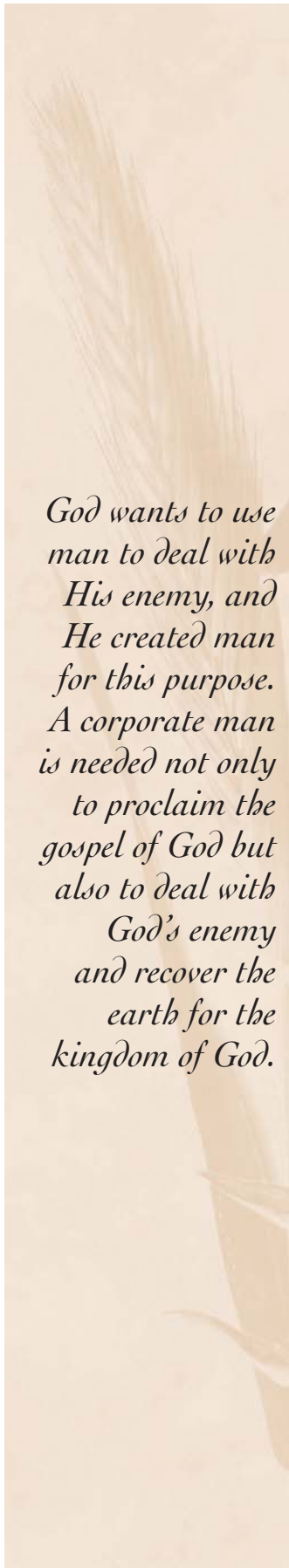
God Giving Man Dominion for the Kingdom

"Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heaven and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26). Here we see that God created a corporate man not only to express Him but also to represent Him by having dominion over all things. The revelation in the Bible is that the Triune God created man in His image and with His dominion to express Him and represent Him. God in His Divine Trinity created a singular corporate man in His own image, and He committed to this man dominion over all the earth. This twofold purpose is applicable to the believers in Christ today, for the more we experience and enjoy the Triune God through His divine dispensing, the more we will grow in the reality of the divine image and the divine dominion.

God's intention in giving corporate man dominion is to subdue His enemy, Satan, who rebelled against Him. The creeping things that creep upon the earth typify Satan, the serpent, and his angels, as well as the demons, who follow Satan (v. 26; 3:1, 14; Rev. 12:4, 7, 9; cf. Luke 10:19). The word *subdue* in Genesis 1:28 implies that a war is raging on earth between God and His enemy, Satan. Whoever gains the earth will have the



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victory. The underlying thought is that God has a problem, and this problem is Satan, the archangel who rebelled against Him and became His enemy in the universe and especially on the earth (Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18). According to Genesis 3:1, Satan as God's enemy hid himself in the serpent, one of the creeping things on the earth. In order to subdue this enemy and thus solve His problem, God gave man authority to rule over all things created by God. Man especially must rule over the earth and even subdue the earth because the earth has been usurped by God's rebellious enemy. God needs man to exercise His authority over all the creeping things, and God needs man to subdue and conquer the rebellious earth so that God may recover the earth for His kingdom (Matt. 6:9-10).

Some may be troubled by the assertion that God has a need for man to accomplish something for Him. Those who are not intellectually open to consider such an assertion may be governed by the concept that since God is omnipotent, He does not, and cannot, ever have any kind of need. This concept might be acceptable to the religious mind, but it is not in agreement with God and His word. As the Creator, God will not diminish Himself by dealing with a rebellious creature directly through a display of divine power. Rather, God want His creature *man* to deal with His fallen creature *Satan*. God wants to use man to deal with His enemy, and He created man for this specific purpose. A corporate man is needed not only to proclaim the gospel of God but also to deal with God's enemy and recover the earth for the kingdom of God. God simply will not exercise His omnipotence to defeat, destroy, and annihilate His rebellious enemy. Any believer who is waiting for this to happen is waiting in vain, and any child of God who is praying for this to take place is praying in vain. As the New Testament revelation concerning the incarnated Son of God emphatically makes clear, it is only through man and by man that God's problem with Satan will be solved. To be sure, such a representation of God with His authority requires that God's people pay a great price by denying the self, not loving their soul-life, and not pursuing their own interests. Nevertheless, before the Lord Jesus can return, He will gain some believers who will learn not only to express God but also to represent Him in dealing with His enemy, no matter what the cost may be.

God's intention in giving man dominion is to recover the earth (Gen. 1:28). God created man with the intention that a corporate person would recover the earth for Him and that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Thus, a corporate man was created by God to have dominion over the earth, to subdue it, to conquer it, and to thereby recover the earth for God. God wants to regain the earth; the earth has therefore become a crucial place, a place that Satan wants to hold and that God wants to regain. In order for the earth to be recovered for God, man was commissioned to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth, and to subdue it. According to the prayers in Matthew 6:9-10 and Psalm 8:1 and 9, the Lord's name must be sanctified on earth and become excellent in all the earth. During the millennium the earth will become the kingdom of God, and in eternity the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven to the new earth (Rev. 11:15; 21:1-2).

God's intention in giving man dominion is to exercise His authority over the earth in order that the kingdom of God may come to the earth, the will of God may be done on earth, and the glory of God may be manifested on earth (Matt. 6:10, 13). As the redeemed and regenerated people of God, we need to exercise God's authority so that the kingdom of God may come to the earth. The genuine church according to the New Testament revelation is the kingdom of God in this age (16:18-19; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Eph. 2:19; Col. 4:11; Rev. 1:4-6). The church will bring in the manifestation of the kingdom, for the work of the church is to bring in the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:10; 12:22-29; Rev. 11:15; 12:10). The church has been brought into existence for the purpose of bringing in the kingdom (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18; Rev. 1:6, 9). The church should therefore pray with authority to bring the kingdom of God to the earth.

We need to exercise God's authority so that the will of God may be done on earth. The kingdom of God is absolutely a matter of God's will and completely fulfills God's will; in fact, we may rightly say that the kingdom is God's will. If we realize this and are deeply impressed and motivated by it, we will recognize the need to pray for the Father's will to be done on earth as in heaven. This is to pray for the kingdom of God to be brought from the heavens to the earth in its glorious manifestation. We also need to exercise God's authority so that the glory of God may be manifested on the earth. God is a God of glory; glory is the expression of God, God expressed (Acts 7:2; Eph. 1:17; 3:14-16, 21; Rev. 21:10-11). The kingdom of God is the realm in which God exercises His power in order to manifest His glory.

God's Intention Fulfilled in Christ and the Church

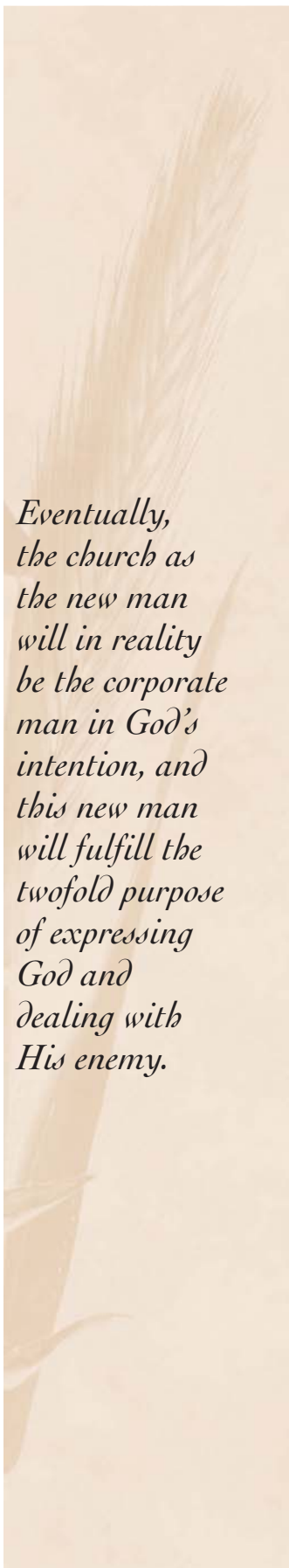
God's intention that man would express Him in His image and represent Him with His authority is fulfilled in Christ as the second man and in the church as the corporate one new man (1 Cor. 15:47; Eph. 2:15; 1:22-23; 4:24; 1 Cor. 12:12; Col. 3:10-11). The apostle Paul enables us to see that Christ is not only the last Adam but also the second man (1 Cor. 15:45, 47). The first Adam was the beginning of mankind, and the last Adam was the ending, but as the last Adam, Christ also terminated the old man (Rom. 6:6) through His all-inclusive, redemptive death on the cross. As the first man, Adam was the head of the old creation, representing it in creation; as the second man, Christ is the Head of the new man, representing it in resurrection. We believers were included in the first man by birth and became part of the second man by regeneration; our believing into Christ has transferred us out of the first man into the second man for the fulfillment of God's purpose in His creation of man (Rom. 5:12-21).

The church is the one new man, who is corporate and universal, created of two peoples, the Jews and the Gentiles, and composed of all believers, who, though they are many, are one new man in the universe (Eph. 2:15). The corporate man created by God was damaged through man's fall; hence, there was the need for God to produce a new man. The producing of the new man was accomplished through Christ's abolishing in His flesh the ordinances and through His creating the new man in Himself. The more this becomes clear to us, the more we will realize that the man in Genesis 1 is a picture of the new man in God's new creation. The man in the old creation is a figure, a type, of the man in the new creation. Eventually, the church as the new man will in reality be the corporate man in God's intention, and this new man will fulfill the twofold purpose of expressing God and dealing with His enemy. For this, God's intention is to regenerate the many members of the one new man, who are the many members of the one Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). Then as the church, the corporate man in God's purpose, we, the children of God, the members of the Body of Christ, will express God and represent Him to subdue the earth, conquer His enemy, and bring in the kingdom of God.

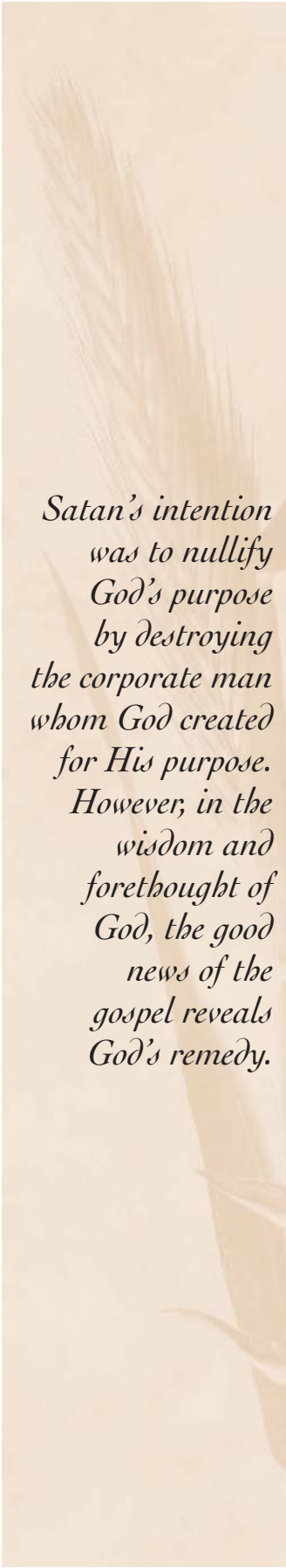
The Fall of Man from God's Purpose and Its Remedy

When the man created by God to fulfill His purpose disobeyed God, sin as the element of Satan entered into the human race with disastrous consequences. The human spirit was deadened, the soul became the self, and the body was transmuted into the flesh. As a result, the God-created corporate man could not possibly carry out God's purpose of expressing God and representing Him. We need to understand the relationship between the fall of humankind and God's original purpose.

The first aspect of God's purpose for humanity was that those created in His image would express Him. Whereas the human spirit is the organ for contacting God, receiving God, and containing God, the human soul is the organ for expressing God. However, instead of expressing God, fallen human beings express the self, as Peter notoriously did in Matthew 16, when by setting his mind on the things of men instead of the things of



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*Satan's intention
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the corporate man
whom God created
for His purpose.
However, in the
wisdom and
forethought of
God, the good
news of the
gospel reveals
God's remedy.*

God and acting boldly in the self with its opinions, he became the practical expression of Satan. Jesus “said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men” (v. 23). The Lord Jesus continued by immediately connecting this expression of Satan to the self: “Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (v. 24). Here Satan, the mind, and the self are exposed as a unit working to resist God’s will, and the issue of this working together is that the man created to express God instead expresses Satan, thereby nullifying the expression of God. Later, in Romans 3:23 Paul would speak of the human failure to express God: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

The fall of man also negated the second aspect of God’s purpose in His creation of humanity—to represent Him with His authority in order to deal with His enemy, recover the earth, and bring in His kingdom. In order to represent God with His authority, we must first live in obedience to Him and do all things under His authority and rule. Fallen humanity does the exact opposite of this, for it was through disobedience that sin entered into humankind, causing human beings to repeat the rebellion against God that began with Satan. Sin is not only the falling short of God’s glory and failing to express Him; as the apostle John says, “Everyone who practices sin practices lawlessness also, and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

The man created to exercise dominion over the earth is instead dominated by the element of sin as the principle of rebellion and is under the authority of darkness in the kingdom of Satan (Col. 1:13). When we study Romans 3:23 and 1 John 3:4 in light of God’s purpose as revealed in Genesis 1:26-28, we see that fallen human beings are altogether contrary to God’s purpose, expressing the self and falling short of God’s glory instead of expressing Him with His glory and rebelling against Him and becoming lawless instead of living under His rule in order to represent Him with His authority. By causing sin to enter into humanity, Satan’s intention was to nullify God’s purpose by destroying the corporate man whom God created for His purpose. Surely, with respect to the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose, this is exceedingly bad news. However, in the wisdom and forethought of God, there is the good news of the gospel that reveals God’s remedy and way to recover His chosen people and reconcile them to Himself that they may carry out His original purpose. This remedy is the person of Christ the Son of God and His redemptive work.

Christ’s incarnation and human living as the unique God-man fulfilled God’s purpose in His creation of man (John 1:1, 14; Luke 1:31-32, 35; 2:40, 52). The incarnation of Christ the Son of God is closely related to God’s purpose in His creation of man in His image and according to His likeness—that man would receive Him as life and express Him in His divine attributes (Acts 3:14; Eph. 4:24). The Lord Jesus was born of the human essence with the human virtues in order to uplift these virtues to such a standard that they could match God’s attributes for His expression (Luke 1:35). As the One who was conceived with the divine essence with the divine attributes as the content and reality of His human virtues, Christ fills the empty vessel of human virtues (Matt. 1:18, 20). The divine attributes fill, strengthen, enrich, and sanctify the human virtues for the purpose of expressing God in the human virtues. The Gospel of Luke is a revelation of the God-man Jesus, who lived a human life filled with the divine life as its content (1:35; 2:7-16, 34-35, 40, 49, 52). There are no human words to describe this One, who is the mingling of divinity with humanity (Phil. 2:5-8). In Him we see the divine attributes and the human virtues. Because the Lord Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit with the divine essence, He possesses the divine nature with the divine attributes. Because He was born of a human virgin with the human essence, He also possesses the human nature with the human virtues. The being of the Lord Jesus, His constitution, is a composition of the divine nature with its attributes and the human nature with its virtues. In Christ the divine attributes and the human virtues are mingled

together as one, and His human living was the living of a man who lived God to express the divine attributes in the human virtues (Luke 7:11-17; 10:25-37; 19:1-10). His person and His living were the fulfillment of God's purpose in creating man in His image for His expression.

As the Son of Man in His humanity, the Lord lived under God's authority (Matt. 8:9) and therefore had the standing to represent God with His authority. Moreover, the Lord was absolutely obedient, even unto the death of a cross (Phil. 2:8). As a man, He resisted Satan and brought the kingdom of God to earth, and in so doing, He fulfilled God's purpose in giving created man dominion over all things.

Through His all-inclusive, redemptive death on the cross, Christ solved the two major problems of fallen humanity—not expressing God and rebelling against the rule of God. Because Christ bore our sins and even was made sin for us, dying a vicarious death for our redemption, God can righteously forgive us, justify us through faith in Christ, reconcile us to Himself, and regenerate us to become His children, who will grow into sons for His expression and representation.

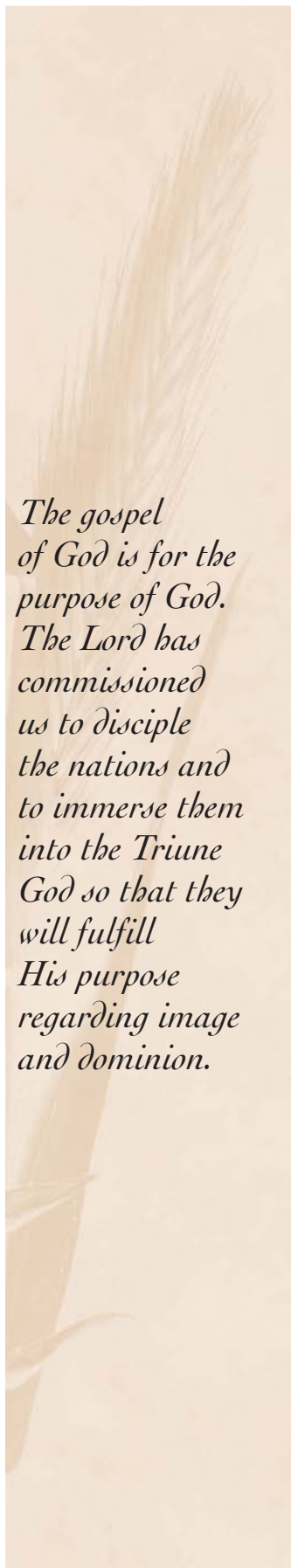
Judicial redemption and organic salvation, salvation in life, open the way for God to fulfill His intention that all the believers in Christ would become a reproduction of Christ, who lived a life in which the attributes of God were expressed in the virtues of man. Christ's God-man living constituted Him to be a prototype so that He may now be reproduced in us and live again in us (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:20-21). In order to become a reproduction of Christ, we need to be reborn of the pneumatic Christ in our spirit and transformed in our soul by Christ as the life-giving Spirit (John 3:6; 2 Cor. 3:18). The Christ who lives in us is the One who possesses the human virtues strengthened and enriched by the divine attributes; He remains a composition of the divine nature with its attributes and the human nature with its virtues. This wonderful, indwelling Christ is now seeking to live in the believers the kind of life that He lived on earth. Within us He is living a life that is a composition of the divine attributes and the human virtues. When we love the Lord, pursue Him, and have fellowship with Him, we spontaneously live in a condition that is far beyond human description, because we live a life that is humanly divine and divinely human for the expression of Christ as the image of God for the glory of God. The more we open ourselves to the Lord and desire to be joined to Him as one (1 Cor. 6:17), the more we are filled by Him and live out the glory of divinity and the virtues of humanity (Phil. 4:4-9).

The Gospel of God and the Purpose of God

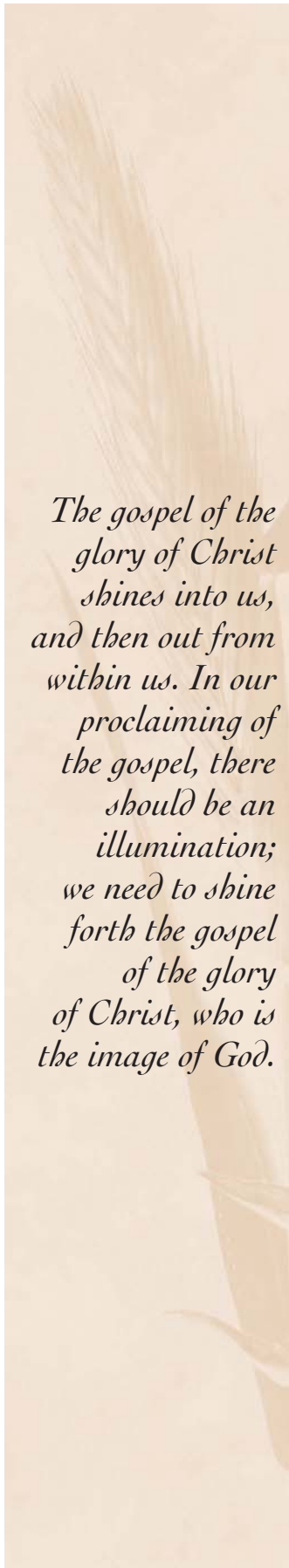
The gospel of God (Rom. 1:1) is for the purpose of God. The Lord has commissioned us to disciple the nations and to immerse them into the Triune God, not so that believers will spend eternity in a fabulous dwelling in heaven but so that they will be brought back to God for the fulfillment of His purpose regarding image and dominion. If we would appreciate this, we need to know the gospel as the gospel of the glory of Christ and as the gospel of the kingdom.

The Gospel of the Glory of Christ, Who Is the Image of God

Paul and his co-workers announced the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:3-4; 1 Tim. 1:11). Glory is God expressed in splendor and is intrinsically related to God's economy to work Himself into us and bring us into glory for His expression (Heb. 2:10). The glory of God is involved with Christ's incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and coming again. The Word became flesh, and the glory of His divinity was concealed within the shell of His humanity, yet His disciples beheld His glory (John 1:14; Matt. 17:2). In His life and work on earth, the Lord Jesus did not seek His own glory but the glory of the One who sent Him (John 7:18;



The gospel of God is for the purpose of God. The Lord has commissioned us to disciple the nations and to immerse them into the Triune God so that they will fulfill His purpose regarding image and dominion.



The gospel of the glory of Christ shines into us, and then out from within us. In our proclaiming of the gospel, there should be an illumination; we need to shine forth the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

8:50, 54). The glory of Christ's divinity was released through the breaking of the shell of His humanity (12:23-24), and then Christ was glorified in His resurrection (Luke 24:26; Acts 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:21). Because Christ was glorified in His ascension, He is the model of a person who has entered into glory, where He is crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9-10; 6:19-20; 9:24). The Lord as the Son of Man will come in the glory of the Father (Matt. 16:27; Luke 21:27), and in the New Jerusalem for eternity, Christ, the Lamb as the lamp, will shine with God as the light to illuminate the New Jerusalem with the glory of God (Rev. 21:11, 23; 22:5).

Since Christ is the image of God and the effulgence of His glory, the gospel of Christ is the gospel of His glory that illuminates and shines forth (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:3-4). The gospel of the glory of Christ is the gospel of the glory of the blessed God (1 Tim. 1:11). The gospel with which the apostle Paul was entrusted is the effulgence of the glory of the blessed God (Heb. 1:3; Rom. 1:25; 9:5). By dispensing God's life and nature in Christ into God's chosen and redeemed people, this gospel shines forth God's glory, in which God is blessed among His people (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3, 6, 12, 14).

This gospel illuminates, radiates, and shines in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). God shines in our hearts through the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that is, in the enlightenment that causes us to know the glory of God in the gospel of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 God, *image, Christ, glory, gospel*, and *illumination* are all in apposition and refer to the same wonderful person. God is the image, the image is Christ, Christ is the glory, the glory is the gospel, and the gospel is the illumination. The glory of Christ manifested in the face of Jesus is the God of glory expressed through Jesus, who is the effulgence of the glory of God, and to know Him is to know the God of glory (Acts 7:2). Through the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, the Christ of glory as the excellent treasure is received by the believers; thus, the shining of the reality of Christ, the embodiment and expression of the Triune God, is the treasure within us (2 Cor. 4:6-7). God's shining—His dispensing—in our hearts brings into us a treasure, the all-inclusive Christ, who is the embodiment of the Triune God as the life-giving Spirit to be our life, our life supply, and our everything for God's corporate expression. Now we all, with unveiled face, may behold and reflect the glory of the Lord and be transformed into the same image—the image of the resurrected Christ—from glory to glory. The marvelous result of the gospel of the glory of God in Christ as the image of God is the fulfillment of our being created in the image of God for His expression.

God shines in our hearts so that we may shine on others in order that they too may know the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the knowledge of Christ, who expresses and declares God (Phil. 2:15; John 1:18). The gospel of the glory of Christ first shines into us, and then it shines out from within us (Matt. 5:16). In our proclaiming of the gospel, there should be an illumination; we need to shine forth the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, from within us. Christ as the treasure within us is the source of the power energizing us and enables us to manifest the truth, the divine reality. If we would live for such a manifestation of the truth, we must renounce the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness and not adulterating the word of God (2 Cor. 4:2). Furthermore, in announcing the gospel of the glory of Christ, we should not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, who is the content of the gospel (v. 5). In doing this, we testify of Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever (Rom. 9:5); the eternal Word incarnated to be a man (John 1:1, 14); Jesus crucified as a man to be our Savior and resurrected to be designated the Son of God in and with His humanity (Acts 4:10-12; 13:33; Rom. 1:3-4); and Christ exalted to be the Lord, the One who is the image of God and the effulgence of His glory (10:12; 1 Cor. 12:3). Those who receive the gospel of the glory of Christ through our shining will have Christ as the precious treasure dispensed into them, and then they too will begin to be transformed into the image of Christ for the corporate expression of God in glory.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

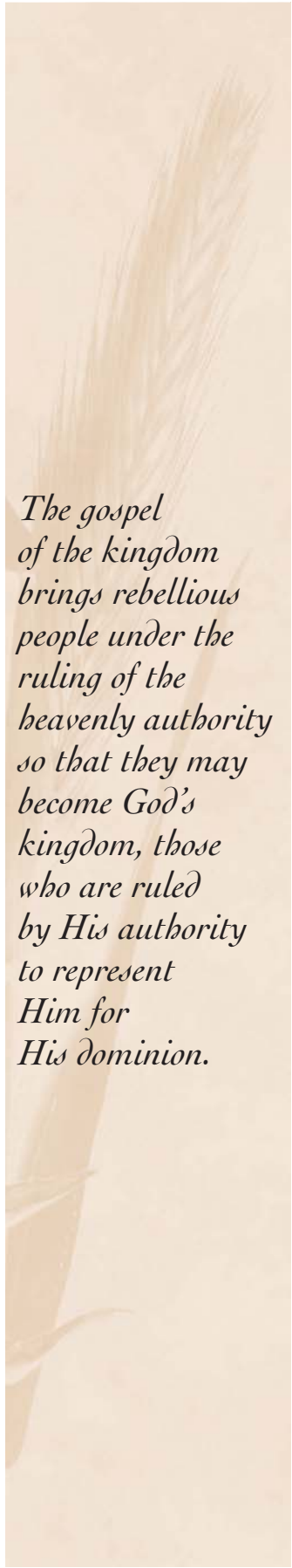
As the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, is related to the image of God, so the gospel of the kingdom is related to the rule, authority, and representation of God for dominion over the earth. To receive the gospel in these two aspects is to be saved for God's purpose (2 Tim. 1:9) in order to live for the fulfillment of this glorious purpose.

The kingdom of God is a divine sphere for God to work out His plan, a realm where God can exercise His authority to accomplish whatever He intends (Mark 1:15; John 3:3, 5; Matt. 12:28; Rev. 11:15). The kingdom of God is the ruling, the reigning, of God, with all its blessings and enjoyment; this delightful realm is the kingdom of the Son of God's love (Col. 1:13). God's kingdom is not only His reign over the universe in a general way with His authority and power but also His reign in a particular way in the sense of life (John 3:3, 15; Rom. 8:2, 6, 10-11, 14) and into which we enter through regeneration. As God incarnate, the Lord Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God, that is, to establish a realm in which God can carry out His purpose through the exercise of His authority (John 1:1, 14; 3:3, 5; 18:36; Mark 4:3, 26-29; Matt. 12:28). From God's point of view, the kingdom is the development of Himself in Christ as the seed of life sown into the believers and becoming a realm in which He rules. From the point of view of God's enemy, the kingdom is the subduing of rebellion (Mark 4:37-39; Matt. 12:28).

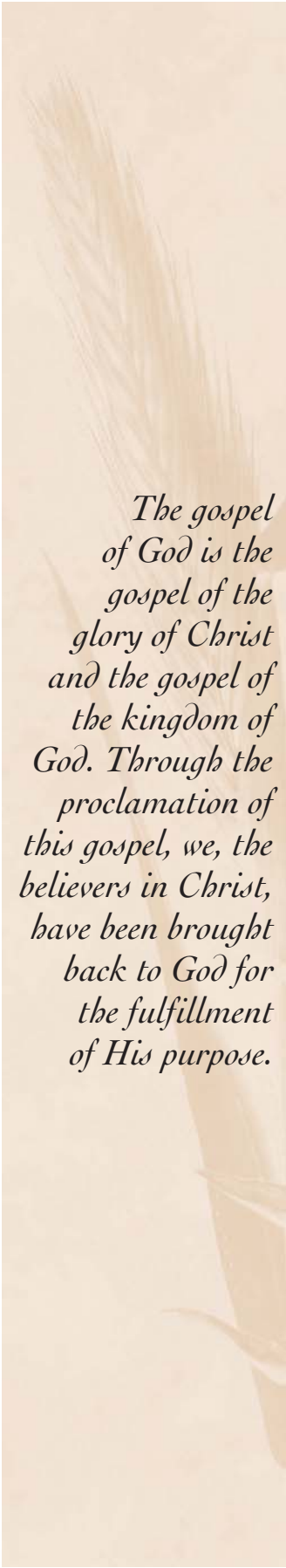
The gospel of the kingdom of God addresses the fundamental problem in the universe—rebellion against the authority of God (Isa. 14:12-14). Satan intends to violate God's sovereignty, usurp God's authority, overthrow God's throne, and establish his own kingdom (Matt. 12:26; Eph. 2:2). When the man created by God for His purpose fell by disobeying God and ingesting sin as a satanic element, he rebelled against God, put God's authority aside, denied God's authority, rejected God's rule, and lived a life of sin as lawlessness (Gen. 3:6, 11; Rom. 5:12; 1 John 3:4).

Through the gospel of the kingdom, God brings rebellious people under the ruling of the heavenly authority so that they may become His kingdom, those who are ruled by His authority and who are transformed into those who represent Him for His dominion (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:5-6). The New Testament preaches the gospel in the way of the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15; Acts 8:12). Because the kingdom of God is the real gospel, to know the gospel requires that we know the kingdom. The gospel is for the kingdom, and the gospel is proclaimed so that rebellious sinners might be saved, qualified, and equipped to enter into the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:17). The gospel of grace, the gospel of life, and the gospel of salvation are all for the kingdom; the kingdom is the center, the hub (John 3:16; Acts 20:24; 4:12). The gospel of the kingdom brings people not only into God's salvation but also into the kingdom, for the emphasis of the gospel of the kingdom is on the heavenly ruling of God and the authority of the Lord. This gospel brings the believers into the realm of the divine ruling so that they may participate in the blessings of the divine life in the divine kingdom (1 Thes. 2:12). In Matthew in particular, the goal of the gospel of the kingdom is to set up the kingdom of the heavens by immersing people into the Triune God, making them citizens of the kingdom of God (28:19; Rom. 14:17).

Through the proclaiming of the gospel of the kingdom, God commands everyone to repent for the kingdom of God (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Acts 17:30). To repent is to have a change of mind, a drastic change in thought and concept, issuing in regret; to repent also includes having a radical turn in one's purpose (Luke 3:3, 8; 5:32; 17:3; Acts 17:30-31). Those who repent realize that originally they were rebellious and against God and His will but that they have now turned back to the Lord in glad submission to His authority and rule. Repentance is mainly for us to enter into the kingdom of God. Unless we repent—that is, have a change of concept resulting in a change of view and value—we cannot enter into the kingdom of God. In His "proclaiming the gospel of God" (Mark



The gospel of the kingdom brings rebellious people under the ruling of the heavenly authority so that they may become God's kingdom, those who are ruled by His authority to represent Him for His dominion.



The gospel of God is the gospel of the glory of Christ and the gospel of the kingdom of God. Through the proclamation of this gospel, we, the believers in Christ, have been brought back to God for the fulfillment of His purpose.

1:14), the Lord Jesus Himself said, “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the gospel” (v. 15). To enter into the kingdom of God, people need to repent of their sins and believe in the gospel so that their sins may be forgiven and so that they may be regenerated by God to have the divine life, which is the life of the divine kingdom.

As believers in Christ, we have been regenerated to enter into the kingdom of God as a realm of the divine life and of the divine species to live under the blessed rule of God in life, light, and love (John 3:3, 5, 15-16; Col. 1:12-13). The requirement for entering into the kingdom of God as the realm of the life of God is to be born of God in our spirit to become children of God possessing the life and nature of God (John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:2) and having the only life—the indestructible eternal life—that matches the nature of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is a divine realm to be entered into, a realm that requires the divine life. Hence, the unique way to enter into the kingdom of God is to receive God as life and to gain God Himself; this is regeneration (John 3:3, 5, 15; 1 John 5:11-12). As those who have believed into Christ as the Son of God, we have been born into the kingdom of God, and now the divine life in our spirit knows the kingdom of God. As startling as it may sound, the kingdom of God as a realm of life into which we have entered through regeneration is a realm of the divine species. Yes, the children of God are of the same species as God, just as human children are of the same species as their parents. We have entered into the divine realm, the realm of the divine species, by being born of God to become children of God, God-men, who live according to the life and nature of God but not as part of the Godhead (John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5, 15; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 3:2). This realm is indescribably wonderful and enjoyable, full of love, life, and light. God the Father has “delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). Through regeneration based on redemption, we have been transferred into the delightful kingdom of the Son of God’s love—a realm where we are ruled in love with light and life. The kingdom in which we, the believers in Christ, find ourselves today is a realm full of life, light, and love (1 Pet. 2:9).

In this delightful realm we fulfill God’s purpose by expressing Him and representing Him with His authority. In this realm we are being saved in the divine life (Rom. 5:10) in order to be transformed by the renewing of the mind and to be conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God for God’s corporate expression (12:2; 8:29). In this realm we are also learning to reign in life by receiving the gift of righteousness and of the abundance of grace, which reigns unto eternal life. As a result, we live under the authority and rule of God to represent Him as we preach the gospel of the kingdom throughout the inhabited earth (Matt. 24:14), teaching the new believers to observe all that the Lord has commanded us (28:20).

The gospel of God surely is intrinsically related to the eternal purpose of God concerning image and dominion, for which He created humankind in Genesis 1:26-28. God’s intention is to have on earth a corporate person to express Him with His glory and to represent Him with His authority so that He may establish on earth a kingdom in which His glory is manifested and His will is done. Since human beings have fallen from this purpose, coming short of God’s glory and living a life of lawlessness, God sent Christ as the second man to fulfill His purpose and to give His life as a ransom for many so that His chosen ones may be redeemed, reconciled, and regenerated. The gospel of God is the gospel of the glory of Christ and the gospel of the kingdom of God. Through the proclamation of this gospel, we, the believers in Christ, have been brought back to God for the fulfillment of His purpose. God saved us for His own purpose (2 Tim. 1:9), and now His purpose may become our purpose (3:10) as we present ourselves to the Lord to live personally and corporately as His expression and for His representation. This is the goal of the purpose of God and the gospel of God concerning image and dominion. **AFC**