

*THE DIVINE WILL ACCOMPLISHED,
THE DIVINE PURPOSE FULFILLED,
AND THE DIVINE ECONOMY
CONSUMMATED BY THE OVERCOMERS
IN THE RECOVERED CHURCH*

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In the midst of inscrutable suffering, Job declared to God, “You have hidden these things in Your heart; / I know that this is with You” (Job 10:13). Job was convinced that the purpose of his existence and the meaning of his inexplicable pain and tragic loss were hidden in God’s heart. Along with all of God’s people in the Old Testament, Job did not know the purpose of God in creating the universe, bringing him into being, and allowing dreadful things to happen to him. God’s will and purpose were a mystery known only to God, who had stretched forth the heavens, laid the foundations of the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him (Zech. 12:1). This mystery was hidden in God’s heart throughout the ages, and it was revealed only in the New Testament time in Christ and to the apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:3-5, 9). If, as believers in Christ, we would understand this revealed mystery and thereby know the meaning of the universe and the significance of our existence as human beings, we need to know what God has revealed regarding His will, His purpose, and His economy and gradually realize that the will of God, the eternal purpose of God, and the economy of God are all focused on Christ with the church—the Body of Christ, the corporate new man, and the bride of Christ consummating in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth.

The Will of God

Perhaps the most important verse in the Scriptures regarding the will of God is Revelation 4:11: “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.” God’s will is what God wants; we may even say that God’s will is God’s wish, what He, as a God of purpose, with a heart’s desire, longs to bring forth for His satisfaction. Therefore, He created all things because of His will and for His will so that He might gain what He desires. The context and content of the book of Revelation indicates that God’s will, the source of the universe and all positive things within it, includes the local churches as golden lampstands, the bride being prepared for the Bridegroom, the manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth, and the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem as the eternal wife of the redeeming God. However, the most important aspect of God’s will as unveiled in Revelation is that the resurrected, ascended, and enthroned Christ is the center of God’s administration. The fact that Revelation consummates with a vision of the New Jerusalem as the wife of the Lamb indicates that the will of God, because of which He created all things, will be fulfilled by the New Jerusalem, the Lord’s counterpart. God “works all things according to the counsel [the plan] of His will” (Eph. 1:11), considering in detail the way by which He will accomplish His will.

The Will of God Related to Christ

The will of God is intrinsically related to Christ (Heb. 10:7), and apart from Christ we

cannot know and carry out the will of God. The person, life, work, and ministry of the Lord Jesus manifest the great importance of knowing and doing the Father's will: "I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). As the One who spoke and taught what He had received from the Father, He testified, "I can do nothing from Myself; as I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me" (5:30). Although in John 4 Jesus was weary, thirsty, and hungry, and the disciples had gone away into the city to buy food and upon their return urged Him to eat, He said, "I have food to eat that you do not know about...My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work" (vv. 32, 34). Based upon the fact that, in His person and living, He was the will-of-God-man, He instructed His believers to pray for the Father's will and to do the Father's will. Concerning prayer, the Lord charged us to say, "Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth" (Matt. 6:10). Because of the rebellion of Satan, the fall of man, and the usurpation of the earth by God's enemy, there is an urgent need for believers as the kingdom people to pray for God's will to be done on earth as in heaven. "The kingdom people must pray for this until the earth is fully recovered for God's will in the coming kingdom age" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 10, note 1). In addition, the believers must do the Father's will according to what He had determined in eternity past, not according to what He permits. "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens" (7:21). The kingdom is a matter of God's will and fulfills God's will; therefore, we need to do the will of the Father by seeking first the kingdom of God (6:33). In order to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the coming age, we must do the will of our Father in this age (v. 10; Rev. 4:11; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 1:5, 9, 11; 5:17; Col. 1:9; 4:12).

The apostle Paul, who received mercy to be a pattern for all believers (1 Tim. 1:16), became a reproduction of Christ as the will-of-God-man. Paul identified himself as "a called apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God" (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1). Paul became, in Christ Jesus, what God wanted him to be—an apostle, a minister, and a witness both of the things in which he had seen the Lord and of the things in which Christ would appear to him (Acts 26:16). In fact, a brother in the Lord named Ananias informed Paul that he had been chosen by God to know the will of God. Ananias said, "The God of our fathers has previously appointed you to know His will and to see the righteous One and to hear the voice from His mouth; for you will be a witness to Him unto all men of the things which you have seen and heard" (22:14-15). Since Paul was appointed to know God's will, all believers should learn from him and obey his injunction: "Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). In Ephesians 1:9 Paul testifies to a marvelous divine reality when he writes, "Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure." It is the delight, the pleasure, of God's heart to make the mystery of His will known to us, and it is a delight and pleasure for us to learn, through Paul, what the will of the Lord is in its two main aspects—Christ and the church, the great mystery (5:32).

The will of God regarding Christ is revealed in Colossians, a book concerning God's will (1:9). "Epaphras, who is one of you, a slave of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God" (4:12). This matches Paul's urgent, continual prayers in Colossians 1:9: "Since the day we heard of it [their faith and love], do not cease praying and asking on your behalf that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." God's will is centered on Christ, concentrated in Christ, and for Christ. As the content of the Epistle to the Colossians makes evident, God's will is focused on the all-inclusive, extensive Christ, who is the complete God, the perfect man, and the reality of all positive things in the universe. Christ is the image of the invisible God (1:15), the Firstborn of all creation (v. 15), the One in whom, through whom, and unto whom all things were created (v. 16), the One who is before all things and the One

in whom all things cohere (v. 17), the Head of the Body, the church (v. 18), the Firstborn from the dead (v. 18), the mystery of God (2:2), the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (v. 3), the One in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (v. 9), the Head of all rule and authority (v. 10), the reality of the feasts, the new moon, and the Sabbath (vv. 16-17), and the One who is sitting at the right hand of God and who will be manifested in glory (3:1, 4).

It is God's will that we, the believers in Christ, know, experience, enjoy, be one with, and be constituted with the Christ revealed in Colossians. God intends that the all-inclusive, extensive Christ be our portion, as typified by the land of Canaan with its riches (1:12). It is God's will that Christ would be the preeminent One, the One who has the first place in everything (v. 18). Both in the old creation (the universe) and in the new creation (the church), Christ is the preeminent One, occupying the first place. If we realize this, our Christian life will be radically changed to correspond to God's will concerning Christ. God wants us to realize that Christ dwells in us as our hope of glory (v. 27), that we are made full in Him (2:10), that we were buried together with Him in baptism and raised together with Him (v. 12), that we can experience Him as the reality of all positive things (v. 17), and that, by holding Him as the unique Head of the Body, we grow with the growth of God, that is, with the increase of the Triune God within us (v. 19). It is God's will that we, having been raised together with Christ, "seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God" (3:1). We have died with Christ, and now our life is "hidden with Christ in God" (v. 3). Christ our life will be manifested, and we also "will be manifested with Him in glory" (v. 4). For the reality and practicality of the church as the corporate new man created in the image of Christ, we need to be constituted with Christ to the extent that He becomes "all and in all" (vv. 10-11). The more we experience Christ as our life and constituent, the more the peace of Christ, to which we were called in one Body, will arbitrate in our hearts (v. 15), and the word of Christ will dwell in us richly (v. 16). Then spontaneously and gradually, we will learn to live in a way that whatever we do in word or in deed, we will do "all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (v. 17). This is the will of God regarding the all-inclusive, extensive Christ and the believers' experience of Him as everything for the one new man, the corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ.

The Will of God Related to the Church

The revelation of the will of God concerning Christ is matched by the revelation of His will regarding the church. This aspect of God's will, His intention, is presented in Romans and Ephesians. The gospel of God as proclaimed by Paul in Romans enables sinners to be reconciled to God and saved by grace through faith and thereby become sons of God and members of the organic Body of Christ, which is expressed as local churches (3:23-24; 8:14, 16, 29; 12:4-5; 16:1, 4-5, 16). This is the will of God mentioned in Romans 12. Here Paul exhorts the believers to present their bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing to God," which is a "reasonable service" (v. 1). In the following verse he says, "Do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect" (v. 2). Then Paul unveils the goal of the gospel of God—the Body of Christ: "Just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (vv. 4-5). The Body of Christ in verse 5 is the will of God in verse 2.

In this chapter the will of God is that we whom God has chosen, called, redeemed, justified, sanctified, and conformed unto glorification in the preceding eleven chapters may be members one of another to have the living of the Body of Christ (vv. 3-5). The Body of Christ is the peak of God's divine revelation. The living of the Body is the issue and goal of the presenting of our bodies, the renewing of our mind, and all the life practices in the foregoing chapters. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 2, note 6)

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The will of God is to produce and build up the Body of Christ as the corporate expression of Christ, the organism through which He moves to fulfill the desire of His heart. To live the Body life is to “prove what the will of God is” (v. 2). If we are normal members of the Body of Christ, living, acting, and functioning in the church life, we will be persons in the will of God (1 Cor. 1:1-2; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4-6).

We have pointed out that Paul was appointed to know the will of God and that in Ephesians 1:9 God made known to him “the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure.” Having received revelation directly from God, Paul could tell us that God predestinated us “unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (v. 5). God’s will is the source of the universe and all positive things therein, and intrinsically related to the will of God is His good pleasure, the desire of His heart, which must be satisfied. The counsel of God is now being carried out for the fulfillment of the will of God. In Ephesians 1:5, 9, and 11 we have the will of God, and at the end of this chapter we have “the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all” (vv. 22-23). The will of God is to have the church as the Body of Christ.

We are one Body in the organic union with Christ, a union in life portrayed by the vine with the branches in John 15. This means that Romans 12 speaks of the Body of Christ from the perspective of the organic union with Christ. Christ as our life is a uniting life; it is a life that makes us one not only with Christ but also with all the other members of Christ (vv. 4-5). The Body of Christ is not an organization or a society; on the contrary, the Body of Christ is purely an organism produced by the union, the oneness, in life that we have in Christ. The Body is not held together by strong leaders or by human determination; rather, the Body is an organic entity that is held together in the organic union with Christ. Furthermore, the actuality and reality of the Body consist in the members remaining in the organic union with Christ. Christ, who is the will of God, is the life that holds together the church as the Body of Christ, which also is the will of God.

We have seen that Paul was appointed to know the will of God and that in Ephesians 1:9 he testifies that God has made known “the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure.” According to verse 5, God the Father has predestinated us unto sonship “according to the good pleasure of His will,” and according to verse 11, He is working “all things according to the counsel of His will.” In verses 22 and 23 Paul says, “He subjected all things under His [Christ’s] feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.” Now we can see that verses 5, 9, 11, and 22 through 23 unveil the glorious fact that the will of God, in which is God’s good pleasure, is to bring forth and build up the church as the Body of Christ. Each chapter of Ephesians discloses the mystery of the Body of Christ as the organism of the Triune God in Christ from a particular point of view. Ephesians 1 reveals that the Body of Christ is the issue of the dispensing of the processed Triune God and the transmitting of the transcending Christ (vv. 3-14, 19-23). Ephesians 2 reveals that the Body of Christ is the masterpiece of the Triune God as the corporate one new man (vv. 10, 15-16). Ephesians 3 reveals that the Body of Christ becomes the fullness of the Triune God by our experiencing the unsearchable riches of Christ and by Christ’s making His home in our hearts (vv. 8, 14-19). Ephesians 4 reveals that the Body of Christ is the union, mingling, and incorporation of the processed and consummated Triune God with the regenerated believers and that this unique Body is built up in love by the one ministry in which all the members participate and by their growth into the Head, Christ, in all things (vv. 4-6, 11-16). Ephesians 5 reveals that the Body of Christ is composed of the children of light to be the bride, the counterpart, of Christ for the satisfaction of Christ (vv. 1, 8-9, 26-27). Ephesians 6 reveals that the Body of Christ is the corporate warrior of the Triune God empowered by the four-fold power in 1:19-23 and covered by the whole armor of God (6:10-20). If we see the essential connection between the will of God and the Body of Christ in chapter 1 and then view the Body of Christ from these various perspectives in chapters 1 through 6, we will honor and obey Paul’s command in 5:17 to “understand what the will of the Lord is.”

The Eternal Purpose of God

Based upon His will, His good pleasure, and His counsel, God in Christ made His eternal purpose (1:5, 9, 11). In his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul cares for God's purpose and speaks from the heart of God's purpose, telling us that God created all things "according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus" (3:11). God's eternal purpose is the eternal plan made in eternity past, having been planned in eternity past for eternity future. What God planned before time and space were created will be fulfilled and consummated in time and then will endure forever in the new heaven and the new earth. God has made "known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself" (1:9). The fact that God purposed in Himself reveals that God Himself is the source, the origination, the initiation, and the realm of His eternal purpose. Regarding His eternal purpose, which He made in Christ and which is being carried out, fulfilled, and accomplished in Christ, God did not take counsel with anyone. God is causing all things to work together for His purpose (Rom. 8:28), and in His wisdom and sovereignty He "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11).

We need to be impressed with the fact that, although God purposed "in Himself" (v. 9), He made His eternal purpose "in Christ" (3:11). The phrase *in Christ* indicates that in eternity past Christ existed simultaneously with God and implies Christ's eternal, divine existence and His deity. This also indicates that Christ is the embodiment of God (Col. 2:9) and implies a commission (Matt. 16:16). As revealed in the New Testament, Christ is the embodiment and expression of the Triune God, the One in whom and through whom all things were created (John 1:3; Col. 1:16) and the One who passed through the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement. In this wonderful Christ God made His eternal purpose. Christ Himself is the center of God's purpose, and He is the realm, sphere, means, goal, and aim of God's eternal purpose. In Christ God made His plan to bring forth the church, the Body of Christ, to be the expression of Christ, who is preeminent, having the first place in all things (v. 18).

The context of Ephesians 1 and 3 unveils the profound truth that God's eternal purpose is to have the church, the Body of Christ and the corporate new man (2:15; 4:24), through which He can express Himself to the praise of the glory of His grace (1:6). What God purposed in Himself (v. 9), the purpose according to which He predestinated us unto sonship (vv. 5, 11), is the church, which is the Body of Christ, "the fullness of the One who fills all in all" (v. 23). God's eternal purpose was not only made in Christ (3:11), but it was also intended for Christ to have the church, His Body, as His fullness, for His corporate expression. "Christ, who is the infinite God without any limitation, is so great that He fills all things in all things. Such a great Christ needs the church to be His fullness for His complete expression" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 1:23, note 3). Through the church—the goal of God's eternal purpose—God will "head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him" (v. 10). God subjected all things under the feet of Christ and "gave Him to be Head over all things to the church" (v. 22). *To the church* reveals the direct connection between the Head, Christ, and the church, the Body of Christ, and also indicates that there is a continual transmission to the church from the ascended Christ, who is "far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (v. 21). Satan's goal is to corrupt God's creation and to cause chaos and confusion; God's intention is to head up all things in Christ, who has been appointed to be the universal Head. Because of Satan's rebellion against God and His will, purpose, and authority and because of the satanic element injected into humanity as sin, there is chaos in God's creation, which has been made subject to vanity (Rom. 8:20). Nevertheless, God is working in Christ to liberate His creation from vanity by heading up all things in Christ through the church (v. 21; Eph. 1:10, 22-23). The first step in the heading up of all things in Christ is for God to bring those whom He has chosen to be holy and predestinated to be sons out of the chaos and place them under the headship of Christ. The more the church cooperates with God's

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intention and work, the more God will head up all other things. God's will and purpose are to head up the entire universe in Christ through the church.

Ephesians 3:9-11 reveals the intrinsic relationship between creation, the mystery hidden in God (v. 9), the church (v. 10), the spiritual enemies of God (v. 10), and God's eternal purpose (v. 11). If we consider verse 9 in context, we will perceive the relationship between creation and the church. God created all things for the church, not as it is commonly understood today but as it is revealed in Ephesians—the Body of Christ, the dwelling place of God, the one new man, the counterpart of Christ, and the corporate spiritual warrior. God's plan and intention in His work of creating the universe, especially man, were that man would receive the life of God to become the church. God's marvelous creation, focused on man made in His image, was for the purpose of producing the church. This is the mystery, "which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things" (v. 9). God's motive in creating all things was His will and good pleasure. The basis of His creation was His will and plan. God carried out the work of creation to accomplish His will and to fulfill the desire of His heart.

In order to accomplish His eternal purpose, God created two orders of beings with a free will—angels and humans. He first created angels to be ministering spirits, and then He created humans in His image. In His foreknowledge God realized that some of the angelic beings would rebel, asserting their created will against God's uncreated will. In this cosmic rebellion the archangel became the archenemy of God, and the other rebellious angels became the evil principalities and powers in his kingdom. Because the rebels were beings created by God, God decided not to deal with them directly by His power and authority but to defeat them through another creature—man. God wants to use man to deal with His enemy, and He created man for this purpose. God desires to use the creature man to deal with His fallen creature Satan. God's intention in this matter is fulfilled in Christ as the second man (1 Cor. 15:47) and through the church as the corporate new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24). As the second man, the Son of Man, Jesus utterly defeated the devil, destroying him and nullifying all his evil works. Then, according to His will and plan, God determined that the church would declare this victory to both angels and humans and testify to it until the kingdom of the heavens is manifested in glory at the coming of the Son of Man with His overcomers and until the kingdom of this world becomes "the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). This function of the church is an aspect of God's eternal plan in producing the church as the new man, the corporate Christ. God's purpose is to have the church through which He can make known "to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). This is according to the eternal plan that God planned in Christ, a plan that included God's way, in the God-man Jesus, to defeat the enemy, the rebellious angel Satan, and to manifest His authority through His kingdom on earth.

In verse 10 *the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies* refers to the evil ones, Satan and his angels. The church, as the Body of Christ and the corporate new man, is wrestling against "the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies" (6:12). All that these evil forces do in fighting against God with His will and purpose gives the sovereign God opportunities to manifest His manifold, multifarious wisdom, putting to shame the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. Through His wisdom God in Christ accomplished redemption, destroyed the devil, defeated the power of death, and produced the church composed of sinners who have been redeemed, saved, and regenerated. Through such a church, the multifarious wisdom will be made known throughout the universe, especially to the evil authorities and world-rulers. The mystery that had been hidden in God has been revealed; the mystery of God's purpose to produce and build up the church as the Body of Christ for the corporate expression of the Triune God and for a display of the marvelous wisdom of God to the evil powers is His way of defeating them and fulfilling His purpose to have a glorious church (5:27).

God's eternal purpose must be fulfilled in time. Between the two ends of eternity—the eternity before the creation of the universe and the eternity in the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem—there is an interval, a bridge of time, and upon this bridge there is a process in which God's purpose is accomplished. On this bridge man was created in His image to express Him in glory and to represent Him with authority. On this bridge Christ accomplished redemption through His death on the cross and brought forth the new creation through His death-conquering and life-releasing resurrection. Eventually, at the end of the present age—the age of grace, the age of the church, and the age of mystery—a declaration will be made: "The mystery of God is finished" (Rev. 10:7), because God's eternal purpose to have the church will have been fulfilled.


We need to see God's purpose in creation and redemption. God's purpose in creating man was to have a corporate man to express Him and represent Him. Creation was part of God's original purpose. Redemption, however, was remedial, and God's aim in the redemption accomplished by Christ through the shedding of His blood was to bring us back to God's eternal purpose. Having received a deep spiritual understanding of both creation and redemption, Paul says that God saved us and called us with a holy calling "according to His own purpose and grace" (2 Tim. 1:9). As believers in Christ Jesus, we must realize that we were saved by God for His purpose. He delivered us from a meaningless human existence, and through the gospel He saved us into the meaning of the universe. The human beings God created had a marvelous meaning and purpose—to express God and represent Him—but humanity fell into sin and death, and the meaning of human life was lost. Through His salvation God has rescued us and brought us back to our original purpose, God's eternal purpose, the meaning of the universe, and the meaning of human life. Now we may be assured that the sovereign God is causing all things to work together for good "to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

The Economy of God

The will of God and the purpose of God are accomplished through the economy of God (1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 1:10; 3:9). As used by the apostle Paul, the word *economy* means "household law, or administration"; the Greek word *oikonomia* literally translated is "house law." God's economy is His house law, His household administration, and this administration refers to God's purpose, His plan, with many particular arrangements. Since God's eternal purpose is to produce the church as the Body of Christ consummating in the New Jerusalem, the goal of God's economy is to gain such a church according to the desire of God's heart. Ephesians 3:9 speaks of "the economy of the mystery." The mystery hidden in God is His will and plan to bring forth the church, and the economy of God is His detailed administrative arrangement to produce the church by dispensing Himself in Christ as the Spirit into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people, in whom Christ lives (Gal. 2:20). In His essential Trinity, the Triune God cannot dispense Himself into His children, but in His economical Trinity this dispensing is not only possible but also an experiential reality. God in Christ became flesh through incarnation, experienced human living, died an all-inclusive death on the cross, resurrected with a spiritual body, and became the life-giving Spirit (John 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:45b) to dispense Himself into us, the believers, so that we may be sanctified, renewed, and transformed for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, the house of God, the one new man, the kingdom of God, and the counterpart of Christ. The consummation of this aggregate will be the New Jerusalem, the wife of the redeeming God, in the new heaven and new earth.

In order for God's eternal purpose to be fulfilled, He must produce a group of people who in every possible way are the same as He is, having the divine life and the divine nature. In life, nature, image, radiance, glory, and outward expression, these people will be the same as God in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead or as an object of worship. This is attained by God through His economy, which is worked out

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by the divine life being dispensed into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people. As God's life is increasingly wrought into them, they are saved in His life (Rom. 5:10), and an organic, metabolic process takes place within them so that they may be transformed and thus become the same as God in life and nature. Through His economy God is working Himself in His economical Divine Trinity into His redeemed and regenerated people as their life, nature, life supply, and everything so that they may be saturated with God for the producing and building up of the church as the Body of Christ, the one new man, and the counterpart of Christ. Every member of the Body, the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12), must be the same as Christ in life and nature; every part of the one new man must take Christ as their indwelling person (Eph. 3:17) and be thoroughly constituted with Christ and transformed into His image (Col. 3:10-11); and the counterpart of Christ must match Christ in life, nature, constitution, and expression in order to be joined to Him for an eternal marriage (Rev. 19:7-9).

This requires the believers in Christ to experience God's unique work, the central work of God—to work Himself into His children, the members of Christ, making Himself one with them and causing them to be one with Him so that the divine attributes may be expressed through divinely enriched human virtues to the praise of the glory of His grace and for the praise of His profound wisdom and determined intention. The central work of God is to work Himself in Christ into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people by dispensing Himself in Christ as the Spirit into their tripartite being, into their spirit and soul and body (1 Thes. 5:23). This is portrayed in Ephesians 3:16-17, where Paul prays that the Father of glory through His Spirit would strengthen us with power into our inner man so that Christ may make His home in our hearts. This is God's unique work of building Himself in Christ into us, thereby making His home in us. The goal of God's economy for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose is attained by working Himself into us. Apart from this goal, the Christian life is meaningless because it is not in harmony with God's will, purpose, goal, and economy.

The Triune God wants to make Himself our inward elements, the contents of our spirit and soul. This indicates that God's central work is focused on our person and is a matter of gaining persons to be useful in serving Him by constituting them with Himself. The principle of God's unique work is to gain persons who are genuine Triune-God-men—believers permeated, saturated, and constituted with the processed and consummated Triune God in His economy. Spiritual progress, therefore, consists in the degree to which we open our inner being to the Lord and allow Him to gain ground in us by working Himself into us. The crucial question for believers is this: Will we allow God in Christ as the Spirit to work Himself into us?

We cannot overemphasize that God's intention in His economy is to build Himself in Christ into our being. Everything that Christ is and everything that Christ has accomplished are for this one thing (John 14:20). May we, the children of God and brothers of Christ, receive mercy from God to realize that we need the Triune God to build Himself in Christ into our humanity, working Himself in Christ into us as our life, nature, and person. If we open our being to the Lord and cooperate with Him as He endeavors to carry out His central work, we will not only be persons according to God's heart, like David, but we will also become God in life, in nature, and in expression but not in the Godhead. All the steps, great and small, that God takes in our daily life are to fulfill His intention in His economy of building Himself in Christ into our being (Rom. 8:28-29). The issue of this glorious work of God is the church—the corporate, organic entity composed of Christ as the Head and the believers as the members (1 Cor. 12:12, 27).

In eternity past God made His eternal purpose in Christ, chose us to be holy, predestinated us unto sonship, determined His counsel based upon His consideration of the way to accomplish His will and purpose, and planned His economy in detail (Eph. 3:11; 1:4-5, 10-11). Now what was planned and determined in eternity past is being worked

out in time according to God's foreknowledge: "When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law, that He might redeem those under law that we might receive the sonship" (Gal. 4:4-5). Instead of being an end in itself, redemption is a necessary judicial procedure carried out by Christ to bring us into the sonship according to God's predestination. The way, the place, and the time related to Christ's redemptive work were also determined by the Triune God in eternity past, before the foundation of the world. Peter spoke of this in Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:18-20: "This man [Jesus], delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, through the hand of lawless men, nailed to a cross and killed" (Acts 2:23). This counsel was determined by the Divine Trinity in eternity past. According to 1 Peter 1:18-20, we were redeemed "with precious blood, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ; who was foreknown before the foundation of the world but has been manifested in the last of times for your sake." What was foreknown and determined in eternity past was accomplished in time. "Christ was foreordained, prepared, by God to be the redeeming Lamb (John 1:29) for His elect according to His foreknowledge before the foundation of the world. This was done according to God's eternal purpose and plan" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 1 Pet. 1:20, note 1). God sent His Son not only to accomplish redemption but also to accomplish His will (John 6:38), carry out His economy, and fulfill His eternal purpose concerning the church, the Body of Christ, through which God is expressed and His multifarious wisdom is displayed to the evil powers. For this, Jesus came as the Christ of God (Luke 9:20).

"My Church" and "the Church"

In Matthew 16 Peter received a revelation from the Father who is in the heavens. When the Lord Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (vv. 15-16). *The Son of the living God* refers to the Son in the eternal Godhead with the Father and the Spirit; *the Christ* refers to the Lord's commission as the anointed One to accomplish God's eternal purpose. In the divine economy Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, God's Anointed, the One appointed by God to do His will and fulfill His purpose (John 1:41). "As the One anointed by God Christ is the appointed One. His appointment is related to His commission. Christ has been appointed to carry out the intention of God, the Appointer. Therefore, as God's anointed One, the Messiah, Christ has been commissioned by God to carry out the desire of His heart" (Lee, *Conclusion* 259). The desire of God's heart is to have the church as the expression of Himself in Christ and as the counterpart of Christ in the divine romance. The New Testament reveals that, as the Christ, the Lord Jesus fulfilled God's eternal purpose through His incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension so that God, in His central work, may dispense Himself into us for the producing and building up of the church.

In Matthew 16:16-18 we have a glimpse of the great mystery, Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). The revelation given to Peter by the Father concerning the person of Christ is the first component of the mystery—Christ, the Son of God. The Lord's word to Peter in Matthew 16:18 is the second component—the church as the Body of Christ: "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." This is the first mention of the church in the New Testament, and significantly, it immediately follows the revelation regarding Christ.

"My church," planned by God in eternity past, is the universal church composed of all the believers in Christ for the testimony of the Triune God in the universe. "My church" in Matthew 16:18, the universal church, is uniquely one. "My church" is the church as the Body of Christ spoken of in Ephesians 1:22-23. Christ has only one Body, one church, which is unique. Furthermore, the words *My church* indicate that the church belongs to Christ and is of Christ, not of any other person, element, or power. The church that Christ is building up is the one universal church, not the so-called churches in organized

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Christianity that are founded on persons, nationalities, races, cultures, doctrines, and practices. Only “My church” is recognized by the ascended Christ, the Lord of all and Head over all, for “My church” is the universal church, the one and only church in the universe. Only “My church” fulfills God’s eternal purpose.

“My church” is built upon “this rock.” The words *this rock* do not refer to Peter; they refer to the wonderful person of Christ Himself and also to the revelation of Christ received from the Father. Because this revelation is so crucial to the building up of the universal church, Paul prayed that the Father of glory would give the believers “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him” and that the eyes of our heart would be enlightened (Eph. 1:17-18). When we see the revelation concerning Christ by being enlightened to see the truth in the Scriptures, the revelation will become the rock—the solid, unshakeable foundation upon which “My church,” the universal church, is built—and we would never be so audacious as to establish a church (so-called) on a person, a practice, or a system of theology. Only the church that is built upon Christ and the revelation concerning Christ is the genuine church in the eyes of the Lord because He will recognize only the genuine church as “My church.”

Speaking of His church built upon the rock, the Lord Jesus went on to say, “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Because the church built by Christ upon the rock fulfills God’s eternal purpose—expressing the Triune God in glory and representing Him with His authority—it is opposed and attacked by the enemy, Satan, the deceiver, the father of lies (John 8:44), and the source of death (Heb. 2:14). *The gates of Hades* refers to the satanic authority of darkness (Acts 26:18), from which the believers of Christ have been delivered and transferred into Christ and into the church as the kingdom of the Son of God’s love (Col. 1:13). The gates of Hades continually assault “My church” in the attempt to frustrate the building up of the church or to destroy what has been built, but the gates of Hades cannot prevail against the genuine church, which, in the resurrected and ascended Christ, is victorious over the attack of death. Satan fears the resistance of “My church” to his power of death. The source of this resistance is the resurrection power of Christ that is experienced by those who pursue Christ (Phil. 3:9-12) and that is an element of the church as the organic Body of Christ. Death could not hold Christ (Acts 2:24). He conquered death in His resurrection, and He possesses the keys of death and of Hades (Rev. 1:17-18). Because “My church” is “resurrectionally” in nature—that is, created in Christ’s resurrection, constituted with the resurrection life of Christ, and empowered by resurrection—the church is an organism absolutely in resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 2:6), and therefore, it is an entity that can endure death, resist the attack of death, and triumph over death in the resurrected Christ. The so-called churches, whether small sects or huge organizations, are not in resurrection and thus cannot endure death, but the church that Christ is building, “My church,” is an organism against which the gates of Hades cannot and will not prevail.

In space and time “My church” is “the church.” In Matthew 18:17 we find the expressions *tell it to the church* and *hear the church*. “My church” in Matthew 16:18 is the universal church, which, transcending space and time, is the unique Body of Christ; “the church” in Matthew 18:17 must be, and is, the local church, the unique expression of the Body of Christ in a specific locality. If believers aspire to live in “My church,” the universal church, they must live in “the church,” the church in their locality. Notice that the Lord spoke of the church, not a church, indicating that there is only one expression of “My church” in a certain locality. No one can live directly in the universal church; it is impossible to live in “My church” without living in “the church” locally. Christ is building up the universal church in and through local churches, a truth that the apostle Paul realized, experienced, practiced, and ministered, as indicated in Ephesians 2:21-22: “In whom [Christ Jesus Himself] all the building [the universal church], being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you [the believers in a local church] also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.” The way that Christ builds

up the universal church, the unique Body of Christ, is through local churches, practical expressions of the Body of Christ. The building up of “My church” is God’s eternal purpose, and the building up of “the church” is the God-ordained way for believers to be in the genuine church and live in the church in a practical way. Apart from “the church” there is no way for Christ to have “My church.” The universal church is the goal, and the local church is God’s way to reach this goal—“the church” in a city and “My church.”

Because the church as the universal Body of Christ is uniquely one, the practical expression of the church as the Body of Christ must be uniquely one locally. Simply stated, the procedure ordained by God is one church in one city. This was the practice portrayed in Acts, in the Epistles of Paul, and in the book of Revelation. Acts 8:1 speaks of “the church which was in Jerusalem,” the first church established in a locality. In Jerusalem there were thousands of believers but only one church, the church in Jerusalem. Acts 13:1 mentions “the local church” in Antioch. The apostles appointed elders in every church (14:23) and in every city (Titus 1:5). *Appoint elders in every city* compared with *appointed elders...in every church* indicates that the elders in a local church were the elders in that city; therefore, there was one church, “the church,” per city, and in this one church there were elders, who were the elders in that city. This demonstrates the truth and illustrates the practice that the jurisdiction of a local church is the city in which it is located and that in this city there is only one administration carried out through the elders appointed in that city and in that church.

This was Paul’s teaching and practice. In Romans 16:1 Paul mentions “the church which is in Cenchrea,” and referring to the house of Prisca and Aquila, which was the meeting place for the church in their locality, he speaks of “the church, which is in their house” (vv. 3-5). In 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul addresses “the church of God which is in Corinth.” In nature and origin the church is of God; in practical expression it is *the church* in a particular city—one city, one church. The church in the city of Thessalonica was “the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1). However, in Galatians 1:2 Paul speaks of “the churches of Galatia,” demonstrating that the church in a locality is one, but in a region such as Galatia, there were churches, with one church in each of the various localities. In Philippians 1:1 Paul addresses “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons,” and in 4:15 he says, “No church had fellowship with me in the account of giving and receiving except you only.” *All...who are in Philippi and church...you only* reveal that all the saints in Philippi constituted the church in that city. In Colossians 4:16 Paul speaks of “the church of the Laodiceans,” who were “the church in Laodicea” (Rev. 3:14).

The Seven Churches in Revelation

The verses concerning the church of the Laodiceans and the church in Laodicea turn our attention to the speaking of Christ, the glorified Son of Man, in Revelation 1 through 3. On the Lord’s Day John heard a voice saying, “What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea” (1:10-11). John was instructed to send the scroll to the seven churches, but then he was directed to send the scroll to seven cities. This clearly indicates that the seven churches were located in seven separate cities, with one church, “the church,” in each of these cities. Following this, the Lord Jesus Himself spoke to the church in Ephesus (2:1), to the church in Smyrna (v. 8), to the church in Pergamos (v. 12), to the church in Thyatira (v. 18), to the church in Sardis (3:1), to the church in Philadelphia (v. 7), and to the church in Laodicea (v. 14). It is an undeniable fact that the glorified Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Himself, connected every church to a city and every city to the church in the city, indicating that “the church” about which He spoke in Matthew 18:17 refers to a church in a certain city, according to the record in Acts, in the Epistles of Paul, and in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. If

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anyone is clear that “the church” designates the church in a city in which the church has been established, it surely is Christ Himself. As the Son of Man, God in the flesh, He spoke about “the church,” and as the Son of Man in resurrection, He spoke to the churches in seven different cities, revealing that the church in each city was “the church” to which a believer should tell something and “the church” that a believer should hear. At the end of His speaking to each local church, the Lord Jesus said, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Toward the end of Revelation, in 22:16, the Lord Jesus declared, “I Jesus have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches.” The churches were in the Lord’s heart, the things unveiled in Revelation were for the churches, and the scroll describing these things was sent to the churches.

The truth regarding “My church,” “the church,” and one church in one city is consistent from Matthew through Revelation. The goal of God’s eternal purpose for Christ to build “My church” is unchanging, and the God-ordained and God-established means to build up “My church” through “the church” is likewise unchanging. God’s thought—to have the universal church—is higher than our thought, and God’s way to gain the universal church, the genuine church—through the local churches, with one per city—is higher than our way. Sadly, even tragically, however, God’s thought regarding “My church” has been misunderstood, and God’s way regarding “the church” has been abandoned. The Lord, with His foreknowledge, knew that this would happen and prophesied concerning this in the book of Revelation.

The Prophetic History of the Church and the Degradation of the Church

The letters to the seven churches in Asia were sent to seven actual local churches that were in existence toward the end of the first century, and these letters disclose Christ’s view, feeling, and intention regarding these churches. These seven letters are prophetic, for they are part of “the prophecy” that includes the entire book of Revelation, which is a prophecy with “the spirit of the prophecy” (19:10). We need to view Revelation 2 and 3 both as letters to actual churches and also as prophecies regarding the situation and condition of the churches throughout the present age—the age of the church—until the coming of the Son of Man with His bridal army to turn the present age to the age of the kingdom, the age of righteousness. Understood in this way, Revelation 2—3 is what we may call “the prophetic history of the church,” an unveiling of developments that would take place after the first century regarding the church. This prophetic history covers the church toward the end of the apostolic age (Ephesus), the church during the period of persecution (Smyrna), the church in union with the world, beginning with Constantine (Pergamos), the hierarchical Roman Catholic Church (Thyatira), the state churches and denominations issuing from the Reformation (Sardis), the recovered church (Philadelphia), and the degraded recovered church (Laodicea). The churches signified by Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea will all remain until the Lord Jesus comes again. This means that the Roman Catholic Church, the state churches and Protestant denominations, the recovered church, and the degraded recovered church will endure until the end of the present age. The Roman Catholic Church, the state churches, and the denominations are filled with various aspects of degradation concerning the nature of the church, the practice of the church, the mixture of the church with the world, the clergy-laity system, hierarchy, departure from essential truths, and spiritual deadness. Laodicea, the degraded recovered church, is proud, lukewarm, and spiritually poor and blind. None of these so-called churches can possibly fulfill God’s eternal purpose concerning the church, because the governing vision of “My church” has been lost or distorted, and the practice of “the church” has been forsaken and replaced by religious entities based on doctrine, culture, race, language, nationality, and social class. God, however, is determined to carry out His eternal purpose to produce the universal church, for He is relentless in accomplishing His will, fulfilling His purpose, and consummating His economy. God has ordained that “My church” would be expressed in and built up through “the church,” and

He will not set aside the way and procedure that He has arranged; He will recover this way and procedure in the present age. This indicates that God needs and requires a recovery of the vision of “My church” and the practice of “the church.”

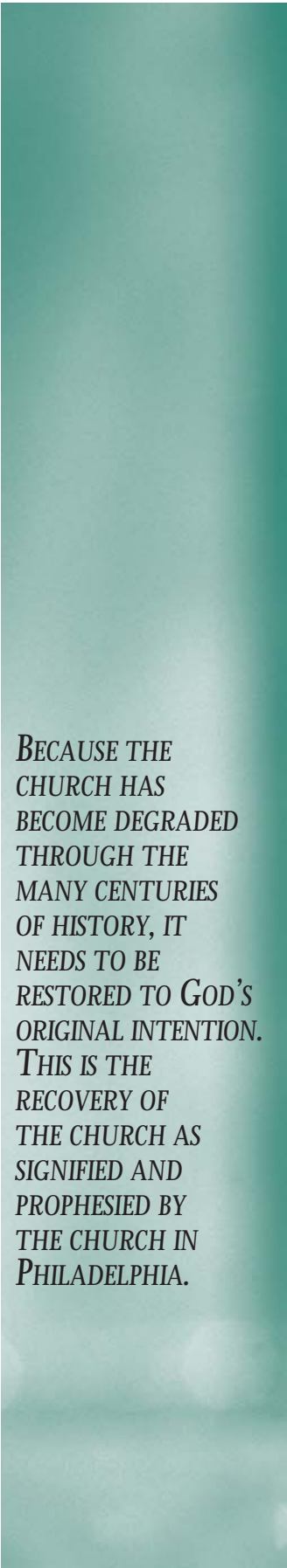
The Need for the Recovery of the Genuine Church

The word *recovery* means that something existed originally in a normal condition and then was damaged or lost; thus, there is a need to bring that thing back to its original and normal state (Dan. 1:1-2; Ezra 1:3-11; 6:3-5). *Recovery*, therefore, refers to the restoration or return to a normal condition after damage or loss has been incurred (1 John 1:1; 2:24). In Matthew 19:8 we see the principle of recovery: “From the beginning it has not been so.” In this portion of the Word, the Pharisees tested the Lord Jesus by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” (v. 3). The Lord responded by pointing them to Genesis 1:27 and 5:2. Then He quoted Genesis 2:24: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall be joined to his wife; and the two shall be one flesh” (Matt. 19:5). He continued, saying, “So then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has yoked together, let man not separate” (v. 6). The Pharisees retaliated by saying, “Why then did Moses command us to give her a certificate of divorce and divorce her?” (v. 7). The Lord’s answer was powerful and wise: “Moses, because of your hardness of heart, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so” (v. 8). Because of the hardness of their heart, God may allow His people to act in a way that is contrary to His will, His intention, and what He ordained in the beginning. God continues to permit this to a certain extent today. His people may not have the heart to return to God’s plan from the beginning but prefer to take a way that is pleasing to them or convenient. However, those who are pure in heart, caring only for God’s will, purpose, plan, and economy, are willing to return to what was “from the beginning.”

This is the situation regarding the church. The majority of believers are content to work within the present degraded condition of the church, often exclaiming that when we are in heaven, we will drop all divisive, denominational names and be one in Christ. This is maudlin religion. A very small minority, like the Israelites who returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, are not only willing but eager to return to God’s original plan, intention, goal, and arrangement concerning “My church” and “the church.” They will cooperate with God for the recovery of the church by obeying God’s word and taking the way ordained by God from the beginning. When we speak of the recovery of the church, we mean that for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose for the church, God needs us to return to the vision that He gave and the way that He established in the beginning. Concerning the church, our view should not be governed by the present condition or traditional practices but by God’s original intention and way as revealed in the Scriptures (Eph. 2:21-22; 3:3-5; 4:16; 1 Cor. 12:27; 1:2). We need to understand the recovery of the church in relation to God’s purpose and accomplishment and Satan’s work of destruction (Rev. 4:11; Rom. 12:2, 4-5; Matt. 13:31-33). God is a purposeful God, and since He has made His purpose in Christ and determined to accomplish His will, nothing can change His mind or stop Him (Eph. 3:9-11). In His work of recovery God will come in to redo what He planned and did in Christ, restoring what was destroyed by the enemy. Because the church has become degraded through the many centuries of history, it needs to be restored to God’s original intention. This is the recovery of the church as signified and prophesied by the church in Philadelphia.

Requirements for the Recovery of the Genuine Church

Before we can consider the aspects of the recovered church as revealed in the Lord’s word to the church in Philadelphia, we need to know God’s requirements for the recovery of the genuine church as revealed throughout the New Testament. These divinely ordained requirements can only be stated succinctly here.



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The recovery of the unique oneness of the Body of Christ: God is one; oneness is His nature, and He is always true to this oneness and never acts contrary to it (Deut. 6:4; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:4-6). Because God's way is oneness, oneness is the basic element of all His acts (Gen. 1:26). In producing the church as the Body of Christ, God acted according to His nature of oneness; therefore, the church of God was produced in the unique oneness that is in keeping with the nature of God (Eph. 1:22-23; Acts 2:42, 46; 4:32).

The Body of Christ is uniquely one universally, being undivided and indivisible like Christ (1 Cor. 1:13). The oneness of the universal church, the Body of Christ, is the oneness in the Triune God revealed in the Lord's prayer in John 17. The Body of Christ is one in and with the Triune God, and the Triune God is one in and with the Body of Christ (14:20; Eph. 4:4-6). Furthermore, the oneness of the Body of Christ is the enlarged oneness of the Divine Trinity (John 17:11, 21-23) because this oneness has been wrought into the organic Body of Christ. Based on this, we speak of one Body and one Spirit. Actually, the oneness of the Body of Christ is "the oneness of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3). This oneness was imparted into the spirit of the believers in Christ through regeneration by the Spirit of life with Christ as life (John 3:3, 5-6; Rom. 8:2; Col. 3:4). Now for the recovery of the genuine church, the believers need to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace with the divinely enriched, transformed human virtues (Eph. 4:1-3).

The recovery of the headship and preeminence of Christ: Christ is "the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things" (Col. 1:18). In His ascension Christ is the God-exalted One, the One who has received the name which is above every name (Phil. 2:9-11). The Lord Jesus has been made the Lord by God (Acts 2:33, 36), He has been exalted as the Leader over all the rulers (5:31), and He has been made the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5). Moreover, in Christ's ascension God made Him the unique Head of the Body, the church, and inaugurated Him into the headship of the universe (Col. 1:18; Acts 2:36; Eph. 1:22-23). Now Christ is the Head both of the Body, the church, corporately and of all the believers individually; He is the Head directly of every member of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). Christ, and Christ alone, has all the authority in the Body; the authority to direct the Body and all its members resides in the Head. We need to honor the unique headship of Christ and hold Him as the Head (Col. 2:19).

For Christ to have the first place in all things (1:18) means that Christ has the preeminence in God's will, God's purpose, God's economy, and the church of God, the Body of Christ. No thing, no person, no matter, no doctrine, no work, and no practice should replace Him; He, and He alone, has the first place, as indicated in Matthew 17:5: "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight. Hear Him!" Both in the old creation and in the new creation, both in the universe and in the church, Christ occupies the first place, the place of preeminence (Col. 1:15, 18). Christ must also have the first place, the preeminence, in what we may call our personal universe (3:17; 1 Cor. 10:31)—the totality of our person, our life history, our relationships, our possessions, and all our activities.

The recovery of the truth: In a very real sense, the recovery of the genuine church is based on the truth as presented by the apostles' teaching recorded in the New Testament (Acts 2:42; 2 John 1-2, 4; 3 John 3-4, 8). The truth is the Triune God with His word (John 1:1, 14-17; 14:6, 16-17; 15:26; 16:13; 17:17; 18:37). Many truths revealed in the Scriptures have been lost, neglected, misunderstood, misinterpreted, and wrongly applied since the days of the apostles. For the recovery of the church as the pillar and base of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), God's people must learn, be constituted with, and be faithful to the truth unfolded in the Bible. For the accomplishment of the will of God, the fulfillment of the purpose of God, and the consummation of the economy of God, we must be absolute for the truth of God. The divine truth is absolute in itself, and the believers in Christ

must be absolute for the truth and uphold the absoluteness of the truth (3 John 3-4, 8). If we would be absolute for the truth, we must set aside natural or cultural concepts, subjective feelings, and personal relationships and stand on the side of the truth. We need to honor the truth, take the way of the truth, and never compromise the truth (2 Pet. 2:2). The truths in the Bible have both an objective aspect and a subjective aspect, and we need to be absolute for both aspects of the truth, as presented in the Gospel of John (4:14; 6:57; 14:16-17, 20; 15:1, 4-5; 20:22). We also should be absolute for the functions of the divine truth—the truth that sets us free and sanctifies us with the holy nature of God for the glory of God (8:32; 17:17).

The recovery of the tree of life: “My church,” which is expressed as “the church,” is not an organization—it is an organism produced by and constituted with the divine life, the eternal life of the Triune God. For the recovery of the genuine church, we need to have the scriptural view and proper realization of the eternal life of God in relation to the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19). Eternal life is the uncreated life of God, the indestructible and incorruptible life (Eph. 4:18; Heb. 7:16; 2 Tim. 1:10). The eternal life is the life that is in the Son of God and that is the Son of God (1 John 5:11-12; 1:2; John 11:25; 14:6). The eternal life is the life with which the believers are regenerated and which becomes the believers’ life, making them children of God and members of Christ (Col. 3:4; John 1:12-13; Eph. 5:30).

The eternal life, the life of God, is embodied in the tree of life. The crucial importance of the tree of life is demonstrated by the fact that it is mentioned both at the beginning and the end of the Bible (Gen. 2:9; Rev. 22:2, 14). The intrinsic spiritual meaning of the tree of life is that it signifies the Triune God in Christ to dispense Himself into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people as life in the form of food. Christ Himself is the fulfillment of the figure of the tree of life. “In Him was life” (John 1:4); this refers to the life signified by the tree of life in Genesis 2:9, 16, and 17. This life was embodied and incarnated in Christ (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 5:11-12). Christ as the true vine (John 15:1) is the reality of the tree of life in Genesis 2:9. If we put John 1:4 and 15:1 together, we will see that Christ, who is life and the vine tree, is the tree of life. All the marvelous aspects of the all-inclusive Christ revealed in the Gospel of John are the outcome of the tree of life (1:17; 8:12; 10:10-11). Christ, as the tree of life, is our spiritual food—the bread of life (6:35), the living bread (v. 51), the bread of God (v. 33), the true bread (v. 32), the heavenly bread (v. 50)—and we need to eat this bread for spiritual nourishment. “As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (v. 57). Only as we feed on Christ as the tree of life in the form of the bread of life can God have a way to recover and build up the church planned in eternity past for eternity future.

The recovery of the universal fellowship of the Body of Christ: The Body of Christ is uniquely one, the life of the Body of Christ is uniquely one, and the fellowship of the Body of Christ also is uniquely one. As there is the circulation of blood in the human body, so there is a circulation of life in the Body of Christ, a circulation that the New Testament calls fellowship (1 John 1:3, 7). Because the divine life in the Body of Christ is moving and active, it has an issue—fellowship, the flowing of the life of the Body throughout the Body universally in “My church” and locally in “the church.” Such fellowship is related to oneness (1 Cor. 1:9; 6:17; 10:16-17; 12:20). The circulation of the divine life in the Body brings all the members of the Body into oneness and preserves this oneness (Eph. 4:1-6). The fellowship among all the genuine local churches is the fellowship of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). Because there is one Spirit and one Body, there is only one circulation of life in the Body; this circulation is the fellowship of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4; 1 John 1:3, 7). A local church—“the church”—is a part of and an expression of the unique Body of Christ—“My church”—and the fellowship of the Body is universal. If the genuine church is to be recovered, the universal fellowship of the Body of Christ must also be recovered.

THE TRUTHS IN THE BIBLE HAVE BOTH AN OBJECTIVE ASPECT AND A SUBJECTIVE ASPECT, AND WE NEED TO BE ABSOLUTE FOR BOTH ASPECTS. WE ALSO SHOULD BE ABSOLUTE FOR THE FUNCTIONS OF THE DIVINE TRUTH—THE TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE AND SANCTIFIES US WITH THE HOLY NATURE OF GOD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.

The recovery of the organic function of all the members of the Body of Christ: The degraded churches are religious organizations with hierarchy and a clergy-laity system. Religious organization, structural hierarchy, and the common clergy-laity system in various forms have had the damaging effect of spreading spiritual death and of nullifying the function of the members of the Body of Christ. In Luke the Lord Jesus said, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are called benefactors. But you shall not be so” (22:25-26). He rejected every form of hierarchy and authoritarianism. In Matthew He said, “Do not be called Rabbi, for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father...Neither be called instructors, because One is your Instructor, the Christ” (23:8-10). Only God is our Father, and only Christ is our Teacher and Instructor. We all—male and female believers who are children of God alike—are simply brothers. In Revelation the Lord Jesus exposed and judged the actions and the teachings of the Nicolaitans, a term that He associated with those who regarded themselves higher and more important than the common people, the laity, and, in actuality, conquered them and lorded it over them. To the church in Ephesus the Lord Jesus said, “This you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (2:6). The Lord did not hate the persons, the Nicolaitans themselves; He hated the works of the Nicolaitans. In His word to Pergamos He mentioned the “the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (v. 15), indicating that what had been actions in Ephesus had become a doctrine in Pergamos. Throughout the organized, religious system of Christianity, both the works and the teachings of the Nicolaitans abound. The clergy-laity system is ubiquitous.

A particular requirement for the recovery of the genuine church is the total abandonment of every form of the clergy-laity system and the recovery of the organic functions of all the members of the Body of Christ. “Just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another. And having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (Rom. 12:4-6). Every member has a portion of grace, and every member has a particular organic function. First Corinthians 12 is a further development of this, mentioning “distinctions of gift, but the same Spirit” (v. 4), “distinctions of ministries, yet the same Lord” (v. 5), and “distinctions of operations, but the same God, who operates all things in all” (v. 6). Because “the body is not one member but many” (v. 14), all the members with their various functions are indispensable, and they must have the opportunity to function according to their measure. In 14:26 we see that everyone has a portion to bring and express in the meetings of the church: “What then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.” Every member of the Body is valuable, and the function of every member is necessary. In order to have a proper spiritual understanding of this, there is the need for believers to seriously restudy the New Testament and realize that therein is a scriptural way to meet and to serve, a God-ordained way to build up the church as the Body of Christ by the vital, organic function of every member (Eph. 4:11-12, 16; Rom. 12:4-5; 15:14; 1 Cor. 12:14-22; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). For the recovery of the church, this way must replace the anti-Body clergy-laity system.

The Characteristics of the Recovered Church as Signified by Philadelphia

The church in Philadelphia prophetically depicts the church of brotherly love, that is, the proper church life. In Greek *Philadelphia* means “brotherly love” (Rev. 3:7). We, the believers in Christ, are all brothers, and among us in “the church” there should be brotherly love, brotherly affection. First John 3:14 helps us to understand, appreciate, and aspire to such love: “We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. He who does not love abides in death.” The love of God toward the brothers is strong evidence that we have passed out of death into life. Verse 16 goes on to say, “In this we know love, that He laid down His life on our behalf, and we ought to lay down our lives on behalf of the brothers.” This indicates that brotherly love is a willingness to lay ourselves aside to

serve the brothers (Gal. 5:13). To love the brothers is to be willing to deny the self and to have a heart that is willing to lay down one's own life for one's brothers.

Two outstanding characteristics of the recovered church are revealed in Revelation 3:8. Here the Lord said, "You have a little power and have kept My word and have not denied My name." The Lord's word is His expression, and the Lord's name is the Lord Himself. Those in this church allow the word of Christ to dwell in them richly (Col. 3:16), making home in the depths of their inner being (Eph. 3:17), and they also realize that the Lord's words are spirit and life (John 6:63), and as they read, study, and pray the written Word, they come to the Lord, contact Him, and receive words of eternal life from Him (John 5:39-40), perhaps echoing Peter's words, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life" (v. 68). Like the church in Philadelphia, those in the recovered church keep the Lord's word with the little power that they have. They allow the word of Christ to dwell in them richly (Col. 3:16).

Have not denied my name has more than one level of meaning and application. To deny the Lord's name is to assume a name other than that of Jesus and then to designate a so-called church by that name, such as Lutheran, Calvinist, and Wesleyan. To not deny the Lord's name is to reject all names other than that of the Lord Jesus Christ and simply to be those who call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:12-13). The recovered church belongs absolutely to the Lord, abandoning every other name, especially denominational names. To not deny the name of the Lord is also to do everything in the name of the Lord, to meet as believers in the name of the Lord, and to affirm every aspect of the all-inclusive Christ. "Whatever you do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). For a believer in Christ to deny the Lord's name is to speak and act in one's own name by living in the flesh and in the self instead of walking according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4). To be in the name of the Lord is to be one with Him—by allowing Him, as the indwelling life-giving Spirit, to live in us—and to live Him, magnifying Him. Paul practiced this when he testified, "To me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). In Matthew 18:20 the Lord Jesus spoke of meeting in His name: "Where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst." Those in the recovered church do not gather themselves together in a way that is initiated by them or preferable to them; on the contrary, the Lord Himself gathers them into His name, the reality of which is the Spirit. "The meetings of the believers are initiated by the Lord, who calls the believers out of all persons, matters, and things that occupy them and gathers them together into His name to enjoy the riches of His presence" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 20, note 2). By living and meeting in the name of the Lord, the recovered church is in a position to experience, enjoy, testify, and affirm every aspect of the all-inclusive Christ—the Christ who is the complete God with all the divine attributes, a perfect man with all the human virtues, and the reality of every positive thing in the universe. Such an all-inclusive Christ is unveiled in John, Colossians, Hebrews, and Revelation. To deny the Lord's name is to deny any aspect of His all-inclusiveness, being unable to recognize or unwilling to receive every detail concerning His person and work revealed in the Scriptures. The recovered church does not deny the Lord's name in this or any other way; rather, it affirms all that Christ is and experiences Him in particular aspects of His all-inclusiveness, as indicated by the Lord's word to Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7.

In this verse the Lord Jesus referred to Himself as "the Holy One, the true One, the One who has the key of David, the One who opens and no one will shut, and shuts and no one opens." The Lord Jesus is the Holy One, by whom and with whom the church can be holy, separated from the world and unto the Lord. In Acts 3:14—a verse that speaks of Christ as the Holy One—*holy* indicates that Jesus, the Nazarene, was absolutely for God and absolutely one with God. The word *holy* in the Bible signifies one who is absolutely unto God, for God, and one with God. Only Jesus is such a One, and in carrying out God's economy, He is making the recovered church the same as He is in His holy nature.

A REQUIREMENT FOR
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The Lord Jesus is also the true One, by whom we can be true for God and His will, purpose, and economy. Christ, the true One, is genuine and real in every way. This Christ is the reality of the church; without Him we have nothing but vanity. The reality in Jesus (Eph. 4:21) is the condition of the life of Jesus as presented in the Gospels; the essence of the life of Jesus as the God-man is reality (John 1:14, 17; 14:6). Those in the recovered church should live a life of reality, as the reality is in Jesus (Eph. 5:9; 4:20-21).

To the recovered church, the Lord Jesus is the One who has the key of David, the key of the kingdom, with the authority to open and shut (Isa. 22:22). The key of David opens the wealth of God's being, the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8), and this key also opens the entire universe for God so that God may accomplish His will because of which all things were created (Rev. 4:11). As the real David, the greater David (Matt. 12:3-8), He possesses and exercises all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18) to build up the church as the house of God and to establish the kingdom of God on earth. He truly holds the key of David; He expresses God, represents God, and uses the key to open everything related to God's will and purpose and to shut whatever God decides to shut. The real David with the key of David has set before the recovered church an opened door, which no one can shut (Rev. 3:7-8).

Because the recovered church fulfills the requirements for recovering the church and has the characteristics of the recovered church signified by the church in Philadelphia, the Lord could say, "Because you have kept the word of My endurance, I also will keep you out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth. I come quickly" (vv. 10-11).

The Overcomers in the Recovered Church

Although the recovered church is in a normal and healthy spiritual condition in the eyes of the Lord (cf. 2:23), having no defects, the Lord Jesus still needs, and calls for, overcomers. The existence of the recovered church is not an end in itself; rather, as "the church," it is the means for Christ to build up "My church," and it is the overcomers in the recovered church who will accomplish God's will and fulfill the desire of His heart. Regarding the overcomers mentioned repeatedly by Christ in Revelation 2 and 3, we need to avoid a serious mistake. This mistake, widely held, constantly taught, and aggressively promulgated by countless Bible expositors, theologians, and preachers, is that in the New Testament there is only one category of overcomers and that the verses regarding overcoming in 1 John 5 and Revelation 2 and 3 refer to all believers regardless of their condition, for all believers are overcomers. This is erroneous. Yes, 1 John 5:4 and 5 refer to all of God's redeemed and regenerated people. "Everything that has been begotten of God overcomes the world" (v. 4a). "This is the victory which has overcome the world—our faith" (v. 4b). "Who is he who overcomes the world except him who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (v. 5). Every genuine believer confesses that Jesus is the Son of God (4:15). Such a believer is one who has been begotten of God (John 1:12-13; 3:16) and has received the divine life, which empowers the believer to overcome the evil world that lies in the evil one (1 John 5:19). By faith and through the divine life, every regenerated believer in Christ can overcome the world. However, the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3 do not overcome the world—they overcome the degradation of the church for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

In the book of Revelation we see the overcoming Christ, who is calling for and producing overcomers: "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome" (5:5). As the Lion, Christ overcame and defeated the rebellious Satan, the enemy of God. "He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne" (3:21). Here the overcoming Christ assures us that even as He overcame and sat with His Father on His throne, the overcomers in the churches (not all believers) will overcome and sit with Him on His throne.

These overcomers are produced by the overcoming Christ through the sevenfold intensified Spirit (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). The Lord's promises to the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3 refer both to the present experience and enjoyment of the overcomers and to the reward that will be given to them (not to all believers) in the coming millennial kingdom (2:26-27). This indicates that if we do not faithfully experience Christ as the reality of His promises in this age, the age of the church, we will not participate in their fulfillment in the coming age, the age of the manifestation of the kingdom of God in glory. The spiritual principle here is that what the overcomers become in the church in this age will be their reward in the next age. What the overcomers are will become their reward.

"He who overcomes, him I will make a pillar in the temple of My God,...and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name" (3:12). The overcoming Christ will make the overcomers in the recovered church pillars in the temple of God, and then upon these pillars He will write the name of God, the name of the city of God, and the Lord's new name. With respect to the overcomer being made a pillar in the temple of God, we need to consider 21:22: "I saw no temple in it [the New Jerusalem], for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." The overcomer will become a pillar in the temple of God, which surely must exist in the city of God, as indicated by the typology of the temple in the city of Jerusalem. However, in the city of God there is no temple; rather, the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are the temple. To be made a pillar in the temple of God is to be made a pillar in God Himself, a conclusion that cannot reasonably be denied or rejected. The Lord Jesus makes the overcomers pillars by transforming them through the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2), through their beholding with an unveiled face the glory of the Lord, and through their being transformed into the same image—the image of the resurrected Christ as the first-born Son of God—from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). In order to become a pillar in the temple of God, which is God in the Lamb, the overcomers must be built into the Triune God by being one with God, mingled with God, filled with God, saturated with God, and constituted with God to be the same as God in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead or as an object of worship. In the recovered church the believers whom Christ is producing as overcomers are gradually becoming the same as God in this way. They are living in the reality of Ephesians 3:16-17 and are experiencing the central work of God by opening to Him and allowing Him to build Himself in Christ into their inner being. Christ's central work in the recovered church is to work Himself into the willing believers, constituting them into pillars in the temple of God through being built into the Triune God in His economy according to His will and purpose.

On the overcomers who have been made pillars, Christ is writing the name of His God and His new name. This not only indicates that the overcomers belong to God and Christ; it also reveals that they are one with God and that their entire being is possessed by God and Christ. The name of God denotes God Himself, and Christ's new name denotes Christ Himself. The names of God and Christ written on the overcomers who have been built as pillars into the Triune God indicate, or at least imply, that they have become the same as God and Christ in life and nature. What God is in His life and nature and what Christ is in His all-inclusiveness as the God-man have been wrought into the overcomers, who now bear the names of God and Christ as a designation of what they have become in God's complete organic salvation.


For the name of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, to be written upon the overcomer as a pillar means that this overcomer is one with the New Jerusalem, "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9-10), and is possessed by the New Jerusalem as the corporate counterpart of the redeeming God. Furthermore, for the name of the New Jerusalem to be written upon the pillar means that the city of God, the bride of Christ, has been wrought into the overcomer who has actually become the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is the accomplishment of the will of God, the fulfillment of the purpose of

BY FAITH AND THROUGH THE DIVINE LIFE, EVERY REGENERATED BELIEVER IN CHRIST CAN OVERCOME THE WORLD. HOWEVER, THE OVERCOMERS IN REVELATION DO NOT OVERCOME THE WORLD—THEY OVERCOME THE DEGRADATION OF THE CHURCH FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE.

God, and the consummation of the economy of God. The New Jerusalem involves God becoming man and man becoming God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. In Christ God became man to make man, God's redeemed and regenerated people, the same as He is in life and nature so that the redeeming God and redeemed man can become one corporate person, the New Jerusalem. In His economy the Triune God becomes the New Jerusalem incorporated with the believers in Christ (John 14:20), and God's redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people become the New Jerusalem through God's organic salvation (Rom. 5:10; Rev. 3:12).

The New Jerusalem is a composition of God's chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed, and glorified tripartite people who have been deified, or "Christified," in the sense of becoming God in life, nature, and expression by being constituted with the processed and consummated Triune God to be His eternal corporate expression. This deification of the believers is a process that will consummate in the New Jerusalem in two stages. The overcomers in the recovered church who have become the New Jerusalem during their lifetime will receive the manifestation of the New Jerusalem as a reward in the millennial kingdom. Ultimately, the eternal spiritual state of all believers who will become the New Jerusalem during the age of the kingdom will be part of the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth.

Since the New Jerusalem is "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9), for the overcomers in the recovered church to become the New Jerusalem actually means that they become the counterpart of Christ, His bride, for whom He is coming once she has made herself ready. Then the proclamation prophesied in Revelation 19:7 will take place: "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." The overcomers in the recovered church becoming the New Jerusalem, the wife of the redeeming God, means that the desire of God's heart has been fulfilled. The recovered church itself satisfies all the requirements for the recovery of "the church" for the building up of "My church" and displays all the necessary characteristics: brotherly love, keeping the Lord's word, not denying the Lord's name, and experiencing Christ as "the Holy One, the true One, the One who has the key of David" (3:7). Even in the recovered church, however, Christ needs overcomers who become pillars in God as the temple, who become the same as God and Christ in life and nature, and who become the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. The overcomers in the recovered church accomplish God's will, fulfill God's purpose, and consummate God's economy.

May the Lord recover "the church," the genuine church throughout the earth, and may the Lord through His present, heavenly ministry and by means of the sevenfold intensified Spirit produce overcomers by reproducing Himself in those believers who, receiving mercy and grace from the eternal God, love the Lord and are willing to offer themselves as a living sacrifice to the Lord for the accomplishment of the will of God, the fulfillment of the purpose of God, and the consummation of the economy of God. May Revelation 3:12 become both a heavenly vision and a spiritual reality in the being and living of many believers, whom the Lord loves, for whom He died, in whom He lives, and for whom He, the High Priest, intercedes that they would come forward to the living God, be saved to the uttermost, and eventually participate in the accomplishment of the will of God, the fulfillment of the purpose of God, and the consummation of the economy of God. "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:21). 

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