

ENLIGHTENED TO SEE THE ECONOMY OF THE MYSTERY

BY RON KANGAS

As the resurrected Christ was walking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He asked them, "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26). Then "beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He explained to them clearly in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (v. 27). The things in the Scriptures concerning the Christ were not self-evident but required the explication that could be provided only by the Lord Himself. Later, in the evening, while He was reclining at table with them, "He took the loaf and blessed it, and having broken it, He began handing it to them" (v. 30). Immediately, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him, realizing that this One who had been conversing with them was the crucified and resurrected Jesus (v. 31). "He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (v. 35). Spontaneously and with a sense of amazement, they said to one another, "Was not our heart burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was opening to us the Scriptures?" (v. 32). They rose up, returned to Jerusalem, found the eleven and those with them assembled together, and related to them the things that had occurred on the road and how the resurrected Christ was made known to them (vv. 33, 35). "As they were speaking these things, He Himself stood in their midst" (v. 36). After He assured those present that He, the resurrected Jesus, was not a specter but had a body of flesh and bones, He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms concerning Me must be fulfilled" (v. 44), indicating that He would clearly explain to them, as He had done to the disciples on the road, the things in all the Scriptures concerning Himself. "Then He opened their mind to understand the Scriptures" (v. 45). In this portion of Luke's narrative, there are three instances of something being opened. The Scriptures were opened, the eyes of the two disciples were opened, and the minds of those who were assembled together and to whom the Lord appeared were opened. From this we learn that in order to have a genuine understanding of the Scriptures, the resurrected Christ needs to open our mind, our eyes, and the Scriptures. Apart from this, we can neither understand the Word of God nor perceive that the Scriptures testify concerning Christ and that when we study the Word we should come to Him so that we may have life from the One whose words are spirit and life (John 5:39-40; 6:63).

Today our need is the same as that of those to whom the Lord appeared and spoke in Luke 24. In order to understand the New Testament, especially the Epistles of Paul, both the Scriptures and our mind must be opened by the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18) through His enlightening (Eph. 1:18), and the eyes of our spiritual heart must be opened by the shining of the divine light into our inner being and by the application of the anointing Spirit. In particular, we need this threefold opening to receive a real spiritual understanding of chapter 3 of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. Some of the deepest verses in the entire Bible are found in Ephesians 3. It is reasonable to claim, as matured and

experienced expositors have done, that one of the deepest, most profound, and most mysterious verses in this chapter is verse 9: "To enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things." Admitting the need of the threefold opening mentioned above, this essay will attempt to open this verse little by little, considering the following crucial matters: being enlightened, being enabled to see, the mystery hidden in God throughout the ages, and the economy of the mystery.

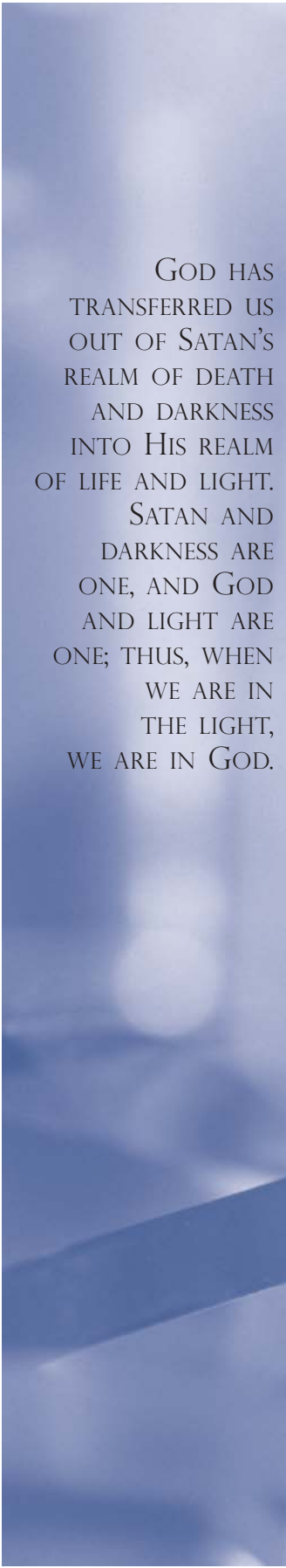
Experiencing the Shining of the Divine Light

In order to be enlightened, we must first experience God as light, because it is only the divine light, the shining of God in Christ, that brings forth enlightenment: "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Light, an expressive attribute, is the nature of God in His expression and, we may say, the nature of God's expression. Light is related to life (John 1:4). As the nature of God's expression, the divine light shines in the divine life and is the source of the divine truth (1 John 1:6; John 8:12). Light is God's shining, God's expression. When God is expressed, the nature of that expression is light. A great principle in the Bible is that light and life go together (Psa. 36:9). Where light is, there is life, and where life is, there is light. If we are under God's dispensing through His shining, we participate in God's nature as light, and we are constituted with this element of His nature to become light in the Lord (2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:8). Furthermore, the divine light is the source of the divine truth (John 1:5, 9; 18:37). When the divine light shines into us, it becomes truth (8:12, 32). The more the divine light shines into us, the more the divine things become real to us. Because light is the source of truth and truth is the issue of light, when we walk in the light, we practice the truth.

God, "the blessed and only Sovereign...who alone has immortality," dwells in "unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:15-16). Since the divine light is unapproachable, how can God as light shine upon us and into us without consuming us? The answer is that God, who is light itself, has embodied Himself in a marvelous lamp, and this lamp is the incarnate Son, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). The lamp, the embodiment and incarnation of God as light, is the redeeming Lamb. The light, which would consume us if we tried to approach it and if it shined upon us, is in the Lamb, the One who redeemed us. Because God wants to become one with us, He, the light, has embodied Himself in Christ, the Lamb-lamp; this causes God and Christ to be one light with the Father in the Son being expressed through the Son, who is the effulgence of God's glory (Heb. 1:3). Thus, the Lamb makes it possible for God to shine Himself into us so that we may be born of the light to become sons of light. "While you have the light," Jesus said, "believe into the light, so that you may become sons of light" (John 12:36). Christ, the Son of God, is the light of the world (8:12), but those who are born of light, having the life and nature of God through regeneration, are also the light of the world (Matt. 5:14). This is precisely what happened to Saul of Tarsus (known to us as Paul), who once was darkness but became light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8); he was constituted with the divine light and was therefore able to enlighten others and turn them from darkness to light (Acts 26:18).

Paul was saved by light. While he was on a journey to Damascus, breathing out murder against the believers and arresting those who called upon the name of the Lord, a great light from heaven suddenly flashed around him (9:3; 22:6). In his testimony to King Agrippa regarding this, Paul said that "a light from heaven beyond the brightness of the sun" shined around him (26:13), and he testified that this was "the heavenly vision" that directed his life from that point forward (v. 19). Paul was smitten by this heavenly light, fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (v. 14). This "Me," who identified Himself as Jesus (v. 15), was a corporate Me, comprising the Lord and all His believers:

THE LAMB MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR GOD TO SHINE HIMSELF INTO US SO THAT WE ARE BORN OF THE LIGHT. CHRIST IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, BUT THOSE WHO ARE BORN OF LIGHT, HAVING THE LIFE AND NATURE OF GOD THROUGH REGENERATION, ARE ALSO THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.



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Saul did not have this revelation. He thought that he was persecuting Stephen and other Jesus-followers, who were in the Way, which he considered heresy (24:14). He did not know that when he persecuted these he persecuted Jesus, for they were one with Him by being united with Him through faith in Him. He considered that he was persecuting people on earth, never thinking that he touched anyone in heaven. To his great surprise a voice from heaven told him that He was the One whom he was persecuting and that His name was Jesus. To him this was a unique revelation in the universe! By this he began to see that the Lord Jesus and His believers are one great person—the wonderful “Me.” This must have impressed and affected him for his future ministry concerning Christ and the church as the great mystery of God (Eph. 5:32) and laid a solid foundation for his unique ministry. (Lee, Recovery Version, Acts 9:4, note 1)

Paul was smitten by the divine light and born of the divine light to become a son of light and was governed by the heavenly vision of the corporate Me; thus, he was able to enlighten others in his ministry. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 he says, “The God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” God shined in Paul’s heart so that he could shine on others for them to have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Thus, he could say, “We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord” (v. 5).

On the day he saw the light from heaven and heard the voice of the resurrected and ascended Christ, Paul received a commission from the Lord: “I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me and of the things in which I will appear to you” (Acts 26:16). Then the Lord said that He would send Paul to the Gentiles “to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God” (v. 18). To be turned from darkness to light is to be transferred out of darkness into light (1 Pet. 2:9). Darkness signifies sin and death, and light signifies life and righteousness. Darkness is the expression and sphere of Satan in death, and light is the expression and sphere of God in life. God has transferred us out of Satan’s realm of death and darkness into His realm of life and light. Satan and darkness are one, and God and light are one; thus, when we are in the light, we are in God.

As light is the nature of God in His expression, so darkness is the nature of Satan in his evil works ([1 John] 3:8). Thank God that He has delivered us out of the satanic darkness into the divine light (Acts 26:18; 1 Pet. 2:9). The divine light is the divine life in the Son operating in us. This light shines in the darkness within us, and the darkness cannot overcome it (John 1:4-5). (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 John 1:5, note 4)

Formerly, we were in darkness and lived in darkness (Matt. 4:16), but we have been delivered out of the authority of darkness (Col. 1:13) and transferred into the divine light, into the shining God Himself. We “were once darkness but are now light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). “We were once not only dark but darkness itself. Now we are not only the children of light but light itself (Matt. 5:14). As light is God, so darkness is Satan. We were darkness because we were one with Satan. Now we are light because we are one with God in the Lord” (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 5:8, note 1). Having been transferred out of the satanic darkness into the divine light, we may enjoy the all-inclusive Christ as “the allotted portion of the saints in the light” (Col. 1:12). If we open our heart to the shining God, our entire inner being will be full of light, not having any dark part, for “the whole will be full of light as when the lamp with its rays illuminates” us (Luke 11:36).

To be turned from darkness to light is to be turned from “the authority of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). Satan has his own kingdom (Matt. 12:26), and the authority of Satan is the kingdom of Satan, which belongs to darkness. Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31) and the ruler of the authority of the air (Eph. 2:2), having his authorities and his angels, who are his subordinates as the rulers of the darkness of this world (6:12). Therefore, Satan has his kingdom, which Paul designates as “the authority

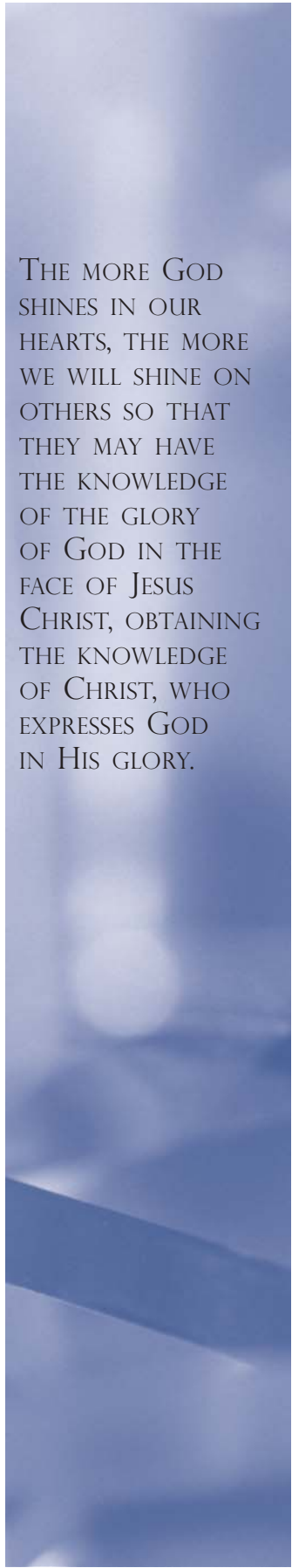
of darkness" (Col. 1:13). When we opened to the shining of the divine light and believed into the Son of God to receive eternal life (John 1:9-12; 3:15), we were transferred out of the authority of Satan to God. To be transferred to God actually means to be transferred to the authority of God, which is the kingdom of God, belonging to light. We were once in darkness under the authority of Satan, but we have been transferred out of darkness and the authority of Satan into light and the authority of God.

In Acts 26:23 Paul testified to King Agrippa, saying "that the Christ would suffer and that He, being the first to rise from the dead, would announce light both to the people and to the Gentiles." According to the context, the announcing of light refers to "the enlightening of God, who is light (1 John 1:5), shining in Christ...through the preaching of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4, 6)" (Lee, Recovery Version, Acts 26:23, note 2). Christ as the image of God is the effulgence of God's glory; thus, the gospel of Christ is the gospel of the glory of Christ that shines in our hearts. By dispensing God's life and nature in Christ into those who are drawn by God to believe into His Son, the gospel of the glory of Christ shines forth God's glory. God's shining in our hearts results in the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; this is the enlightenment that enables us to know the glory of God in the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). The more God shines in our hearts, the more we will shine on others, as Paul did in his ministry, so that they may have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; they will obtain the knowledge of Christ, who expresses and declares God in His glory. The gospel of the glory of Christ first shines into us, as it shined upon Saul of Tarsus, and then it shines out from within us (Phil. 2:15).

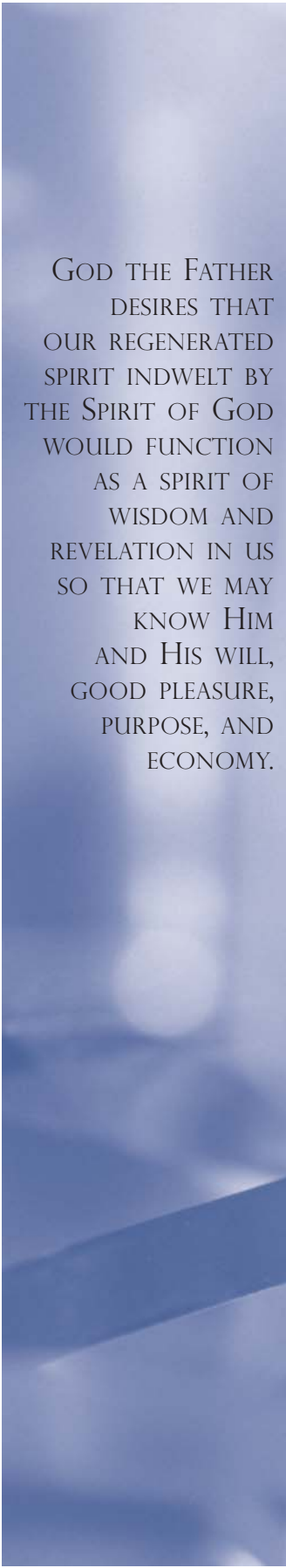
An example of the shining of the gospel of the glory of Christ is presented for our consideration in Acts 13. Verse 47 quotes an Old Testament prophecy, saying, "The Lord has commanded us, 'I have set you as a light of the Gentiles, that you would be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth.'" Amazingly, Paul applied this prophecy concerning Christ to himself. "This word is a quotation from Isa. 49:6, which refers to Christ as God's Servant, whom God made a light to the Gentiles that His salvation might reach to the end of the earth. Because he was one with Christ in carrying out God's salvation in Christ, the apostle Paul applied this prophetic word to himself in his ministry of gospel preaching" (Lee, Recovery Version, Acts 13:47, note 1). In his announcing the gospel, as recorded in this chapter, Paul, who had been constituted with the shining God in His Son, was "made a light to the Gentiles," and his gospel preaching was full of divine light.

This light was expressed in Paul's message concerning the crucified and resurrected Christ as the Savior: "From this man's [David's] seed, God, according to promise, brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus" (v. 23). In verse 32 Paul went on to say, "We announce to you the gospel of the promise made to the fathers." The seed of David mentioned in 2 Samuel 7:12 is actually Christ as God's firstborn Son (v. 14; Heb. 1:5-6), who has both divinity and humanity and is typified by Solomon. The word concerning "your seed" in 2 Samuel 7:12 and "My son" in verse 14 implies that the seed of David would become the Son of God; that is, a human seed (descendant) would become a divine Son. This corresponds to Paul's word in Romans 1:3-4 concerning Christ as the seed of David being designated the Son of God in His humanity in resurrection. This seed was Jesus, the God-man, who was the Son of God by virtue of His divinity alone (Luke 1:35). Through His resurrection He as the human seed became the Son of God in His humanity as well.

This revelation is further developed 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.'" In verses 32 and 33 we see that Christ as the Firstborn of God was promised to the fathers and that God fulfilled this promise by raising up Jesus. Resurrection was a birth to the man Jesus, for He was begotten of God in His resurrection to be the firstborn Son among many brothers (Rom. 8:29); He was the only begotten Son of God from eternity, and in the Godhead He will forever be the only



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begotten Son (John 1:18; 3:16). Nevertheless, after His incarnation and through resurrection, He was begotten by God in His humanity to be God's firstborn Son, possessing both divinity and humanity. Paul could proclaim this God who became man and man who became God as the gospel because he was able to see the Lord's resurrection in Psalm 2:7: "You are My Son; / Today I have begotten You." Paul applied the word *today* to the day of Christ's resurrection. This indicates that Christ's resurrection was His birth as the firstborn Son of God. Jesus, the Son of Man, was born to be the Son of God in His humanity through being raised up from the dead. God's raising up Jesus from the dead, therefore, was His begetting of Him to be His firstborn Son. Through incarnation God's only begotten Son put on humanity and became the God-man (John 1:14, 18; Luke 1:35); then in resurrection this God-man was born of God to be His Firstborn among many brothers conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29). The only begotten Son of God, in His resurrected humanity, is also the firstborn Son.

In Acts 13 Paul was not preaching Christ as the only begotten Son, as the Gospel of John does (1:18; 3:16). Rather, in Acts 13 Paul was preaching Christ as the firstborn Son for propagation. As the only begotten Son, the Lord is the embodiment of the divine life. For this reason, the Gospel of John emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that, as the Son of God, He is the embodiment of the divine life (1:4). Through resurrection Christ became the firstborn Son as the Life-dispenser for the propagation of life. First, Christ was the only begotten Son as the embodiment of life, but now He is also the firstborn Son for the propagation of life, bringing forth many redeemed and regenerated believers as His increase (3:29-30), those who are "added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14; 11:24). Paul could announce such an astounding revelation concerning the resurrected Christ because he himself had been enlightened directly by the Lord, who constituted him a light to the Gentiles. As a result, we can be enlightened by Paul through his writings and Luke's record of Paul's speaking.

Enlightened to See

In order to see the economy of the mystery (Eph. 3:9), our eyes need to be opened. In referring to the Gentiles to whom Paul would be sent, the Lord charged him "to open their eyes" (Acts 26:18). First, it was necessary for Paul to be blinded by the light from heaven, a light brighter than the sun, and then to have his inner eyes, his spiritual eyes, opened. As he was in Damascus praying, he saw "in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he may receive his sight" (9:12). Laying his hands on him, Ananias said to him, "The Lord has sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road on which you were coming—so that you may receive your sight" (v. 17), and "he received his sight" (v. 18). "The blinded Saul's receiving of sight was his being saved in full. This was exceedingly important to him. It was especially important that his inner eyes were opened to see the things of God concerning His mysteries and His economy" (Lee, Recovery Version, Acts 9:12, note 1). As one whose inner eyes had been opened by the Lord and who had been thoroughly enlightened by Him, Paul proclaimed the gospel in such a prevailing way that the eyes of people in darkness and under the authority of Satan were opened, causing them to turn from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God so that they could see the divine things in the spiritual realm. Seeing these things requires divine light and spiritual sight. This crucial aspect of a believer's life with the Lord is expressed in Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17 and 18: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened." The spirit spoken of in verse 17 is neither the divine Spirit nor the created human spirit but the regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. God the Father desires that this spirit function as a spirit of wisdom and revelation in us so that we may know Him and His will, good pleasure, purpose, and economy. In order to have a spirit of wisdom and revelation, the eyes of our heart—the inner eyes to see the spiritual things—must be enlightened.

The goal of having our spiritual eyes opened and of our being enlightened by the shining of the God of glory into our heart is that we would be able to “see what the economy of the mystery is” (3:9). Like Job, we may know about God and the divine things, mistaking doctrinal knowledge for a heavenly vision. Eventually, under the discipline of God the Father, all genuine believers in Christ will echo Job’s words: “I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, / But now my eye has seen You” (Job 42:5). Seeing the economy of the mystery, having the eyes of our heart enlightened, is radically different from merely engaging in a mental analysis of the text of the Bible. Knowing about the economy of the mystery is nothing more than having doctrinal information; seeing the economy of the mystery involves revelation, light, and sight.

If we would see the divine things with our spirit, we need to be humbled before the Lord. Two portions of the Lord’s direct speaking emphasize this. The first portion is in chapter 9 of the Gospel of John. After the Lord Jesus had given sight to a man born blind (vv. 1-34), He spoke a solemn word to the self-assured and self-confident religious leaders: “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind” (v. 39). When some Pharisees with Him heard this, they asked, “We are not blind also, are we?” (v. 40). Their question exposes their pride, arrogance, and self-righteousness. Being in the darkness of religion, they were self-deceived, convinced that they were not blind to spiritual things. Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin; but now that you say, We see; your sin remains” (v. 41). Those who realize that they are spiritually blind may have their spiritual eyes opened and be enlightened by the Lord and thus become able to see the things of God. Those who boast, saying, “We see,” will be left in the darkness of sin and death.

The second portion of the Lord’s direct speaking on the need to be humbled in order to see is in chapter 3 of Revelation. Addressing the messenger of the church in Laodicea, the Lord said, “You say, I am wealthy and have become rich and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are...poor and blind” (v. 17). The church in Laodicea was a genuine local church (v. 14), a local expression of the universal, organic Body of Christ, composed of redeemed and regenerated believers. However, being a child of God and being in a local church do not guarantee that one could never become spiritually blind and thus lack true spiritual insight into the genuine spiritual things. To those whom the Lord marked out as blind, He gave the following counsel: “Buy from Me...eyesalve to anoint your eyes that you may see” (v. 18). Sadly, among Christians today there are countless numbers who are spiritually blind and need to pay whatever price is necessary to buy from the Lord eyesalve to anoint their blind eyes so that they may be able to see. The eyesalve to which the Lord referred—the eyesalve that is an ointment—must be the “anointing from the Holy One” in 1 John 2:20 and 27. This eyesalve, this ointment, is the anointing Spirit, who is the resurrected Christ Himself as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45).

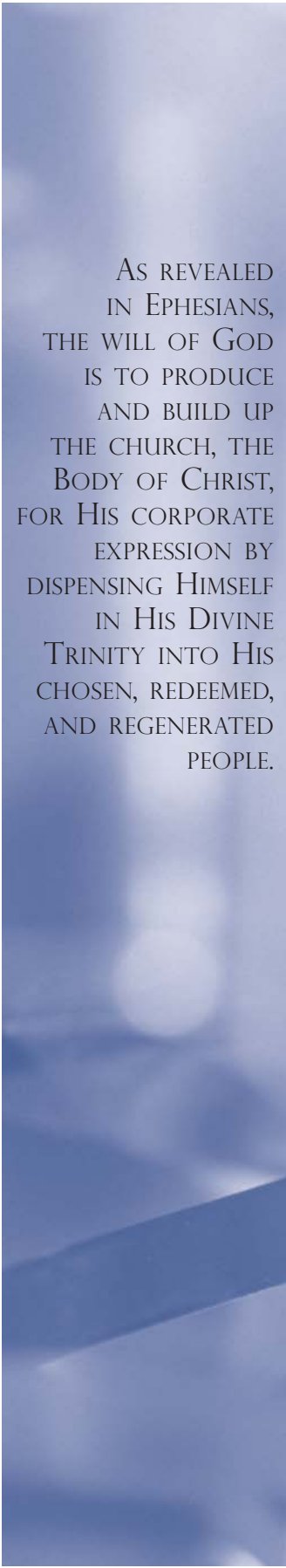
The Mystery and the Mysteries

The basic revelation in the Bible is the unveiling, the bringing to light, of God’s mystery and the mysteries related to His will, purpose, and economy. For this reason, the Bible speaks of the revelation of the mystery:

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, 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. (Rom. 16:25-26)

Whereas in verse 25 *mystery* is used in a general and inclusive way, the rest of the New Testament uses *mystery* to speak explicitly of a variety of mysteries, some of which are

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the mystery of God's will, the mystery of the kingdom of God, the mystery of the indwelling Christ, and the mystery of godliness.

Paul mentions the mystery of God's will in Ephesians 1:9: "Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself." God's will is mysterious because it is related to the mystery that was concealed within Him until He made it known. "In eternity God planned a will. This will was hidden in Him; hence, it was a mystery. In His wisdom and prudence He has made this hidden mystery known to us through His revelation in Christ, that is, through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 9, note 2).

A will is an intention, and God's will is God's intention, which is intimately related to the desire of God's heart; thus, the will of God with its mystery involves God's good pleasure. As revealed in Ephesians, the will of God is to produce and build up the church, the Body of Christ, for His corporate expression by dispensing Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people, constituting Himself into them by working Himself into their being and mingling Himself with them to produce a corporate entity (vv. 15-23; 3:16-21). This corporate entity is the fullness of God.

In Mark 4:11 the Lord Jesus spoke concerning the kingdom, saying, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to those outside all things are in parables." The kingdom of God "does not come with observation" (Luke 17:20), because it is not material but spiritual. In Luke 17:21 the Lord revealed that the kingdom of God is a person, Christ Himself: "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you." The One who Himself is the kingdom of God has sown Himself as the seed of life into His believers, who receive His word with an honest heart (Mark 4:3-8, 14-20). As they open their inner being to Christ as the seed of life within them, this seed grows and develops into a realm over which the indwelling Christ rules in and through the divine life. Because the kingdom of God in its reality is spiritual and presently invisible, it is a mystery that is revealed to some but hidden from others. Mark 4:11 shows that the kingdom of God is

a hidden mystery [that was] unveiled to the Slave-Savior's disciples. Yet since the nature and character of the kingdom of God are wholly divine, and the elements through which it is brought forth are the divine life and the divine light..., the kingdom of God, especially in its reality as the genuine church in this age (Rom. 14:17), is still entirely a mystery to the natural man. Divine revelation is required to understand it. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 1, note 1)

In Colossians 1:26 Paul refers to the "mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations but now has been manifested to His saints," and then he goes on to say that this mystery is Christ in us, the hope of glory (v. 27). Here we have the revelation of the mystery of the indwelling Christ. The mystery hidden from the ages and from the generations has been made manifest to the saints; this mystery is the all-inclusive Christ as the indwelling hope of glory. The hope of our calling is the hope of glory (Eph. 1:18; 4:4), which is the transfiguration of our body and our manifestation as the sons of God (Rom. 8:19, 23-25, 30; Phil. 3:21). The Christ who dwells within us is the hope of glory with countless riches (Eph. 3:8), and day by day we are being strengthened into our inner man according to the riches of God's glory, which are being worked into us for our transformation from glory to glory unto the full expression of God (2 Cor. 3:18; Rev. 21:10-11). In his writings Paul strongly emphasizes the indwelling Christ: "Christ is in you" (Rom. 8:10); "Jesus Christ is in you" (2 Cor. 13:5); "Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20); "until Christ is formed in you" (4:19). It is surely a mystery that the all-inclusive Christ actually dwells in us.

This leads to the mystery of godliness: "I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar

and base of the truth. And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:15-16). *Godliness* refers to godlikeness, and this involves the appearance, expression, and manifestation of God. Stated succinctly, godliness is the manifestation of God in the flesh. The church of the living God is the house of God, and in 1 Timothy *godliness* denotes the living of God in the church; it signifies God as life lived out in the church. This mystery of godliness is the mystery of God becoming man so that, in Christ and through God's salvation in life (Rom. 5:10), man may become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead or as an object of worship for the producing and building up of the church, the Body of Christ, as the corporate expression of Christ. The church of the living God is the house of God, which is the mysterious manifestation of God in the flesh.

If we study 1 Timothy 3 under the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, we will see that the church is the manifestation of God in the flesh. To be sure, God's manifestation was first in Christ as an individual expression of God in the flesh. However, verses 15 and 16 indicate not only that Christ Himself as the Head is the manifestation of God in the flesh but also that the church as the Body of Christ is the enlarged manifestation of God in the flesh. Both Christ and the church are the mystery of godliness. The manifestation of God in the flesh began with Christ when He was on earth, and now this manifestation of God in the flesh continues with the church. The church is the increase, the enlargement, and the multiplication of the manifestation of God in the flesh. A local church that is cared for according to Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 1 through 3 will become, as the house of the living God and the Body of Christ, the continuation of Christ's manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the mystery of godliness—God lived out in the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh. With this brief consideration of four divine mysteries as a foundation, we may now go on to focus on the mystery of God.

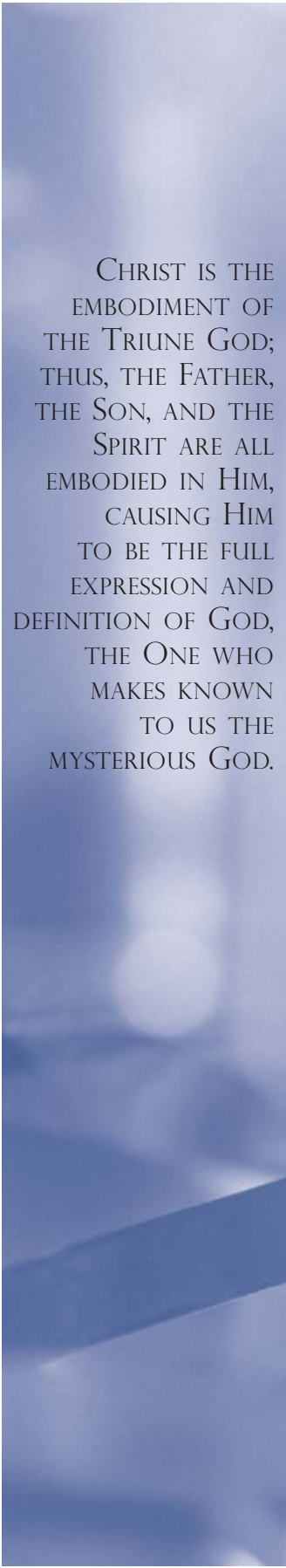
The Mystery of God—Christ

The invisible things of God, "both His eternal power and divine characteristics, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being perceived by the things made" (Rom. 1:20). Sinful human beings can perceive the invisible things of God through the visible things created by God. However, these visible things cannot manifest or make known the person of God. What is exhibited in and by the universe as God's creation are only certain characteristics of God, not the Godhead of God. It is only in Christ and through Christ that we can know God in His person and Godhead.

In Colossians 2:2 Paul speaks of "the mystery of God, Christ." For Christ to be the mystery of God means that Christ, the eternal Word, is the definition and explanation of God (John 1:1-2, 14, 18). Christ is the embodiment and expression of the unknown God (Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3) and is, therefore, the declaration of God. Because Christ is God's definition and explanation, apart from Christ we cannot find God or know God. The fact that Christ is the mystery of God indicates that if we would know God, we must know Christ, for He is God's unique definition and explanation.

The universe is a mystery, and the eternal, infinite, immeasurable creating God is also a mystery; He is a God who hides Himself (Isa. 45:15). In Christ, by Christ, and through Christ as the mystery of God, the mysterious, hidden God is revealed and made known. Christ, the Word of God and the only begotten Son of God, has explained Him (John 1:18). Everything of God and everything concerning God is in Christ, the embodiment and expression of God. Embodied in Christ is all that God is, all that God has, and all that God is doing and intends to do. Since God is in Christ and revealed by Christ, the only way to have God is to have Christ. If we know the Christ who is the mystery of God, we know God, and we can even be in God (14:20). Apart from Christ, we cannot be in God, we cannot be one with God, and we cannot experience and enjoy the reality

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of God. As the mystery of God, Christ is the key that opens to us the intrinsic being of God. In Christ we know God, we are brought into God, and we are one with God.

As the mystery of God—the embodiment, expression, definition, and explanation of God in His person and Godhead—Christ has some truly wonderful and amazing characteristics. The Christ who is the mystery of God is both the infinite God and a finite man. For God to be infinite means that He is free from all limitations and that everything belonging to Him is without measure or quantity. As the infinite God, Christ is self-existing and ever-existing; He is the great I Am (8:24, 28, 58). Through His incarnation He brought the infinite God into the finite man; God is infinite and man is finite, yet in Christ the two became one.

The Christ who is the mystery of God is the complete God manifested in the flesh. For Christ to be the complete God means that He is the Triune God. He is not merely one-third of God, the Son. He is the totality of God. Through incarnation Christ became God manifested in the flesh. *In the flesh* means in the likeness (1 Tim. 3:16), in the fashion, of man (Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7-8). He was manifested in the flesh not only as God the Son but as the entire God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. For this reason the New Testament does not say that the Son of God was manifested in the flesh; rather, it says that God was manifested in the flesh. This means that the entire God, not only the Son of God, was incarnated. Christ in incarnation is the entire God manifested in the flesh.

The Christ who is the mystery of God is the One in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Col. 2:9). In Colossians 2:9 *all the fullness of the Godhead* refers to the entire Godhead, to the complete God. Because the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead must be the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The fact that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that the Triune God is embodied in Him. As the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, Christ is therefore not only God the Son but also the entire God. Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God; thus, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all embodied in Him, causing Him to be the full expression and definition of God, the One who makes known to us the mysterious God.

The Mystery Hidden in God, Who Created All Things

The mystery in Ephesians 3:9 is the mystery that by revelation was made known to Paul (v. 3)—the mystery of Christ. The mystery, “which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things” (v. 9), is the church. According to Ephesians 3:4, the church has a particular title—the *mystery of Christ*. According to the divine revelation in the New Testament, there are two main mysteries. The first mystery, revealed in Colossians, is Christ as the mystery of God—God embodied, defined, and expressed, God explained, and God made visible (2:2). The second mystery, revealed in Ephesians, especially in chapter 3, is the church as the mystery of Christ (v. 4). Although Christ is mysterious, the church is the manifestation of Christ (1:22-23). The church as the Body of Christ is the corporate expression of Christ, who is the embodiment and expression of the Triune God (4:15-16). When we see the church, we see Christ; when we come into the church, we come into Christ; and when we contact the church, we contact Christ. This profound, experiential reality is based on the revealed truth that the church is a corporate unit produced out of Christ, who is the mystery of God (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4; 5:30-32). The all-inclusive Christ, with His unsearchable riches (3:8), is the mystery of the mysterious God, and such a Christ as the mystery of God produces a unit—the church, which is the mystery of Christ. How wonderful it is that mystery produces mystery! Christ, the mystery of God, brings forth the church, which is the mystery of Christ.

God created all things because of His will, His intention, to have the church as the corporate expression of Christ, who is the embodiment and expression of the Triune God.

After completing His work of creation, God hid within Himself the purpose for which He created the universe and all the positive things in it. Human beings were created because of God's will (Rev. 4:11), and for eons they longed to know the purpose and meaning of their existence. However, no one knew the mystery, which was hidden in God. The words uttered by Job convey the feeling of countless others: "You have clothed me with skin and flesh / And woven me together with bones and sinews. / You have granted me life and lovingkindness, / And Your visitation has preserved my spirit. / But You have hidden these things in Your heart; / I know that this is with You" (Job 10:11-13). What was hidden in God and thus remained unknowable to the Old Testament saints was revealed to the apostles and prophets.

Regarding the unveiling of this mystery, Paul bears witness: "By revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I have written previously in brief, by which, in reading it, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit" (Eph. 3:3-5). The mystery of Christ was revealed to the apostles and prophets in their spirit. The word *spirit* in verse 5 refers to the mingled spirit, the regenerated human spirit mingled with the divine Spirit to become one spirit (John 3:6; 1 Cor. 6:17). This mingled spirit was the means by which the New Testament revelation concerning Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ was unveiled to the apostles and prophets. If we would understand this revelation of the mystery previously hidden in God, we need to be in the mingled spirit (Rev. 1:10; 4:2) as the organ by which we can see and perceive the revealed mystery of Christ (Eph. 1:17).

We have seen that the two main mysteries in the New Testament are Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ. These two mysteries form the great mystery—Christ and the church (5:32). Christ and the church, the great mystery, are the meaning of the universe and of human life. God's intention in His creation of all things, especially in creating human beings, was that His created, redeemed, and regenerated people would be filled with God in Christ as the Spirit and mingled with God to produce the church. For this purpose the human spirit was created (Zech. 12:1). The crucial point here is that the desire of God's heart is to have the mystery of Christ—the church, the Body of Christ, as the increase and expression of Christ (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11, 22-23). Because we were created, redeemed, and regenerated to be living and functioning members of the Body of Christ, the Body life is the ultimate satisfaction of our spiritual experience (5:30). Unless we reach this point—the reality, actuality, and practicality of the mystery of Christ—we cannot be fully satisfied. We can be completely satisfied only when we realize that we are a part of the mystery of Christ and live as members of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:1-2, 4-5). Only the church as the mystery of Christ can accomplish God's will, fulfill His purpose, and satisfy the desire of His heart. Likewise, only the reality of the church as the mystery of Christ can produce the assurance within that as believers in Christ and children of God, our sojourn on earth is meaningful and purposeful according to God and the revelation of the mystery. The mystery of Christ should be real and practical in our daily life so that our time on earth will contribute to the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose and bring joy to His heart.

Being Enlightened to See the Economy of the Mystery

Although the eyes of our heart certainly need to be enlightened to see the mystery hidden in God, Ephesians 3:9 reveals that what we specifically need to see is the economy of the mystery. Related to the church as the mystery of Christ is the divine economy, and we need to know what this economy is. God's economy is based on God's will, God's good pleasure, and God's purpose. Revelation 4:11 says concerning God, "You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created." God is a God of purpose, having a will in which is His good pleasure, the desire of His heart (Eph. 1:5; 3:9-11; Col. 1:9). He created all things for His will so that He might accomplish and

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fulfill His purpose. God's will is God's wish; God's will is what He wants to do (Eph. 1:9). God's good pleasure is of His will and is embodied in His will, so God's will comes first (v. 5). 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" (Lee, Recovery Version, 1:9, note 2). God works all things according to the counsel of His will (v. 11); God's will is His intention, and His counsel is His consideration of the way to accomplish His will, His intention. According to His will and the desire of His heart, which He purposed in Himself (v. 9), God made an eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:11). The eternal purpose—the purpose of the ages—is the eternal plan that God made in eternity past. This plan is called the eternal purpose because it was planned in eternity past for eternity future. "God Himself is the initiation, the origination, and the sphere of His eternal purpose" (Lee, Recovery Version, 1:9, note 4). Regarding His purpose, God did not take counsel with anyone. Ephesians reveals that God's purpose is to have the church, the Body of Christ, through which He can express Himself in a corporate way. The will of God, the desire of God's heart, and God's eternal purpose are to have the church. His unique purpose is to produce and build up the church as the Body of Christ for the glorious corporate expression of the Triune God.

God's will, desire, and purpose are carried out according to God's economy. An economy is an arrangement for getting things done. God's economy is His plan and arrangement to fulfill His eternal purpose according to His will and heart's desire. God's will is what He wants to do; God's good pleasure is what He desires; God's purpose is His determined intention; and God's economy is His plan and arrangement to fulfill His purpose. His economy is His detailed, planned administration to carry out His eternal purpose by dispensing Himself, the processed and consummated Triune God, into us, His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people, in order that we would partake of the divine life and divine nature for the producing and building up of the church as the Body of Christ. The economy of the mystery is the divine arrangement of all things, all matters, and all situations in the lives of His people so that He, in Christ as the life-giving Spirit, may dispense Himself into their tripartite being, making them the same as He is in life and nature and making Himself one with them and them one with Him to fulfill His will to have the organic Body of Christ as His corporate expression. Concerning God's economy—the economy of the mystery—our spiritual eyes need to be enlightened so that we may enter into Paul's prayer that the Father would grant us, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man so that Christ may make His home in our hearts through faith (vv. 16-17). The mystery of Christ is the church revealed in 1:22-23 and 3:3-5; the building up of the church as the Body of Christ is presented in 4:12-16; the divine plan and arrangement—the economy of the mystery—is unveiled in 3:9; and the divine dispensing of the Triune God into our inner being is brought to light in 3:16-19.

To be enlightened to see the economy of the mystery is a blessing that flows from the God of purpose, the God of glory. The more we are enlightened to see the economy of the mystery, the more we will join the apostle Paul to pray for the vital spiritual experiences that will issue in our participating in the fulfillment of the economy of the mystery, the divine plan to build up the Body of Christ through the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity into the tripartite being (1 Thes. 5:23) of those who have believed into the Son of God, who have been born of God to be children of God with the life and nature of God, and who, in response to God's mercy, are willing to see, experience, and live out personally and corporately the economy of the mystery—God's plan and arrangement to fulfill His eternal purpose concerning the church, the Body of Christ, which will consummate as the New Jerusalem, the wife of the redeeming God (Rev. 21:2, 9-11). **AFC**

Work Cited

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