



THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

**EPHESIANS
CHAPTERS 1-4**

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“He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He was planning in Christ for the administration of the fullness of times: to consummate all things in heaven and earth in one head, Christ” (Ephesians 1:9, 10).

Introduction

This booklet is based on a series of sermons preached at Thorp Community Church. I did not end up preaching through the whole book. The Lord had me stop in chapter four, verse sixteen, so that is all that is represented in these pages. Nevertheless, the truth in Ephesians is rich. I hope those who read this will be as blessed as I was by Paul's presentation of Christ in the first four chapters.

Ephesians

Cosmic Christ

In the opening chapter of Ephesians, Paul presents Christ in a rather cosmic aspect. We are dealing, in these verses, with One who existed before creation, who encompasses every spiritual blessing, in whom God brought all times, places, and realms to their ultimate consummation. Is such a view of Christ relevant? Does Jesus in this aspect have anything to do with our day to day goings on?

It is our tendency to expect that God make Himself relevant to us. By presenting Christ in such a cosmic way, Paul challenges us to make ourselves relevant to God. That Christ is the beginning and the end must touch our hearts at a deep level or we will never feel compelled, as Paul was, to give our lives for Him who died for us and rose again (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). God will never be relevant to us until we realize that there is no relevance outside of Him.

In trying to tell us what he knows, Paul seems to run out of breath. Clearly, there are no words vast enough to encompass the One He has seen by revelation. Is our own vision of Christ so breathtaking? Or are we more interested in a small Jesus that mostly helps us live our own lives but doesn't take us captive to His vision and purpose? The Old Testament speaks of people having "household gods," idols set up in a small shrine in the home. At times, these were even common among God's people (Judges 17). If one wished to rearrange the furniture or move to another house, the gods could be picked up, moved, and placed where one wished. They were at the disposal of the family who owned them, and their purpose was to ensure the health and prosperity of the household. This is probably the sort of Jesus many want and have—a Jesus that stays in His place, that we can take wherever we wish, whose purpose centers on us and on our desires. Whatever can be said about this household Jesus, we cannot say it is the Jesus of the New Testament. For the Jesus of the New Testament—the One who is before all things, in whom all things hold together—says, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" (Col. 1:17; Isaiah 66:1, 2). Anyone who has encountered Christ as He is understands that they will occupy a place in His house, that He is free to pick them up and take them wherever He wishes, that their life exists for His purpose and desires. This is the One whom we encounter in the first chapter of Ephesians.

Study Questions:

- 1) In what aspect does Paul present Christ in Ephesians chapter 1?
- 2) Why is it important for us to know Christ as He is presented in this chapter?
- 3) What was a "household god?" (Judges 17).

The Consummation of All Things

The center of chapter one is verses 9 and 10:

He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He was planning in Christ for the administration of the fullness of times: to consummate all things in heaven and earth in one head, Christ.

These verses are concerned with the fulfillment of all that is heavenly, of all that existed before creation, of every spiritual blessing. We can see that Christ was this fulfillment, that God's will and good pleasure were planned in Him. Yet there are two phrases which, at first glance, seem somewhat obscure. The first is, "the administration of the fullness of times," and the second is, "to consummate all things." Again, with Paul's use of words like "fullness" and "all things," we might think these are ideas too large to understand and simply pass over them. But the Bible is its own best interpreter, and there are other scriptures that have something to say about these phrases.

We first need to locate the fullness of times. Galatians 4:4 says, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." Again, Hebrews 9:26 reads, "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." From these scriptures we can see that the fullness of time came at the cross. And the cross was the administration—that which governed, organized, and defined the fullness of time. Peter says as much in Acts: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). We can see administration in the fact that God purposed the cross and orchestrated its occurrence at the time of His choosing.

This brings us to the second phrase: "to consummate all things in heaven and in earth in one head, Christ." Now the word "consummate" carries the connotation of coming together, uniting, and even marriage. In Christ we have a marriage, a union of things heavenly and things earthly. How did God effect this marriage? Colossians 1:19, 20 says, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." So the administration of the fullness of times was this consummation of all things in Christ, and the cross was the instrument of that consummation.

An Illustration from Genesis

Before moving on, it will benefit our understanding if we look at an illustration from Genesis. To some this may seem strange. In what way can Genesis help our understanding of Ephesians? Put simply, the Old Testament is not only history. It is that, but more importantly, the Old Testament contains the pattern, the blueprint of God's eternal plan in Christ. This plan it sets forth over and over again in history, in law, in temple designs, in wisdom, in songs, in poetry. To say it another way, what the New Testament says in words, the Old Testament shows in pictures. Genesis 1:26 reads, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" Certainly this verse is about God making man and granting him authority over the first creation. But it also shows a

consummation, a bringing together of all things in heaven and in earth under one head—the image of God. Considered in this aspect, this verse looks ahead to the consummation of all things in Christ, who is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). The writer of Hebrews makes this same connection when he applies Psalm eight to Jesus (Heb. 2:6-9). But where is the cross? For we have said that the consummation did not just happen in Christ but in the cross of Christ. Though not apparent from Genesis 1:26, the cross is there, and we will discover it presently. But before we do, further discussion of Ephesians chapter one is in order.

Study Questions:

- 1) When was the fullness of times? (Gal. 4:4; Heb. 9:26).
- 2) What was the administration of the fullness of times?
- 3) What does “consummation” mean, and how did God bring about the consummation of all things?
- 4) How can Old Testament books, such as Genesis, help us understand Ephesians?
- 5) Fill in the blank: “What the New Testament says in _____, the Old Testament shows in _____.”
- 6) Where do we see a consummation in Genesis chapter one?

In Him

The words, “in him,” or “in Christ,” appear nine times in the first fourteen verses of Ephesians. The concept appears more than that. These two words are an important key to understanding, not only Ephesians, but God and ourselves in relation to Him. To make this point fully it will be worthwhile to list the verses in question:

- “every spiritual blessing...in Christ” (1:3).
- “For he chose us in him...to be holy and blameless” (1:4).
- “he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ” (1:5).
- “his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves” (1:6).
- “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (1:7).
- “his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ” (1:9).
- “to consummate all things in heaven and in earth in one head, Christ” (1:10).
- “In him we were made heirs” (1:11).
- “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit” (1:13).

We have here a list of “every spiritual blessing:” holiness, grace, forgiveness, and the many other benefits of being in Christ. But more important than the benefits themselves is the fact that they all consist **IN HIM**. Ephesians 1:13 says, “and you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth.” To be a Christian is to be included in Christ. We are holy because we are in the Holy One. We are sons because we are in the Son. We are heirs because we are in the Heir. This passage is not about Jesus and all the things He gives us. It is about Jesus who IS all things to us.

When we read this passage, we do not always see Christ as its exclusive subject. We see Him as just one of a pantheon of Bible subjects Paul is discussing. But Paul wasn’t writing to instruct the Ephesians in the theology and doctrines of Christianity. He was writing so they would know the Person of the consummation and the full richness of Him. Unfortunately, so much of Christianity is focused on getting things instead of knowing Jesus and being in His fullness. When we understand grace, redemption, and these other benefits to be other than Christ Himself, we wrongly apply them to ourselves. That is, we see Jesus as our savior and every spiritual blessing as something else we are to possess or have operational in us. Though subtle, we change the gospel message when we think this way. We introduce a separation between us and Jesus, and we relate to Him in a way that is less than He intends. Instead of believing that we were placed in Him who is every spiritual blessing, we believe we are pursuing these blessings with His help. Our walk becomes centered around Christian things instead of being centered in Christ. This leads us into difficulties and confusion.

For example, based on verse four we may believe that before creation God chose to save some and to condemn others. But notice that Paul didn’t say, “For he chose us **to be** in him....” He said, “For he chose us **in him**....” God chose Christ before the creation of the world, and all who believe into Him are included in that choosing. Inasmuch, then, as Christ was chosen, we were chosen **IN HIM**. Applying God’s choosing to ourselves instead of Christ leads to believing in a God whose salvation is based on the flip of a coin rather than on the eternal love that led Him to suffer and die for all men.

Holiness, again, is being in the Holy One. If we do not know that Christ is holiness, we will think it is how we dress, how well we behave, or how much we do for God. But to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for

us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). It is not our works, then, that make us holy, but the work of God by which we are in Christ.

A final example concerns the anointing. Paul says we were “marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph. 1:13). In other words, we are anointed with God’s Spirit because we are in the Anointed One, the One to whom God gives the Spirit without limit (John 3:34). Why do we seek the anointing for ourselves when we are in the Anointed One?

Certainly, we are diversely gifted and placed in the body as God wills (1 Cor. 12:11, 18). But there is only One Anointed, and we are His members. Throughout the Bible, anointing oil is poured on a person’s head, not their body. Naturally, the oil overflows onto the body because of the fact that head and body are joined. But the body itself is not anointed.¹ In the same way, Pentecost was not the anointing of individuals in the church. It was the flowing down of the Holy Spirit from Jesus our Head who ascended into heaven and was anointed King of kings (Acts 2:1-4). In Exodus when God talks with Moses about the anointing oil He says, “Do not pour it on men’s flesh...whoever puts it on anyone other than a priest must be cut off from his people” (Ex. 30:32, 33). To be frank, much of our talk about people being anointed amounts to nothing more than flattery and the pouring of God’s oil on flesh. No doubt there are many who do not mean to steal glory from Christ when they use this kind of terminology, and it does not honor God to quibble about words. But we must be clear in our own hearts that the anointing is in Him and not on us.

Knowing our anointing in Christ also brings a security as we walk and minister. Jesus is eternally anointed. The Holy Spirit remains on Him (John 1:32). Because the Spirit remains on our head, He remains on us as well. Anointing is something every one of us just walks in because of our union with Christ. Applying the anointing to ourselves, on the other hand, leads to fear and legalism. The anointing becomes something unpredictable, that comes and goes. We may start thinking the Spirit remains only as long as we do exactly what God asks. We may think God only causes His rain to fall on the righteous (Matt. 5:45). But we need to ask ourselves the same question Paul asked the Galatians: “Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?” (Gal. 3:5). Rather than becoming foolish with the Galatians, we would do better to believe and be in Christ, where forgiveness and anointing are unchanging in their reality and availability (Gal. 3:1).

God would have us seek His Son and not spiritual blessings. This is why Paul didn’t pray that the Ephesians would get everything God had for them. He prayed “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better” (Eph. 1:17). As we know Christ, and live in Him by faith, He is made all things to us (1 Cor. 1:30). As we remain in the True Vine, all that He is flows into us (John 15:4).

In the Beginning

Genesis again provides an illustration that is helpful in grasping what it means to be in Christ. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” and He packed them full of blessings. When He made man, He made him in a completed creation, in a garden that was already planted and being watered by the river flowing from within its borders. All that the man had to do was remain in the garden and enjoy the work God had finished.

¹ Lev. 8:12; 1 Sam. 10:1; Psalm 133:2.

Christ is also a garden, in whom the fruits of holiness, sonship, & every other spiritual blessing have been provided by God. From the cross, Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). God hasn’t placed us in what is incomplete and requires our effort. After the fall, Adam worked just outside the garden for things that he once had in the garden. Too many of us also work just outside of Christ, trying to produce and provide for ourselves the spiritual blessings that are ours in Jesus. It is not that we are literally outside of Christ. But our unrenewed thinking causes us to live as if we are.

Study Questions:

- 1) What is even more important than the spiritual blessings that are ours?
- 2) What is the subject of Ephesians 1:1-14?
- 3) Complete: “He was writing so they would know _____
_____....”
- 4) What is holiness?
- 5) Why didn’t Paul pray that the Ephesians would get everything God had for them? What did Paul pray? (Eph. 1:17).
- 6) What did Jesus say from the cross? (John 19:30). How was the creation of the world similar?
- 7) What causes us to live as if we are outside of Christ’s fullness when we are not?

The Fullness of Him

With Ephesians 1:22 and 23 we return again to the consummation of all things under one Head:

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

As before, the consummation is meant to be understood in connection with the death and resurrection of Christ. Verses 19 through 21 explain that the power working in us is the very power which God exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. Yet these verses add a little more to our understanding because they show more particularly the place of the church within the consummation. We are not just “all things.” We are the very body of Jesus, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.

Theologically, we can talk about God’s omnipresence, the fact that God is everywhere present at the same moment. But God is not everywhere in the same way that He is in us. God occupies every space and dimension in the universe, but He does not have relationship in every place that He is. Psalm 139 says:

Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the grave, you are there.

God is everywhere. He is present in heaven and in the grave. But the relationship He has in each of those places is quite different. Under the Old Covenant, when this Psalm was written, God could not be met or related to more meaningfully than in the temple He set apart as the dwelling place of His glory (1 Kings 8:29). In fact, the relationship for which God set apart the temple was so significant, He condemned attempts to relate to Him anywhere else (Deut. 12:2-7).

It is our privilege, under the New Covenant, to be the body, the dwelling, the exclusive temple of God’s glory. Again, God is everywhere, but the degree of His manifestation, the degree to which He is understood and known, depends on the depth of relationship He has in any given context. Paul tells us that “God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (Rom. 1:20). There is a degree of revelation in nature because God, as creator, has a certain relationship with the things He has made. A painter might have a similar relationship with his painting. But the relationship the painter has with his painting no doubt pales when compared to the relationship he has with his wife.

Study Questions:

- 1) What are we meant to understand the consummation in connection with? (Eph. 1:19-23).
- 2) Are we just “all things”? Who are we?
- 3) What does “omnipresent” mean?
- 4) Does God have relationship in every place He is?

The Wife of the Lamb

When we looked at a figure of the consummation in Genesis, we saw all things in heaven and in earth brought together under the headship of God's image, but we did not find the cross. To find it, we must go to Genesis chapter two. Though chapter two comes after chapter one in the narrative, it does not follow chapter one in time. Chapter two, in fact, doubles back to the 6th day, when man was created, and looks at that event in more detail (Gen. 1:27; 2:7, 21, 22).

In Genesis two we find that out of all things, there was nothing of Adam's kind, nothing that shared in his very self. This, in fact, was the only thing in creation God said was not good (Gen. 2:18). "So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep," and out of his side brought the woman (Gen. 2:21, 22). When the man awoke, he recognized that God had given him fullness in his wife. He recognized that Eve was not just another thing to rule over but the one created to fill his longing for relationship: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (Gen. 2:23). God then set them together on the throne of creation and gave them the charge to be fruitful and increase in number (Gen. 1:27, 28).

In the same way, God brought all things in heaven and in earth together through the cross, but there is a level of intimate participation that He has reserved for the church alone. This we find in Ephesians 2, verses 4-6:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

God reconciled all things through the cross, but all things did not participate in the cross. Only the church enjoys such intimacy with her Lord. This is why the church is called the wife of the Lamb (Rev. 21:9). We were in Him when He died just as Eve was in Adam when he slept. Like Adam, Jesus was taken out of the ground where He was buried. But we who are His bride were "created in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:10). Our origin was in Him just as Eve's origin was in Adam. We are of our Husband and share in His very self. Having been buried with Him through baptism into death, we walk with Him in newness of life and share in His throne (Rom. 6:4; Rev. 3:21). By our union with Christ, we are fruitful and increase His image in the earth (John 15:5). We are bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh. Christ cannot be known more clearly than in His bride—those who always carry about in their body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life of Jesus may also be revealed (2 Cor. 4:10, 11).

This is what it means to be the fullness of Him. How could the One who fills everything be any more full? Again, this describes the degree of relationship and revelation He has in His body, a degree unmatched by anything in creation. In the beginning, God said, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). His intention, His full thought, existed in His mind, and He expressed it in His word. But when His word became flesh—"and there was light"—His word was given fullness (Gen 1:3). "God is love" (1 John 4:16). Love was in the heart of God before creation, eternally. When Jesus, the Word, became flesh and died on the cross, God's love was given the fullness of bodily manifestation (1 John 3:16). "No one has ever seen God," John writes, "but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:12). Being the body of Christ means continuing the bodily manifestation of God's love. In this way we are the fullness of Him. Through us, what is hidden in God's heart is made known to all things. This is

why Ephesians chapter three says, “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:10, 11). God’s wisdom is Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:22-24). He wants to demonstrate the love of the cross through us again and again. This is the mission and calling of the church. By this all men will know that we are His disciples (John 13:35).

Study Questions:

- 1) Does Genesis chapter two happen after chapter one?
- 2) Complete: “When the man awoke, he recognized that God had given him _____ in his wife.”
- 3) What intimacy with Christ is reserved for the church alone?
- 4) Through whom is Christ known most clearly? Why?
- 5) Complete: “Being the body of Christ means _____.”
- 6) What is the mission and calling of the church?

A Holy Temple in the Lord

While the final verses of chapter one through the seventh verse of chapter two describe our relationship with Christ from the angles of body and bride, the final verses of chapter two focus on what it means to be the temple of God:

...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph. 2:20-22).

To help our consideration of this passage, we should look at the following verses:

"In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built" (1 Kings 6:7).

"[Y]ou also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house...." (1 Peter 2:5).

Before we're living stones, we're merely part of the formless rock in the quarry of the world. In this state, Paul says we were uncircumcised, "without hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:11, 12). When we believe, we come into the circumcision done without hands (Col. 2:11). The cross cuts us away from the quarry of the earth, and we are placed—a finished brick in the finished temple of Christ. No tools were heard at the temple site. The temple is a place of rest. We are not to work. We are to do nothing more than remain where God has placed us in the temple of His Son.

We remain in our place by simply believing the truth. This is easier said than done. Our faith is challenged daily by the rough edges in ourselves and others. Instead of seeing ourselves as complete in God's temple, we see ourselves as misshapen, still in the quarry and in need of sculpting. It is true that we are in the process of being conformed, and that the Holy Spirit is going at us hard with His hammer and chisel. But, "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). The process doesn't change the truth. The working out of our salvation doesn't change the reality of our salvation. God is not working on us because our place in His house is in question. He is working on us because our place is certain, and He is uniquely fitting us for it. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10).

The Holy Spirit is our stone mason, and He shapes us according to the design of the whole temple. Our individual shape is determined by the place we occupy within the whole structure. Similarly, our completeness is not only in relation to our block. A finished block by itself is only an unfinished wall. We are complete because we are joined to the Chief Cornerstone along with those of all times and places that have given themselves to Him.

Study Questions:

- 1) What do the final verses of Ephesians chapter two focus on?
- 2) How do we become part of the temple?
- 3) Complete: "The temple is a place of _____."

4) How do we remain in our place in the temple?

5) Write out Ephesians 2:10.

6) Who is our stone mason?

7) According to what design does God shape us?

The New Man

There is yet a third angle from which Paul discusses Christ and His body in Ephesians chapter two, that of the New Man:

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Eph. 2:15, 16).

Since the fall, the old man, the race of Adam, has been characterized by enmity: Cain killing Abel, the scattering at Babel, Jews and Gentiles, political parties, male and female. Certainly it is good to feel camaraderie with those who are like us. Patriotism, friends of a similar age group, family ties, and the like are good to a point. It is false to think that we can be universal simply by rejecting whatever group we belong to. But unless we realize that every personal identity we can adopt ended at the cross, we walk in a certain amount of deception and in the division of the old man. Those in Christ must shed every other loyalty and defining affiliation and live out the humanity of the New Man.

This is especially true of our individual functions in the body of Christ. We often draw identity from our function in the body instead of from our Head. We start to think of ourselves as apostles, prophets, worship leaders, pastors. The division of the old man is disguised in this case because his sense of self is coming from something godly. To those with this mindset, the body is individuals functioning in giftings rather than the corporate manifestation of a Person. Yet this is precisely the mentality Paul battles in 1 Corinthians twelve. If we were to sum up the chapter in only one verse, it would have to be verse thirteen: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." How ironic it is that we often turn to this chapter to read about individual gifts and individual functions when Paul is trying to teach us that the body is one.

The greatest thing about the New Man is that He is Christ, and that means every member is Christ. This doesn't mean every member is Christ in itself. It means this Man has only one identity and that identity is Christ. God didn't put individual identity to death in order to destroy our sense of self. He put it to death in order to liberate us into a new and risen self—Christ. This is why Paul says, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires...and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24). Similarly, Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." What a great salvation that I no longer live, that you no longer live, that racial divisions no longer live, that feminism and macho-ism no longer live, that materialists and artists no longer live, that old and young no longer live. What a great salvation that now only He lives who was raised ONE New Man, the God-Man: "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all" (Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28).

Study Questions:

- 1) In your own words, state what has characterized the old man.

- 2) Is our identity found in the spiritual gifts God has given us, or the way God causes us to function in the church?
- 3) What is 1 Corinthians 12 about?
- 4) What is the identity of the New Man?
- 5) Write out Colossians 3:11.

For This Reason...

Ephesians chapter three begins, “For this reason....” And we must ask, “For which reason?” when we read this. The reason is everything Paul has been sharing up to that point: God has consummated all things in heaven and in earth in the cross of Christ. We are the wife of the Lamb, the temple of His living sacrifice, the new humanity of His resurrection. “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—” what? Paul doesn’t finish his thought. The next twelve verses seem to be an interruption, and he doesn’t finish his statement until verses 14-19:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.

For the reason, then, that God’s desire is for Christ to have a body, a temple of manifestation, a humanity after His kind, Paul prays that, through our faith and the Holy Spirit, the Father would cause Christ to dwell in us. He prays that our goal would be to explore the depths of Christ’s love together, to grasp it in increasing measure, to be filled with all the fullness of it. All of our other activities and ministries depend on this. Martha complained to Jesus when she saw her sister Mary sitting at Jesus’s feet and listening to His words (Luke 10:38-40). But Jesus scolded her: “Martha, Martha...you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41, 42).

We Christians worry about many things which seem important until they are compared with the importance of truly knowing the heart of Christ. We fret about the gospel going into all the world, about unbelievers being saved, about our personal callings and ministries, about new church buildings, about cultivating spiritual gifts, and about a whole list of things that Paul says are not as excellent as love (1 Cor. 12:31). We justify our busy-ness by saying we need to be balanced, that we have to serve as well as seek. “We need to be Mary and Martha,” some say. But the Lord did not say this.

Study Questions:

- 1) Complete: “God’s desire is for Christ to have a _____, a _____ of manifestation, a _____ after His kind....”
- 2) Explain this statement: “All of our other activities and ministries depend on this.”
- 3) Did Jesus say we need to be like Martha and Mary?

Now to Him Who Is Able

When we consider the enormity of grasping the love of Christ together, a horrible doubt may strike: Is it possible to grasp the love of Christ? Or is His love just an abstraction that has no place in the real world?

To answer these questions, we merely need to read the next two verses:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Eph. 3:20, 21).

Much of the time, only the first part—"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine"—is quoted. We usually understand these verses to be saying that God can do more than we think, and we apply them to things we hope for. If we apply it to job hunting, it means God can give us a better job than we are looking for. If we apply it to evangelism, God can save more people than we can dream of. If we apply it to our marital problems, God can do a bigger miracle of reconciliation than we think.

Certainly, this is true in principle. God can do much more than we think is possible. But this is not what is being taught in this verse, nor is this verse concerned with our personal problems or desires. Paul has just prayed a mind-boggling prayer—that we would grasp the love of Christ—and now he is worshiping God because God is able to make his prayer a reality. "Now to him who is able" to cause Christ to dwell in us through faith, to empower us to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. "[T]o him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. This is what Paul is saying God is able to do more than. By applying this verse to our personal lives, we ignore the vision of Christ Paul is communicating and again refashion Jesus into a household god whose purpose centers on us. Instead of our lives being consumed by the pursuit of Christ's love, Christ is consumed by our personal pursuits.

Paul's confidence in this matter is extraordinary. What is it based on? "Now to him who is able...according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20). What power is at work within us? The life of the risen Christ! Ephesians 1:19, 20 read: "...and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead...." We would certainly fail to fulfill God's vision of a people grasping the love of His Son if it depended on our best efforts. (And isn't it because of our best efforts that God's name is blasphemed among the nations?) (Rom. 2:24). But because of the resurrection, we are new creations (2 Cor. 5:17). The one who demonstrated God's love by dying on the cross now lives in us (1 John 4:9). According to this power, we are able to grasp the love of Christ and live it out together.

A Prisoner of the Lord

The doubting Thomas-es among us still might think grasping Christ's love together is just an abstraction. God may be able to do immeasurably more than all they can ask or imagine, but they can't imagine much. Unless they can reach out and touch something, they will remain unmoved (John 20:24-29).

For all those still nursing doubts, Paul says, "As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Eph. 4:1). Grasping and living out the

love of Christ was as concrete to Paul as his jail cell. Shall we tell him that his vision of Christ is just an abstraction? He is an embodied refutation of our unbelief. It is because the cross was daily and tangible—something that possessed his body and not just his mind—that he suffered hunger, lack of sleep, beatings, and a whole host of other pressures (2 Cor. 11:23-29). As cosmic and spiritual as Paul gets in this letter, we might think he has his head in the clouds. But we must never forget who is writing—one with his feet planted firmly on the ground, who not only urges us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, but who did so himself. Acts 20:24 is probably the anthem of Paul’s whole life: “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”

The Glory of God’s Only Son

Grasping and living out the love of Christ is possible, but only if it takes hold of us first:

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

We are already dead. That which lives for itself did not rise again. Only Christ rose again. As the truth grips our hearts more and more, we will wrestle with the sins, the neediness, and the self-preferring of our old nature less and less. Christ—who values the Father and not Himself—will give up His life within, and our bodies will be the site of that sacrifice. Then we will be like the temple where the lamb was offered continually and God’s glory could be seen.

What does it mean for God’s glory to be seen? God’s glory is the glory of His only Son, the Word becoming flesh in us (John 1:14). As the Word becomes flesh in us, we will fulfill Ephesians 4:2, 3: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Then we will show ourselves to be sons of our Father (Matt. 5:44, 45).

Of course, we are all in process, and the love of Christ is lived out differently by each of us. Not all of us will end up in prison like Paul. We should be careful not to compare ourselves with others or to judge each other based on the way Christ’s love manifests in each of our lives. Some may preach or lead worship; some may make coffee before Sunday school; some may clean out the back room of the church (which has needed to be done for a long time!). If we have sat at Jesus’s feet and have grasped His love, and if we are moved by His love, then God is pleased with our sacrifice regardless of its appearance. The real sacrifice is the Lamb living in us, not the things we do. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3).

Study Questions:

- 1) Is it possible to grasp and live out the love of Christ? (Eph. 3:20, 21).
- 2) By what power are we able to grasp and live out the love of Christ? (Eph. 1:19, 20; 3:20).

3) How do we know that Paul didn't just have his head in the clouds when talking about the love of Christ? (Eph. 4:1).

4) To Paul, "the cross was _____ and _____."

5) What verse sums up Paul's whole life and ministry? Write out this verse.

6) What must happen before we are able to grasp and live out the love of Christ? (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

7) How do we fulfill Ephesians 4:2 and 3?

8) Is the love of Christ lived out in the same way by each person?

9) Complete: "The real sacrifice is _____, not the things we do."

The Whole Measure

Paul touches on the differing roles in the body of Christ when he says, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers....” (Eph. 4:11). But Paul’s point is not to talk about ministries. His point lies in verses 12 and 13: “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity of the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” There is a goal beyond discovering and operating in the ministries to which God has called us. Verse seven of chapter four tells us that Christ has given each person a measure of grace, and each of us is gifted according to that measure. But what is greater than any individual measure is the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. If we do not have this end immovably in view, then discovering and operating in ministries has no purpose. If we attain to our own measure of grace but not to the whole measure of Christ then we have fallen as far short of God’s glory as the Judges fell short of Solomon. Ultimately, all of us are called to only one thing—building up the body of Christ “unto a perfect man,” as the King James Bible says it (Eph. 4:13). In that sense, the individual ministries in which we are involved are not our callings. Instead, as we function in ministries we fulfill the one and only calling to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Considering that the Perfect Man is God’s desire, the church evinces a terrible lack of vision concerning Him. Instead, Christian magazines and bookstores nearly choke on the glut of publications about the five-fold ministry. What was to Paul a thought he passed by on his way to preaching the fullness of Christ has become for us an industry and a fascination. We stare at and study our individual members in much the same way that babies consider their feet and hands. If only we gave that much attention to the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). It is time to repent of the self-fascination that often passes for serving Christ, time to pour out our individual measures like drink offerings so that the church can grow (Php. 2:17). “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph. 4:14-16). Only as each part does its work unto the Perfect Man, and not just unto its own function, will the body grow and build itself up in love in the way God intends. Ephesians chapter four, after all, is about one—“one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6).

Study Questions:

- 1) What is Paul’s point in Ephesians 4:11-13? Is it to talk about ministries?
- 2) What is greater than anyone’s individual measure of grace?
- 3) What is every believer called to do?
- 4) Sum up Ephesians chapter four in one word.

Building the Tabernacle

Exodus chapters twenty-five through forty record the building of the tabernacle of Moses and provide some wonderful illustrations of the body building itself up in love. Again, to some it may seem strange to juxtapose Exodus with Ephesians. But when John says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us,” the phrase “made his dwelling” is more literally translated, “pitched his tent,” or “tabernacled.” The Word tabernacled among us. When we then read, “We have seen his glory,” it isn’t hard to be transported to Exodus 40:34, when Moses finished building the tabernacle: “Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” The connection is unmistakable, and John means for us to make it. The tabernacle of Moses, in which the Lord made His dwelling and manifested His glory, looked ahead to the tabernacle of God’s only Son, “who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus became a many membered tabernacle. Hebrews says, “And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast” (Heb. 3:6). Looking at Exodus, we can gain many insights into how we, as God’s tabernacle, are to be built up in love.

Willing Hearts

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give.’” (Ex. 25:1, 2).

The tabernacle of Moses was built entirely of things given. During the exodus, the Egyptians gave the Israelites many things, including silver and gold (Ex. 12:35, 36). Out of these riches, God’s people gave materials, as well as time and abilities as their hearts were moved. Freely they received, freely they gave (Matt. 10:8). We will only be built into the tabernacle God desires as we willingly sacrifice who we are and what we have. “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). The life laid down freely to the Lord is the kingdom’s greatest and only resource.

The Right Materials

“These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece” (Ex. 25:3)

There is not time to examine each item in the above scripture. Suffice it to say that each speaks of Christ, the Son of God, in some way. Gold shows His incorruptible nature. Silver—associated with redemption throughout the Old Testament—looks ahead to the cost of Christ’s redeeming death (Ex. 30:12, 13; Lev. 27). Scarlet yarn is the blood Jesus shed for us, and the oil is the Spirit of God anointing Him (Acts 10:38). Everyone who has Jesus has something to give, and we must build with Him or we will not be building His tabernacle:

But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. [...] Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him (1 Cor. 3:10, 11, 16, 17).

According to the Pattern Revealed

“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you” (Ex. 25:8, 9).

Moses received the design for the tabernacle and its furnishings as he communed with God on Mount Sinai. We get a sense of the intimacy of this communion in Exodus 33:11—“The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.” If we would receive God’s designs for the church, it must be in this kind of relationship as well. Human plans, common sense, and worldly wisdom must all be put aside. We cannot build based on what draws a crowd, or on what has worked at other times and in other places. We can only build based on the pattern of Christ, revealed as we commune with the Lord face to face.

Everyone

“Then the whole Israelite community...brought to the LORD freewill offerings for all the work the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do” (Ex. 35:20-29).

Glancing through Exodus 35, we read, “All who were willing...Everyone...Every skilled woman...And all the women...The leaders...All the Israelite men and women” (Ex. 35:20-29). Building the tabernacle was definitely a corporate venture. Without the willing participation of every member, the tabernacle would’ve remained a blueprint.

As we saw in Ephesians 4:16, it is the whole body that builds itself up in love, not just leaders or special ministers. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:26, “When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.” In the original Greek, *everyone* is repeated so that it reads, “*everyone* has a hymn, *everyone* a word of instruction, *everyone* a revelation, *everyone* a tongue or an interpretation.” In building the true tabernacle, God intends that everyone know the pattern of Christ by revelation, respond to the pattern, and contribute what they have received.

More Than Enough

“Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: ‘No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.’ And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.” (Ex. 36:6, 7).

The verses just quoted are a perfect example of God being able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us (Eph. 3:20). What if the members of a church so overflowed with resurrection life that the pastor had to ask people to cut back, to be more prayerful about giving of themselves so that enough could be found for everyone to do?

A Place Where God Is Seen

“So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels” (Ex. 40:38)

This verse represents the goal of all that has been said about the body building itself up in love. God must be seen in us or nothing that is in His heart has been accomplished. Moses's tabernacle was THE place God could be found in the earth. Jesus, the true tabernacle, said to His Father, “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world” (John 17:6). Our mission, the reason for our existence, is to continue the revelation of God as His many membered tabernacle. We can evangelize the whole world, but if we cannot bring those who believe our message to a place where God can also be seen, then we have done nothing but given stones to those whom we promised bread (Matt. 7:9). John's first epistle begins:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it (1 John 1:1, 2).

John and the other apostles didn't preach the Word. They preached the Word made flesh and dwelling among us. If the Word isn't becoming flesh in us, we have no gospel to preach but only a biblical fiction. And those who respond to such a message will know it is a fiction when they come to church but do not hear Him, see Him, look at Him, or touch Him in us.

God wants the glory of His Son to fill His tabernacle, and for the testimony of those who meet us to be, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In writing to the Ephesians, Paul hoped to draw them into this vision. He did not just want people to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior but as the consummation of all things. It is for this same reason that God has preserved this letter and delivered it to us. There are so many ways we can make Jesus small. We can reduce Him to theology or a set of tenets. We can reduce our relationship with Him to ministries or Christian activities. We can make Him just one of many Bible subjects. All of these shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces and do not allow them to enter (Matt. 23:13). Hopefully, Ephesians helps us know the One who “fills everything in every way,” the One who cannot be put in a box anymore than He could be put in a tomb.

“Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (Ephesians 6:24).

Study Questions:

- 1) What did John mean for us to think of when he wrote, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14; Exodus 40:34).
- 2) Complete: “Through His death and resurrection, Jesus became a _____ _____ _____.”
- 3) What is the kingdom’s greatest and only resource?
- 4) With what materials should God’s tabernacle be built?
- 5) How do we receive God’s designs for the church?
- 6) Who is involved in building God’s tabernacle? Is it just leaders or special ministers? (1 Cor. 14:26).
- 7) Can God do more than all that we ask or imagine? How much more?
- 8) What is the goal of the body building itself up in love?
- 9) The reason we exist is to _____ _____ _____ _____.
- 10) True or False: The apostles preached the Word. If you chose false, what did they preach?
- 11) If the Word isn’t becoming flesh in us, do we have a gospel to preach?
- 12) If we have no gospel to preach, then all we have is a _____ _____.
- 13) What testimony does God want those who meet us to have? (1 John 1:1, 2).
- 14) Did Paul just want people to know Jesus as Lord and Savior? What did Paul want people to know Jesus as?

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The word is not just knowledge about God. Rather, as John 1:1 says, “the Word was God.” It is hoped that the reader will not just receive knowledge or teaching about God but God Himself. “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”

(John 17:3).

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