

CARRYING OUT THE DIVINE COMMISSION TO ANNOUNCE THE NEW TESTAMENT JUBILEE

BY DAVID YOON

The apostle Paul's radical conversion is a landmark event in the history of the early church and a crucial turning point in the Acts of the Apostles: a highly trained Pharisee who fiercely persecuted the church became a persecuted minister of Christ to the Jews and to the Gentiles for the building up of the church. At his conversion Paul experienced a great transfer from the Old Testament dispensation of the law into the New Testament dispensation of grace, and eventually, he worked together with God to transfer His chosen people from the Old Testament economy into the New Testament economy. Given its importance, Paul's conversion has drawn attention from scholars, including theologians, historians, and literary critics, and the three accounts of this event recorded in Acts have come under substantial scholarly scrutiny. Despite the abundance of books and articles on this subject, the majority of Christians today neglect the ultimate purpose of Paul's conversion, which is altogether related to the accomplishment of God's New Testament economy. No other portion in Acts describes the contents of Paul's commission as succinctly as does 26:18, which records the Lord's words: "To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me."

In light of the divine revelation of the New Testament, Paul's commission in Acts 26:16-18 was to carry out God's New Testament ministry, the ministry of the jubilee, both as a continuation of the incarnated Christ's ministry on earth recorded in the Gospel of Luke and in coordination with the resurrected and ascended Christ's ministry in heaven recorded in the book of Acts. In *The Acts of the Apostles* Arno C. Gaebelien posits that Acts 26:18 is "a terse statement" of the gospel for which Paul was commissioned and that "all the elements of the Gospel are contained in this verse" (406). In brief, the New Testament reveals that the divine commission entrusted unto Paul was to both open people's eyes that they may see God's New Testament economy and to bring them out of Satan's kingdom of darkness into God's kingdom of light so that they might experience God's judicial redemption by receiving forgiveness of sins and might participate in God's salvation in life by enjoying the Triune God as their inheritance in the sphere of the church, the Body of Christ, as the house of God.

The contents of Paul's commission embody his entire life and service as a minister and witness of Christ. Since Paul is a God-appointed pattern (1 Tim. 1:16), his commission should be our commission. In order to appreciate the contents of Paul's divine commission, we need to see the contents of the divine commission concerning the New Testament jubilee seen in the Lord's ministry of the jubilee in the Gospel of Luke and in Paul's ministry of the jubilee in Acts and the Epistles, which ministry is a continuation of the Lord's ministry.

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The New Testament Jubilee Proclaimed by the Lord in the Gospel of Luke

Paul's commission to carry out the New Testament jubilee reflects the Lord's announcement of the jubilee of grace in Luke 4:17-22. Just as the Lord Jesus began His earthly ministry by proclaiming the New Testament jubilee, so also Paul, as a continuation of the Lord, began his New Testament ministry by receiving a charge from the Lord to carry out this jubilee. Luke presents a detailed description of the Lord's proclamation of the New Testament jubilee. This emphasis on the announcement of the jubilee in the Gospel of Luke indicates that "the proclamation of the jubilee by the Lord Jesus in Luke 4 governs the whole Gospel of Luke," and that "our understanding of the Gospel of Luke must be governed by the principle of the jubilee" (Lee, *Life-study* 560, 267). The ministry of the jubilee was the kernel of the Lord's ministry on earth as the Anointed of God in the Gospel of Luke.

In Luke 4 the Lord Jesus entered into a synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath day and read from Isaiah 61:1-2, which prophesied concerning the ministry of Christ as the Anointed of Jehovah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to announce the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to send away in release those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, the year of jubilee" (Luke 4:18-19). Following this, the Lord said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21), and all of those in the synagogue marveled at the words of grace proceeding out of His mouth (v. 22). The expression *the acceptable year of the Lord* in verse 19 denotes the year of jubilee, a time when every Israelite who had sold his allotted portion of the land of Canaan was returned to it, and everyone who had sold himself into slavery regained his liberty and returned to his family (Lev. 25:10, 13, 28, 39-41).

The Lord announced that this Scripture concerning the year of the Lord, the year of jubilee, had been fulfilled in the people's hearing. The year of the Lord typifies the New Testament age, the time when the released captives of sin are accepted by God, enjoying freedom from the bondage of sin, participating in the Triune God as their portion, and returning to their genuine family in the church as the house of God. Moreover, the Lord's proclamation of the jubilee is described as "words of grace," implying the commencement of the dispensation of grace, the age in which God deals with the believers according to grace, not according to law (Rom. 6:14). The New Testament jubilee is equivalent to God's New Testament salvation accomplished by grace, which is God in Christ becoming man's portion and inheritance for his enjoyment.

In His ministry on earth Christ was sent to announce the gospel to the poor (Luke 7:22). In the sight of God, every unbeliever is spiritually poor because he is an empty vessel devoid of God as his real content, having lost God as his real possession through the fall (cf. Psa. 16:5). Hence, to proclaim the gospel to the poor is to minister Christ as the good news of great joy to human beings who are bereft of God as their true possession so that they may become "rich toward God," that is, rich with God Himself as their content (Luke 2:10-11; 12:21).

In His earthly ministry Christ was sent to proclaim the recovery of sight to the blind. "The blind" in Luke 4:18 refer to not only those who are blind physically but also those who are blind spiritually, those who do not "see the salvation of God" (3:6; cf. Isa. 40:5). All human beings are born blind, because they are born in death and darkness. Spiritual blindness is related to both spiritual death and spiritual darkness. On the one hand, blindness is the issue of darkness, for darkness blinds people's eyes (Acts 13:11; 1 John 2:11). On the other hand, blindness is the issue of death. Just as a dead person is certainly blind, so also he who is spiritually dead is spiritually blind.

However, the Gospel of Luke speaks of Christ as “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (2:32; cf. Isa. 49:6); as such, the incarnated Christ fulfilled the Old Testament type in Isaiah of the Servant of Jehovah, who is called by Jehovah to be “a light for the nations” in order to open the eyes of the blind and to bring the prisoner out from the prison, those who dwell in darkness from the prison house (42:6-7). Because of the merciful compassions of God, Christ in His incarnation as the rising sun visited people from on high to shine upon those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, guiding their feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:79). As the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings (Mal. 4:2), Christ healed people’s blindness by shining on them as the light of life (John 8:12). Christ imparted sight to people by ministering to them the divine life, which is the light of men, thereby not only begetting them as “sons of light” but also delivering them out of the darkness of death, the authority of Satan, into the life realm of God’s light (Luke 16:8; John 1:4, 9, 12-13; Col. 1:12-13).

In His ministry on earth Christ was sent to declare release to the captives and to send away in release those who were oppressed. All fallen human beings are prisoners and captives of Satan under his bondage (Isa. 42:7), and they are “oppressed by the devil” as slaves of sin (Acts 10:38; Isa. 58:6; John 8:34). Satan as the strong man guarded sinners as his possessions in order to keep them in his house of sin, his kingdom of darkness (Luke 11:14-21; 1 John 3:8, 10; Col. 1:13). However, when Christ overcame him, He took away Satan’s armor and distributed His spoil, transferring sinners from Satan’s house, his kingdom, into God’s house, His kingdom (Luke 11:17-22; Matt. 12:29; John 16:33; cf. Eph. 4:8). Christ freed people from the guilt of sin by calling them to repentance (Luke 5:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7) and graciously forgiving their sins based on His redemption (5:20-24; 7:47-48; 22:19-20; 23:34).

The parable of a father receiving his son in Luke 15:11-32 illustrates several crucial aspects of Christ’s ministry of the jubilee. The prodigal son who left his father signifies man who in the fall lost God as his possession (Gen. 3:24; 4:16; Eph. 2:12; Mal. 2:10). The son’s squandering his estate, being in want, feeding on carob pods, and coming under the exploitation of a citizen in a distant country signify fallen man suffering spiritual poverty and selling himself into slavery under the dominion of sin and the oppression of Satan in the world. The son’s coming to his senses concerning his misery in the distant country signifies the restoration of the fallen man’s spiritual sight to realize his pitiful condition apart from God in the world (Eph. 2:12). The son’s return to the father signifies repentant man being liberated from Satan’s captivity and returning to God. The son being clothed with the best robe signifies man being clothed with the redeeming Christ and being justified by God in Christ; the son receiving a ring signifies the repenting man receiving the sealing Spirit as the God-given seal on him to be the pledge of the divine inheritance (1:13; Gen. 24:47; 41:42); and the son feasting on the fattened calf in his father’s house signifies the penitent man enjoying the rich Christ as his inheritance in the church as the house of the Father, the house of the living God, and the family of God (John 14:2; 1 Tim. 3:15). Therefore, the Gospel of Luke reveals that in carrying out the ministry of the jubilee, Christ opened people’s eyes and delivered them from the captivity and oppression of Satan by His redemption so that they may be brought into the enjoyment of God as their rich inheritance in the church as His house and family. This implies that the goal of Christ’s ministry of the jubilee was the producing and building up of the church.

The New Testament Jubilee Proclaimed by Paul in Acts and His Epistles

The Gospel of Luke reveals that after carrying out His ministry on earth, Christ died on the cross to accomplish redemption for man, resurrected to enter into His glory, and ascended into heaven (23:42-43; 24:26, 46, 51). Acts, as a sequel to the Gospel of

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Luke, goes on to reveal that in His ascension Christ was highly exalted—to the right hand of God—and officially made the Lord of all and the Christ of God so that He might accomplish His ministry in the heavens by being the Spirit of Jesus poured out from the heavens upon the believers on earth, who then would witness concerning Him and work with Him (Acts 2:33, 36, 4, 17-18; 16:7; 1:8; cf. 13:2). In other words, the Gospel of Luke presents Christ's individual ministry of the jubilee, which was carried out by Himself on the earth, whereas Acts presents Christ's corporate ministry of the jubilee, which is carried out by the resurrected Christ in the heavens as the Head acting, moving, and working in and through the believers on earth as the members of His mystical Body (9:4-5; Eph. 1:22-23).

The central figure of Acts is not the apostles or disciples but the ascended Christ, who executes His heavenly ministry through His faithful members. In His ministry in the heavens Christ carries out the New Testament jubilee through His ministers and witnesses, who are His continuation. In continuing Christ's earthly ministry and by cooperating with His heavenly ministry, Paul faithfully labored to accomplish his portion of the New Testament ministry. For this reason, in Acts 20:24 Paul testified that he considered his life of no account as if precious to himself, in order that he might finish the ministry that he had received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of grace of God, that is, to announce the jubilee of grace, just as his Forerunner did in the Gospel of Luke.

Opening People's Eyes and Turning Them from Darkness to Light

As both "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" and "the rising sun...from on high," Christ was commissioned to proclaim the recovery of sight to the blind by shining upon those sitting in darkness (Luke 2:32; 1:78-79; 4:18). In the same principle, Paul was commissioned to open people's eyes by turning them from darkness to light. Before his conversion Paul was spiritually blind. Like other self-confident Jews of his time, he thought that he was "a guide to the blind," "a light to those in darkness," and "a teacher of babes" (Rom. 2:19-20). Actually, "being ignorant"—unable to see God and spiritual things—Paul was a blasphemer of God and a persecutor of the church, opposing the divine economy by imprisoning the saints (1 Tim. 1:13). But on the road to Damascus to persecute the believers, Paul's inner eyes were opened, and he saw the Lord (Acts 9:27) and the heavenly vision of God's New Testament economy (26:19).

Shortly after stating in Acts 26:18 that he was charged to open people's eyes and turn them from darkness to light, Paul said, in verse 23, that the prophets and Moses prophesied 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." Taken together, these two verses indicate that in His heavenly ministry the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ shines as the light of the world on the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel of the glory of Christ by the believers so that as a result of His shining, the spiritual eyes of the unbelievers would be opened, and they would be transferred from darkness into light (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). This thought mirrors Paul's declaration in Acts 13:47: "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.'" Here Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6, which prophesied concerning Christ as a light of the nations that He may be God's salvation unto the ends of the earth.

On the one hand, the prophecy in this verse was fulfilled in Christ, whom Simeon identified as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32) and as God's "salvation" given to His chosen people (v. 30). In His ascension Christ is both a light to the Gentiles and the salvation of God to the uttermost part of the earth through the preaching of the gospel by His witnesses (Acts 1:8). On the other hand, this prophecy was applied

by Paul to himself in his gospel-preaching ministry to the Gentiles—he was one with Christ in carrying out God’s salvation to the whole world. As a light to the Gentiles and a faithful witness of Christ, Paul in his apostolic ministry endeavored to cooperate with Christ in His heavenly ministry by shining on the Gentiles and bringing God’s salvation to the ends of the earth in order to open their eyes and deliver them out of darkness into light.

Moreover, in Ephesians 3:8-9 Paul states that grace was given to him 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.” According to the context of this verse, the divine economy, which is both a mystery hidden in God and the reason for the creation of all things, refers to God’s eternal purpose to dispense the unsearchably rich Christ as the Spirit into His chosen and redeemed people in order to produce the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of God (vv. 8-10, 16-21; 1:22-23). Because the majority of human beings are spiritually blind, they do not see God’s mysterious economy.

For Paul to enlighten others concerning the eternal economy of God, he not only spoke to make known in boldness the mystery of the gospel concerning His economy but also prayed that the Father of glory, the Father of lights, would give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation and enlighten the eyes of their heart so that they might know the hope of God’s calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and God’s power toward the believers—all of which are related to a heavenly vision of God’s will, pleasure, and economy concerning the church as the Body of Christ—and thus be motivated to participate in the accomplishment of this economy (1:3-11, 17-22; James 1:17).

In Paul’s mind, because all genuine Christians have believed into the Lord Jesus as the light of life, are born of God as light, and are one with God in the Lord, they who “were once darkness” have become not only “the children of light” but even “light in the Lord” (John 1:12-13; 12:36, 46; 1 John 1:5; 5:1; Eph. 5:8). Nevertheless, many of them, like unbelieving Gentiles, may continue to walk in the vanity of their mind and be darkened in their understanding concerning the things of God (4:17-18). For this reason, Paul exhorts the believers to “walk as children of light” and allow Christ to shine on them so that they may be delivered from “the unfruitful works of darkness” and bear “the fruit of the light,” which fruit is the Father as goodness, the Son as righteousness, and the Spirit as truth (5:8-14; Matt. 19:17; Rom. 5:17-18, 21; John 14:17). Furthermore, in Philippians 2:15 Paul reminds the believers of their status as the children of God, the children of light, and he exhorts them to shine as luminaries in the world of darkness so that they may shine on others and transfer them from satanic darkness to divine light.

Turning People from the Authority of Satan to God

Just as Christ was appointed to proclaim release to the captives, prisoners under Satan’s bondage, and to send away in release those who are oppressed under Satan in sin (Luke 4:18; 13:11-13, 16; Isa. 42:7), so also Paul was commissioned to turn people from the authority of Satan to God, that is, to the authority of God (Acts 26:18; cf. 19:18-19). Prior to his conversion, as a child of the devil and a son of disobedience under the rule of Satan (1 John 3:10; John 8:44; Eph. 2:2), Paul breathed out “threatening and murder” against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1). However, at his conversion he was turned from the rule of Satan to that of God, obeying the heavenly vision in which Christ appeared to him. Paul proclaimed to both the Jews and the Gentiles that they should “turn...to the living God” (14:8-15; cf. 9:20; 1 Thes. 1:9-10). According to the book of Acts, the believers who have turned from the authority of Satan to the authority of God constitute the churches, which are the kingdom of God, a realm in which God rules in His life (8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

THE DIVINE ECONOMY, WHICH IS BOTH A MYSTERY HIDDEN IN GOD AND THE REASON FOR THE CREATION OF ALL THINGS, REFERS TO GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSE TO DISPENSE THE UNSEARCHABLY RICH CHRIST AS THE SPIRIT INTO HIS CHOSEN AND REDEEMED PEOPLE IN ORDER TO PRODUCE THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE FULLNESS OF GOD.

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Turning people from the authority of Satan to the authority of God involves an intrinsic turn from darkness to light. This is because Satan is darkness, and God is light (1 John 1:5). Satan rules by darkness, whereas God in Christ reigns by light. “The authority of Satan is Satan’s kingdom, which belongs to darkness,” whereas “the authority of God” is “God’s kingdom, which belongs to light” (Lee, Recovery Version, Acts 26:18, notes 3 and 4). This notion is confirmed by Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:13 that the Father “delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” Here “the authority of darkness” is the authority of Satan, the kingdom of Satan, and the kingdom of the Son of God’s love is the kingdom of God, the authority of God, since the Son of God is the image of God and the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, the embodiment and expression of God (v. 15; 2:9).

Through regeneration the believers in Christ are delivered out of the authority of darkness, the kingdom of Satan, and are transferred into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son, the kingdom of light, which is composed of “the saints in the light” as the citizens (1:12). However, many believers, like the believers in Colossae, may be under the rule of various aspects of the authority of darkness. These aspects include lusts in their sinful members (fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greediness (3:5)); the evil aspects of their fallen soul (wrath, anger, malice, blasphemy, and foul abusive language (v. 8)); the old man with his practices (v. 9); and “the elements of the world,” the empty, deceitful, elementary principles of religion and philosophy (asceticism, Judaic ordinances and observances, and mysticism related to Gnosticism and the worship of angels (2:8, 16, 18-21)). In order to rescue the believers from these forms of the authority of darkness, Paul charges them to put to death their sinful members on the earth (3:5), put away the evil characteristics of their corrupted soul (v. 8), put off the entire old man with his practices (v. 9), and not set their mind on the things on the earth concerning the elements of the world (v. 2). In order to usher the believers into the reality of the kingdom of God’s Son, the authority of the Son, Paul reveals that since Christ as the Firstborn from the dead is the Head of the church (1:18), the believers need to hold Christ as their unique Head, giving Him the first place, the preeminence, in all things (2:19), “serve the Lord Christ” (3:24), and “do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 17).

In Ephesians Paul unveils that the believers need to be transferred from the authority of Satan to the authority of Christ, the embodiment of God, in order to be the Body of Christ and the kingdom of God. Satan is the ruler of this world, the evil system designed by him to keep us away from God and His purpose (John 12:31; 1 John 5:19), and he is the ruler of the authority of the air, possessing authority and command over his angels (Matt. 25:41), who are his subordinates as rulers, authorities, and world-rulers of the darkness of this world (Eph. 6:12). Before our regeneration we were “sons of disobedience” who walked “according to the age of this world” and “according to the ruler of the authority of the air” (2:1-3). By grace, however, we have been saved from the course of the world and the rule of Satan, for God made us alive together with Christ, raised us up together with Christ, and seated us with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus (vv. 5-6), 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” (1:21).

Through our union with Christ in the divine life, we as the Body of the resurrected and ascended Christ are seated with Him in the highest place in the universe, far above Satan and the world. We are liberated from the reign of Satan as the ruler of the aerial authority and his usurpation of us through the world, as long as we abide in the resurrected and ascended Christ as the Spirit of Christ, maintaining our union with Him by remaining in continual fellowship with Him (John 15:4-5). Living in the heavenlies in Christ in a transcendent position over His enemy, we as the church, the Body of

Christ, are a corporate warrior empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength to stand against the stratagems of the devil and wrestle against the rulers, the authorities, the world-rulers of this darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies (Eph. 6:10-12). Formerly, we lived in the world, the kingdom of Satan (2:12); now we are “fellow citizens with the saints” (v. 19), indicating that we as the church are the kingdom of God, “a sphere in which He exercises His authority” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 19, note 3). Ultimately, we as members of His Body need to be subject to Christ as the Head of the church and grow up into Him as the Head in all things so that God may head up all things in Christ through the church as His Body (1:9-10; 4:15-16; 5:23-24, 30).

Satan’s authority also involves the bondage of sin. In Romans 5 through 8, indwelling sin is personified as an active agent (5:12, 21; 7:17, 20), pointing to Satan as the originator and father of sin (1 John 3:8; John 8:44). Just as sin reigns in people’s mortal bodies, lords it over them, deceives them, and kills them (Rom. 6:12, 14; 7:11), so also Satan as the ruler of this world controls, deceives, and murders human beings (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 8:44; Rev. 12:9; 20:3). In the sight of God, sin is Satan injected into man and operating within man. All fallen human beings have sin as their master and are under the authority and bondage of Satan as sin, having been sold under sin to be his slaves (Rom. 7:14; John 8:34).

It was to all the sinners held in the slavery of sin by Satan that Paul proclaimed the liberty in the New Testament jubilee. In Romans 5:12-21 Paul declares that although sin entered into the world through Adam’s transgression and has reigned in his fallen descendants, the believers in Christ who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in the divine life over sin. In the subsequent chapters of Romans Paul reveals that if the believers truly know Christ’s mighty victory over sin in His crucifixion, by which sin in the flesh was condemned and the body of sin was annulled, they will no longer serve sin as slaves (6:6, 10; 8:3). In order to participate in the sin-condemning death of Christ—through which He both put away sin and destroyed the devil (Heb. 9:26; 2:14)—the believers need to abide in Christ, reckoning themselves to be “dead to sin” and “living to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). Having been freed from Satan as sin and enslaved to God as righteousness, they should no longer present their members as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness but present their members as slaves to righteousness (vv. 12-22).

After presenting the objective facts of Christ’s victory over sin and the believers’ release from sin in Romans 5 and 6, Paul illustrates, from his personal experience, the plight of a wretched sinner under the captivity of the law of sin in his members in Romans 7. This chapter, which ends with a cry of despair, is followed in Romans 8:2 by Paul’s jubilant pronouncement: “The law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death.” “The law of sin” refers to Satan as sin dwelling and working in our fallen body, whereas “the law of the Spirit of life” refers to Christ as the life-giving Spirit living and operating in our regenerated spirit. Since the effectiveness of Christ’s sin-conquering and devil-destroying death has been compounded into the Spirit of life, this Spirit makes real to us Christ’s all-terminating death, in which He took away the sin of the world and condemned sin in the flesh, thereby judging our sinful nature and depriving it of its power (John 1:29; Rom. 8:3).

In order for us to be freed from the law of sin, we should put to death the practices of the body by the Spirit and walk according to our human spirit indwelt by and mingled with the Spirit (vv. 13, 4). When we set our mind on the flesh, we are enemies of God and remain captives of Satan, but if we set our mind on our mingled spirit, the law of the Spirit of life will release us from the shackles of the law of sin (v. 6). Eventually, the believers who walk according to the Spirit in their spirit, thereby experiencing a transfer from the dominion of Satan to the dominion of God, live in

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the reality of the kingdom of God, the sphere in which God exercises His authority over the believers in His life (14:17). This kingdom is under the divine rule because the reality of this kingdom is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (v. 17), the divine attributes that the believers express as they walk by the Spirit and are filled with the Spirit, living under the authority of God and serving Christ as slaves (v. 18). When the believers are sufficiently built up as the kingdom of God in the church life, the God of peace will crush Satan under their feet, executing a resounding defeat upon His enemy (16:20).

Receiving Forgiveness of Sins and an Inheritance

The result of turning from darkness and Satan’s authority to light and God’s authority is receiving forgiveness of sins and a divine inheritance. Just as the Lord Jesus forgave people of their sins and shepherded them into the enjoyment of God as their inheritance by announcing the gospel, so also Paul led people to be forgiven of their sins and to participate in the Triune God as their divine inheritance (Acts 13:38-39; 20:32). In Paul’s understanding, receiving forgiveness of sins and the inheritance is equivalent to enjoying the two aspects of God’s full salvation mentioned in Romans 5:10: judicial redemption (having been reconciled to God through the death of Christ) and organic salvation (needing to be saved much more by God in His life). The forgiveness of sins, which corresponds to judicial redemption, is “the base of all the blessings of the New Testament jubilee” (Lee, Recovery Version, Acts 26:18, note 5). On the one hand, forgiveness of sins is based on Christ’s redemption accomplished through His vicarious death, for “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22).

In Ephesians 1:7 Paul speaks of Christ, “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses.” Here Paul equates the redemption in Christ through His blood with the forgiveness of offenses, indicating that forgiveness is the application of Christ’s redemption. On the other hand, forgiveness of sins is through man’s repentance and faith in Christ, the Redeemer. Acts 10:43 says that through the name of the Lord Jesus “everyone who believes into Him will receive forgiveness of sins.” According to Luke 24:46-47, after suffering a redemptive death for our offenses and resurrecting from the dead for our justification (Rom. 4:25), Christ charged the disciples to proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sins in His name to all the nations. In carrying out this charge, Peter said to the Jews who were touched in their conscience, “Repent and each one of you be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38; cf. 3:19).

In a similar vein, Peter tied repentance to forgiveness of sins when he declared in Acts 5:31, “This One God has exalted to His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” This verse indicates that God inaugurated Christ to be both the Leader, whose “sovereign ruling causes and leads God’s chosen people to repent,” and the Savior, whose salvation, “which is based on His redemption, affords them forgiveness of sins” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 31, note 3). In cooperating with Christ in His heavenly ministry to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to those appointed to eternal life, Paul testified repentance unto God both to Jews and Greeks (20:21), and he declared to both the Jews and the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance (26:18-20). Paul also declared that through Christ forgiveness of sins is announced to people and that in Christ everyone who believes is justified (13:38-39).

Forgiveness of sins is the basis for partaking of the divine inheritance by participating in God’s salvation in His life. Acts 11:18 says, “To the Gentiles also God has given repentance unto life.” Here the Greek expression translated “repentance unto

life” (μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν) may be translated also as “repentance that leads to life” (New International Version) or “repentance,—that they may attain unto life” (Alford 25). This indicates that our repentance, which is for the forgiveness of sins based on the redemption of Christ, issues in our enjoyment of the life of the Triune God as our unique inheritance, in which life we are saved. In other words, our receiving forgiveness of sins, which is the application of Christ’s redemption, opens the way for us to enjoy the Triune God as our inheritance, which is a matter of His salvation in life (Gal. 3:13-14). As mentioned above, forgiveness of sins is the base of all the blessings of the New Testament jubilee, and the inheritance is the ultimate blessing. Witness Lee highlights the vital significance of the inheritance in Acts 26:18, pointing out that since forgiveness of sins is “the initial stage of the vision from the heavens,” and the inheritance is “the main object” of this vision, “Paul’s fourteen Epistles are the development and the description of this inheritance” (*Elders’ Training* 7-8).

The inheritance in Acts 26:18 does not refer to a physical blessing. Instead, the inheritance refers to the Triune God who, through the process of Christ’s incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, was consummated to be the life-giving Spirit in order to be imparted into the believers as their portion for their enjoyment in the present age, in the coming age, and in eternity. The Old Testament bears witness to the fact that the Israelites’ true and ultimate inheritance is not material but is God Himself. In Psalm 16:5 David says, “Jehovah is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup.” God gave Himself to the tribe of Levi as their unique portion and inheritance (Num. 18:20; Deut. 10:9; 18:2; Josh. 13:33). Since the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, represents all the New Testament believers, who are a holy and royal priesthood to God (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:5-6; 5:10), the unique portion, the eternal inheritance, of the believers is God Himself.

The New Testament makes clear that the believers’ inheritance includes the earth, eternal life, the kingdom of God, incorruption, salvation, the grace of life, blessing, and the new heavens and the new earth with the New Jerusalem (Matt. 5:5; 19:29; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 15:50; Heb. 1:14; 1 Pet. 3:7, 9; Rev. 21:7). All these matters are intimately associated with God’s intention to impart Himself into the believers to be their unique inheritance. According to the intrinsic revelation of the New Testament, the primary significance of the believers’ inheritance is the Triune God Himself in the unsearchably rich Christ as the immeasurable Spirit wrought into them (Eph. 3:8; John 3:34).

Paul’s commission in Acts 26:18 bears a striking resemblance to his declaration of God’s salvation in Colossians 1:12-14: “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light; who delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Paul was commissioned to turn people from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, so that they might receive forgiveness of sins and their inheritance among the saints. In carrying out this commission, Paul tells the Colossians that God the Father delivered the believers out of the authority of darkness, the kingdom of Satan, transferred them into the kingdom of the Son of His love, and granted them forgiveness of sins through redemption in the Son so that they might be qualified to partake of their God-allotted portion of the saints in the light (vv. 12-14). Here the Greek word translated “portion” may be rendered also as “lot” or “inheritance.”

This word is understood as an allusion to the allotment of the land of Canaan distributed to the Israelites as their inheritance. This understanding is confirmed by Acts 13:19, where Paul identified the Israelites’ inheritance with the land of Canaan, saying that God distributed to them the good land as an inheritance. *The allotted portion of the saints* in Colossians 1:12, signified by the good land of Canaan allotted to the

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Israelites, refers to the all-inclusive Christ as the reality of the good land for the believers' enjoyment. To encourage the believers to enjoy Christ as their land, their inheritance, Paul tells them that they as living organisms have been rooted in Christ as their soil in order to absorb His divine riches for their spiritual nourishment (2:7). Furthermore, since the believers "have received the Christ" as their God-allotted portion by believing into Him, Paul exhorts them to "walk in Him" as the good land in order to enjoy and possess His riches (v. 6), just as Abraham and the children of Israel were told to walk through the promised land in order to possess it (Gen. 13:17; Deut. 11:24-25).

In Paul's understanding, to walk in Christ as the reality of the good land, the believers' inheritance, is to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4). According to Galatians, Christ as the good land is realized as the Spirit: "Christ has redeemed us out of the curse of the law, having become a curse on our behalf...in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (3:13-14). The physical aspect of the blessing that God promised to Abraham is the good and exceedingly spacious land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 17:8; 26:3-4), which typifies Christ with His unsearchable riches and His immeasurable dimensions (Eph. 3:8, 18; Acts 3:25-26).

Since the resurrected Christ is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17), the blessing for all the nations is the promised Spirit, who is received by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:2). In Galatians 3:18 the promised blessing, the Spirit, is spoken of as "the inheritance." Therefore, the believers' ultimate blessing, their eternal inheritance, is the Spirit with His bountiful supply as the realization in their experience of the all-inclusive and all-extensive Christ, the fulfillment of the type of the good land (Heb. 9:15; Phil. 1:19). Today the believers may participate in their inheritance by receiving the Spirit, whom God bountifully supplies to the believers out of the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:5).

Along this line, in Ephesians 1:14 Paul refers to the Holy Spirit, with which the believers are sealed, as "the pledge of our inheritance." Here the Greek word (ἀρραβὼν) translated "pledge" may be rendered also as "foretaste," "down payment," "earnest," and "guarantee." On the one hand, the Spirit in the believers is a guarantee of God as their inheritance, securing their heritage. In *God's Empowering Presence: the Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* Gordon D. Fee notes that "the Spirit's indwelling presence serves as God's own guarantee that we are to inherit all that has been promised" (671). On the other hand, the Spirit is a foretaste of what we will inherit of God in Christ, affording us a taste of our full inheritance. Fee observes, "God's people have already entered into their inheritance; the Spirit as 'down payment' means present possession of what has been promised" (671). This is reminiscent of Paul's description of the believers as those "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit,...eagerly awaiting sonship, the redemption of [their] body" (Rom. 8:23). Fee notes that the genitive *the firstfruits of the Spirit* is appositional and means "the firstfruits, the Spirit himself" (573), indicating that the Spirit is "the firstfruits of the future harvest" (571). Today the indwelling Spirit is the firstfruits, the foretaste, of our full enjoyment of the Triune God as our inheritance, assuring us that we will partake of a full harvest of God as our inheritance when we obtain the full sonship, the redemption of our body.

Among Those Who Have Been Sanctified by Faith in Christ

Immediately after speaking of the inheritance, Acts 26:18 speaks of "those who have been sanctified by faith" in Christ. This implies that the believers' enjoyment of the inheritance is dependent upon sanctification (20:32). The sanctification spoken of in this verse implies both positional sanctification, in which the believers in Christ are set apart from the usurping system of the world unto God by the precious blood of Christ

(Heb. 13:12; 10:10, 14), and dispositional sanctification, in which they are transformed by partaking of both the Holy Spirit and God's holiness, thereby being saturated with the holy nature of God so that they may be permeated with God as their inheritance (6:4; 12:10; Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11; 1:2; cf. Eph. 5:26).

The entire process of God's full salvation in life, by which we participate in Him as our inheritance, hinges on sanctification. Paul underscores the indispensable role of the Spirit's sanctification in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14: "God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, to which also He called you through our gospel unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This salvation, which originates from God's selecting us according to the good pleasure of His will in eternity past and culminates in the glorification of our entire being at the Lord's return, is carried out through the Spirit's sanctification (Eph. 1:4-5; Col. 3:4; 1 Cor. 15:52-54). Ephesians 1:13-14 says that when we believed in Christ, we were sealed with "the Holy Spirit of the promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance unto the redemption of the acquired possession," and 4:30 says that we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of God unto the day of redemption. For us to be sealed with the Holy Spirit is first by God dispensing the Holy Spirit as a living seal into our spirit at our regeneration in order to mark us out permanently as God's inheritance. Then God increasingly saturates our entire inner being with the Spirit throughout our Christian life so that we may be transformed in nature with His holy element unto the redemption of the acquired possession.

Since we are God's possession "obtained through His own blood" (Acts 20:28; cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20), *the redemption of the acquired possession* in Ephesians 1:14 must refer to the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23), which is the transfiguration of our body of humiliation for conformation to the body of Christ's glory (Phil. 3:21). According to Fee, the Greek preposition translated "unto" (εἰς) in Ephesians 1:14 and 4:30 "expresses God's goal in his having sealed us by the Spirit" (672). In Romans 8:17-23 the redemption of our body is commensurate with the completion of our divine sonship, at which time we, as "joint heirs with Christ," will be "glorified with Him," thereby inheriting the Triune God in full as "heirs of God" (vv. 7-21). Therefore, sanctification encompasses three principal stages of God's salvation in life: our regeneration, in which we were initially sealed with the Holy Spirit, the sanctifying Spirit, in our spirit once for all; our transformation, in which we are gradually permeated with the Holy Spirit in our soul; and our glorification, in which we will be fully saturated with the Holy Spirit in our body (1 Thes. 5:23). The sanctification of our entire being will consummate in our maturity in the divine life; this maturity ensures that we, as heirs of God, are qualified to fully possess and enjoy the Triune God as our inheritance in the coming age and for eternity. The believers' ultimate inheritance is nothing less than the Triune God Himself—God in Christ as the Spirit dispensed and constituted into our tripartite being through sanctification for our full enjoyment of Him.

The expression *those who have been sanctified by faith in Me* (Acts 26:18) indicates that faith in Christ is the unique means by which we experience sanctification and thus enjoy Him as our inheritance. Faith in Christ denotes an organic union accomplished through believing into Christ. In Galatians 2:16 Paul links our believing into Christ with our faith in Christ, stating that we "have believed into Christ Jesus that we might be justified out of faith in Christ." The reality of our organic union with Christ is our human spirit mingled with Him as the Spirit of Christ (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:16). At regeneration the resurrected Christ, who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith, entered as the life-giving Spirit into our human spirit, thereby making our spirit a "spirit of faith," the unique organ by which we can substantiate the unseen, eternal God (Heb. 11:1; 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:13, 18). By exercising our spirit of faith, we may realize and appropriate all the riches of Christ as our divine inheritance. Therefore, by faith in Christ, that is, by our organic union with Christ as the life-giving

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Spirit in our spirit, we may be sanctified and thus enjoy the Triune God as our rich inheritance.

The faith in Christ spoken of in Acts 26:18 not only refers to our union in life with Christ but also implies our union with fellow members of the Body of Christ. In Romans 12:5 Paul declares that we who are many are “one Body in Christ” and “members one of another.” Here *in Christ* refers to our mystical union with Christ in the divine life, a union that issued from our faith. This verse reveals that the organic union with Christ encompasses our oneness with not only Christ, the Head of the Body, but also the fellow members of the Body (vv. 4-5). In this corporate union with Christ we are not only “members of Christ,” those joined to the Head of the Body (1 Cor. 6:15), but also “members one of another,” those joined to one another in Christ. Through faith in Christ Jesus, that is, through our union in life with Christ, the Son of God, we are “all sons of God” (Gal. 3:26) and constitute “the household of the faith” (6:10), the church as a universal household, the great family of God.

Those who have been sanctified in Acts 26:18 refers to the saints, who are fellow believers in Christ and fellow members of the Body of Christ, the church. In 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul identifies the church of God, which is the Body of Christ, with the saints, the believers in Christ who have been sanctified: “To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints.” “*To the church of God equals to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus.* This strongly indicates that the church is a composition of the saints and that the saints are the constituents of the church” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 2, note 3). Individually, the believers are the saints; corporately, the saints are the church of God, the Body of Christ. Similarly, Hebrews 2:11-12 reveals that the church is a composition of the brothers of Christ, those who are sanctified by Him. Verse 11 says, “Both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers.” According to this verse, Christ is not ashamed to call His believers brothers, because both the Sanctifier, Christ as the firstborn Son of God, and the sanctified, the believers as the many sons of God, are out of the same source, having been born of the same Father God in resurrection and possessing the same divine life and nature (Acts 13:33; 1 Pet. 1:3).

Hebrews 2:12, quoting from Psalm 22:22, which speaks of Christ, goes on to say, “I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the church I will sing hymns of praise to You.” In this verse *My brothers* is used interchangeably with *the church*. This indicates that the church is a corporate composition of the many brothers of Christ as the firstborn Son of God. The believers’ participation in the Triune God as their inheritance is not individualistic but corporate, for it takes place in the church as the Body of Christ, composed of the saints as the many sons of God. In Paul’s view, the church as the Body of Christ is the house of God, the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15). This means that just as in the year of jubilee every Israelite who had sold himself into slavery regained his freedom and returned to his family (Lev. 25:39-41), so also in the New Testament jubilee the believers who have been released from the bondage of Satan have returned to the church as their divine family.

It is worth noting that according to Acts 26:17-18, the Lord told Paul that He would send Paul to both the people of Israel and the Gentiles to announce the New Testament jubilee to them. This matches the tenor of Luke’s writings, which emphasize God’s intention to save not only the Jews but also the Gentiles. In Luke 4, shortly after announcing the New Testament jubilee (vv. 18-19) and that He would be rejected by the Jews (vv. 28-29), the Lord Jesus referred both to the case of Elijah, who was sent to Sarepta of Sidon, a Gentile land, to feed a Gentile widow and raise up her dead son (v. 26; 1 Kings 17:8-24), and to the case of Elisha, who healed Naaman, the captain of the army of the king of Syria, of his leprosy (Luke 4:27; 2 Kings 5:1-15).

In so doing, the Lord indicated that His gospel would turn to the Gentiles. In Luke 24:47, shortly before His public ascension, the resurrected Lord commissioned the disciples to proclaim in His name repentance for forgiveness of sins “to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem,” that is, to both the Jews and the Gentiles. Similarly, in Acts 1:8, also prior to His ascension, the Lord charged the disciples, saying, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

On the day of Pentecost, the Jewish believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit (v. 5; 2:4), and through Peter’s preaching in the house of Cornelius, the Gentile believers were likewise baptized in the Spirit (10:44-47; 11:15-17). By these two events, the Lord as the Head of the Body baptized all His believers, both Jews and Gentiles, once for all into His one Body (1 Cor. 12:13). The Lord told Ananias that Paul was a chosen vessel to bear His name before “both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (Acts 9:15) and that Paul would be “a witness to Him unto all men” (22:15). When the Jews in Pisidian Antioch rejected the gospel preached by Paul and Barnabas, Paul announced that he and Barnabas would turn to the Gentiles (13:44-47), recalling the Lord’s own response regarding His rejection by the Jews in Luke 4:22-29.

In his Epistles Paul underlines his commission as a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:16). Galatians reveals that through Christ’s redemptive death on the cross, the Spirit as the blessing of Abraham has been received by the Gentiles as their portion through faith in Christ (3:13-14). As a result, the saved Gentiles and the saved Jews are “all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 26) regardless of their races and nationalities (vv. 27-28) and have become fellow members of the household of the faith (6:10). Similarly, Ephesians unveils that through Christ’s death on the cross He slew the enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles in order to create the believing Jews and the believing Gentiles in Himself into one new man and to reconcile both in one Body to God (2:14-16). As a consequence, through Christ the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers “both have access in one Spirit unto the Father” (v. 18) and are “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (v. 19), and in Christ Jesus the saved Gentiles and the saved Jews are “fellow heirs and fellow members of the Body” (3:6). The ultimate goal of Paul’s ministry of the jubilee of grace was to produce the church as the organic Body of Christ, of which the Jewish believers and Gentile believers are fellow members, jointly enjoying the Triune God as their inheritance.

Finally, the expression *among those who have been sanctified* in Acts 26:18 implies that the believers’ enjoyment of the Triune God as their inheritance is a matter in and for the Body of Christ. In order for us to partake of God as our inheritance adequately, we need to be among the saints; that is, we need to participate in the life of the Body. Acts reveals that Paul’s labor to carry out his commission was not an individualistic work but the work of the Body of Christ. In his ministry journeys he did not move or work by himself but with a company of believers as his traveling companions, and they did not act or labor individualistically but corporately, in and with the church (15:3). Their move was not merely the move of individuals but the move of the Body of Christ. Wherever Paul went, he practiced the Body life—visiting the saints, enjoying the church life with them, seeking to shepherd them, teaching them publicly and from house to house, and laboring with them for the propagation of the gospel in the principle of the Body (20:18-38; 21:8). For example, shortly after his conversion, when Paul traveled from Damascus to Jerusalem, he sought “to join himself to the disciples” (9:26), and when he arrived in Rome on his final ministry journey, he took courage at the brothers’ warm welcome (28:14-15). The aim of Paul’s ministry of the jubilee was to bring forth the reality of the Body of Christ composed of the believing Jews and the believing Gentiles who have been sanctified to participate in the Triune God as their inheritance.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF PAUL’S MINISTRY OF THE JUBILEE OF GRACE WAS TO PRODUCE THE CHURCH AS THE ORGANIC BODY OF CHRIST, OF WHICH THE JEWISH BELIEVERS AND GENTILE BELIEVERS ARE FELLOW MEMBERS, JOINTLY ENJOYING THE TRIUNE GOD AS THEIR INHERITANCE.

IN COOPERATION
WITH THE
ASCENDED CHRIST
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WHO INTENDS
TO SANCTIFY THE
BELIEVERS BY
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PAUL SOUGHT TO
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SPIRIT IN THEIR
TRIPARTITE BEING.

Conclusion

At his conversion Paul received a divine commission from the ascended Christ to carry out God's New Testament economy by announcing the New Testament jubilee to both Jews and Gentiles: to open people's eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God so that they might receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among the saints. Paul proclaimed the New Testament jubilee as a continuation of Christ's ministry on earth and in coordination with Christ's present ministry in heaven. In the Gospel of Luke Christ announced the recovery of sight to the blind by shining upon those sitting in darkness in order to open their eyes and deliver them from satanic darkness into divine light; He proclaimed release to the captives under the slavery of sin and the oppression of Satan, transferring them from Satan's kingdom into God's kingdom; and He announced the gospel to the poor by shepherding them to partake of God as their divine inheritance so that they might be rich toward God (Luke 12:21). In cooperation with the ascended Christ, who radiates light through the preaching of the gospel of the glory of Christ, Paul endeavored to enlighten people concerning the economy of God, and he shined on others in order to bring God's salvation to them and to deliver them from the authority of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, a kingdom of light. In cooperation with the ascended Christ as the unique Head of His mystical Body, the Christ who desires to build up His Body for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth (Eph. 4:8-12; cf. Acts 9:31), Paul labored to rescue people from the authority of Satan and to lead them to subjection under Christ the Head, exhorting them to be liberated from the bondage of Satan as sin in their flesh through the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in their spirit, so that they might be the reality of the Body of Christ and the kingdom of God. In cooperation with the ascended Christ as the Leader and Savior who gives repentance and forgiveness of sins, Paul charged people to repent and receive the forgiveness of their sins. And in cooperation with the ascended Christ as the Sanctifier who intends to sanctify the believers by saturating them with the holy nature of God (Eph. 5:26), Paul sought to help the believers to be permeated with the Holy Spirit in their tripartite being for their participation in the processed and consummated Triune God as their rich inheritance in the present age, in the coming age, and in eternity. The goal of Paul's ministry was to make God's chosen and redeemed people members of the church as the household of God and to build up the Body of Christ, a corporate entity composed of Jewish and Gentile believers as fellow heirs of God who partake of Him as their inheritance. May Paul's divine commission become our own, and may we, by the grace of God, carry out this commission to announce the New Testament jubilee to others in coordination with Christ's heavenly ministry for the fulfillment of God's New Testament economy. **AFC**

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