

# THE PURPOSE OF THE AGES

## THE UNIFYING FACTOR OF TIME

Nothing focuses our entire being like being under the revelation of “the purpose of the ages.” It is the unifying factor that will inwardly calibrate us to handle every kind of environment and situation in our lives. In Ephesians 3:11 Paul speaks of “the purpose of the ages” (lit.), which God accomplished in Christ. The fact that it is called the purpose of the ages indicates that it is singular and particular. It is the one purpose of all the ages, embracing the history of eternity past, before the earth’s creation, going through this present period called time, all the way into eternity future with the new heaven and new earth. This purpose of the ages is an overarching purpose. It is the unifying and controlling factor of the entire spectrum of time. Paul’s burden is for all of us to enter into the vision and realization of this unifying and unique purpose.

*The vision of the purpose is what we obey*

We need to be under the vision of this purpose. Why? Because when this purpose becomes a part of our realization and understanding, it enables us to “sort out” our daily living, make decisions, and properly respond to whatever we encounter. This purpose inwardly calibrates us to know exactly what to do moment by

moment, day after day. It actually becomes our point of reference. There is nothing so calibrating as *the* purpose of the ages. We see this in Paul’s own testimony before King Agrippa in Acts 26:1-23. After he shares about his manner of life, he utters this word, “Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” This indicates that Paul was under something that he obeyed. He was controlled by a heavenly vision. He had something to obey.

Many of us for years did not have anything to obey. We were not controlled by a governing vision. Even now, what vision do we obey? Paul says, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” This tells us that there was a vision unveiled before Paul, the vision of the purpose of the ages. Everything came under this vision, and Paul obeyed what he saw. This shows us how crucial it is to be brothers and sisters under the revelation of the purpose of the ages. This revelation makes everything so simple and is able to calibrate us hour after hour. May the Lord give us a fresh opening to the purpose of the ages.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AGES

Most of the versions of the Bible translate the Greek word *aion* (αἰών) as “forever and ever.” But the Greek word is literally “age” or “unto the age of the ages.” This

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is important because it shows us that God moves in time frames called “ages.” The ages are related to His dispensational moves. That is, in different periods of time God moved and operated in a certain way. For example, from Adam to Moses, God worked with man in a certain way. Then from Moses to Christ, God worked with man in another kind of way. In the different ages, or dispensations, there were certain ways God operated on the earth, certain ways He related to man according to what He was doing at that time. Thus, to be a properly calibrated human being living on the earth is to correspond to what God is doing in each age. This is to be a person who is dispensationally significant.

Through all the ages the Lord is carrying out one purpose — the purpose of the ages. The purpose of the ages unites all the ages together, giving harmony, meaning, understanding, and perspective to the entire history of humanity, including eternity past and eternity future. There is one unique purpose that overarches and unites everything together. I have to know this purpose. I must be a person who is under the revelation of this purpose. The light of God’s purpose must shine on everything. We must interpret our lives and find our direction with this purpose firmly in our hearts. This purpose of the ages is unique — it ties everything together.

#### *Before the ages*

In 1 Corinthians 2:7 Paul uses the terminology “before the ages.” He says, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the [wisdom which has been hidden,] which God [predestined] before the ages for our glory.” This verse shows us that *before* God inaugurated the ages, there was something that He had in mind, something that was hidden. That something was “the purpose of the ages.” In other words, the purpose existed before the ages. The purpose hidden in the heart of God gives meaning to all the ages. This purpose, in the form of the wisdom of God, is also mentioned in Proverbs 8:22-31. There Christ is referred to as God’s wisdom *before* everything came into being.

#### *Hidden from the ages*

Paul uses another phrase, “hidden from the ages,” in Colossians 1:26: “. . . the mystery which has been

hidden from [the] ages and from [the] generations, but now has been [manifested] to His saints.” From the beginning of the ages, “the mystery,” or the purpose of God, was hidden until a certain time. Then it was made known. This reveals that all the ages are existing for one thing — for the purpose of God to be manifested to the saints.

#### *From of age*

An idiomatic and literal phrase, “from of age,” is used in Acts 3:21 and 15:18. It is difficult to translate this particular phrase. It has been rendered as “since the world began” (NKJV), “from ancient time” (NASV), “from a remote age” (Rotherham), and “from of old” (ASV). It implies history itself, encompassing all the ages.

#### *This present age*

A more familiar term to us is “this present age.” In Galatians 1:4 Paul says concerning Christ, “Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us [out of] this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” Also Romans 12:2 tells us, “Do not be conformed to this [age].” So there is a present age characterized by evil. This present age refers to the atmosphere, the time, in which we are living, with all of its modern things. It refers to the value system that contaminates the air — that comes through the TV, through the media. This value system permeates the society in which we live. There is an age to which people are being conformed. In this age there are evil parts and good parts. But every part is calculated to replace God in everyone’s life. This is what the age is all about. Satan is using this age to usurp God’s place with mankind (Eph. 2:2-3).

R. C. Trench, in his *Synonyms of the New Testament*, describes the word *age* as “all that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitute a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral, atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale, — all this is included in the αἰών, which is, as Bengel has expressed it, the subtle informing spirit of the κόσμος, or world of men who are living alienated and apart from God.”

### *The age of this world*

Now let us examine Ephesians 2:2, where Paul defines this present age as “the [age] of this world.” He says, “In which you once walked according to the [age] of this world.” Then in apposition to this, he says, “according to the [ruler] of the [authority] of the air, the spirit who [is] now [operating] in the sons of disobedience.” So the age of this world is simply an atmosphere in which Satan is the ruler and in which there is an influence over us seeking to penetrate us, usurp us, and steal us away from God.

The age of this world refers to the time in which we are now living. There is always something in every age vying for our attention. In each decade there is something new. There is always something going on. In the sports world, in the news, in music, in the movies, with personalities — there is always something competing for our hearts. The goal of all these things is to make us passive, kept under the authority of Satan.

In Romans 12 when Paul speaks about the church, he not only says, “present your bodies a living sacrifice,” but also “do not be conformed to this [age,] but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The renewing of our mind is the process of having the purpose of the ages etched into our being so that it becomes part of our reactions. When this renewing takes place in us, we no longer react apart from God’s thought, apart from Christ.

### *The age to come and the ages to come*

The phrase “the age to come” is used many times both in the Gospels and the Epistles. For example, the book of Hebrews refers to “the powers of the age to come” (6:5). There is an age that is yet to come. The phrase “the age to come” refers to the kingdom period, when the Lord returns and sets up His kingdom in a manifested way over this whole earth.

In the New Testament we see not only the singular “the *age* to come” but also the plural “the *ages* to come.” Ephesians 2:7 says, “That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” God put us in Christ and tells us that in that position of being in Christ, He is going to display and show His kindness toward us. This means

that in the ages to come we are the objects of the Father’s kindness because we are in His Son. What the Father feels toward the Son, He feels toward us. In the ages to come, He is going to show us His kindness. This gives us a glimpse into eternity future with the holy city, New Jerusalem. Sometimes we may wonder what we will be doing in our new, resurrected bodies. How will we be existing there in the holy city? According to Ephesians, God the Father is going to be doing one thing — showing His kindness toward us. This is what will take place in “the ages to come.”

### *The consummation of the age*

In Matthew especially, the Lord uses these words, “the consummation of the age.” This phrase means that the present age is going to be ended and consummated. The age as we know it, history as we know it right now on this earth, will one day and one hour be consummated. There will be the end of the age, the consummation of this present age. In Matthew 28:20 the Lord says, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the [consummation] of the age.” The consummation of the age refers to the end of the age at the Lord’s second coming. Matthew 24:3 puts the consummation of the age together with the Lord’s coming back: “And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

### *Into the age and into the age of the ages*

In the New Testament there is also the terminology “into the age.” Romans 11:36 says, “For [out from] Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.” “Forever” can literally be translated “into the age.” This refers to the coming age. Thus, in God’s Word “the age” is spoken of again and again.

Also, Galatians 1:5 uses the phrase “into the age of the ages.” Most Bible versions translate this verse, “To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” But according to the Greek it would literally be translated, “To whom be the glory into the age of the ages. Amen.” There is an age of all the ages. This is when the supreme manifestation of the one purpose will be fully realized on this earth. There will be a new heaven and a new earth that express God’s eternal purpose, the purpose of all the ages, in a full way.

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# God's Expression

*"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*

(Matt. 5:14-16)

These are some of the first words spoken by the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry. They are also some of the first words in the New Testament that reveal to us God's purpose for the church. We have seen, in prior issues of *the Christian*, that God's purpose for the church is multifaceted. There are many different aspects of the church, all of which pertain to her purpose as foreordained by God in eternity past. And here in Matthew, in what is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord reveals another fundamental aspect of God's purpose for the church — that she would express God, as light, to a dark world.

The apostle Paul unveiled an identical understanding of the church in his epistles. To the Philippians he wrote, "Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil. 2:14-16). To the Ephesians he said, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). Similarly, in speaking to believers, the apostle Peter declared, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). In other words, God has ordained that the church be the unique instrument in the universe through which He is expressed and proclaimed. God has chosen the church to be His testimony.

Not only did Paul and Peter see this, but so did the apostle John. In fact, out of all the apostles, it seems that John saw this aspect of the church the most clearly. Why? Because God showed it to him in a vision. Most of us are familiar with the fact that the book of Revelation consists of a number of visions which God gave to John. These visions pertain to Christ, to God's judgment of the world at the end of the age, and to the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. However, have you ever realized that John also received a distinct vision of the church in the book of Revelation? Indeed, the first item that John saw in this entire book was seven golden lampstands (Rev. 1:12). Later in the vision, the Lord tells John that the seven lampstands are the seven churches in Asia to whom the book of Revelation is addressed (Rev. 1:20).

What exactly is a lampstand, and why is the church identified as such? A lampstand is simply a stand upon which a lamp is

situated to shine the light. A lampstand is not the light in and of itself. It is, however, a practical instrument by which light can shine. It is the means for the expression of the light. And this is God's purpose for the church. The church has no light in herself. However, the church is inhabited by God, who is light (1 John 1:5), and by Christ, who is the light of the world (John 8:12). John saw the resurrected and glorified Christ walking in the midst of the seven lampstands (Rev. 1:13-16). This means that Christ, as the Spirit, lives in the church. And as He lives in the church, He is also expressed and testified through the church to a dark and sinful world. Thus, the church is identified as a lampstand because she is the practical means by which God Himself shines to the whole universe.

## *The Expression of God through Man*

Perhaps we are wondering, why has God chosen to be expressed through the church? To answer this question, we must understand two matters. First, we must understand that although God is light, He is invisible to the human eye. Though He is the God of glory, He cannot be seen (John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16). As a result, God is quite mysterious. He is hidden and largely unknown. But it is not God's desire to remain this way. It is not His will to be mysterious and invisible. The Bible reveals that He wants to be testified and made known. He wants His glory to be expressed.

Second, we must understand that God in His wisdom has chosen not to reveal Himself directly to the universe. Instead, He has chosen to express Himself through man. This is why He created man. The Bible tells us that God created man in His image because His original purpose for man was that he would bear His image (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; 15:49; James 3:9). Man was designed as a vessel to contain and express God's glory (Rom. 9:23; 2 Cor. 4:3-18). And this is what makes man so unique and valuable in God's purpose. No other creature under heaven was made in God's image. Only man was made to bear the image of God.

However, soon after he was created, man fell. He became sinful and corrupt. And as a result, he failed to bear God's image. In other words, he fell short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Indeed, man could only express the fallen self, the flesh, and the devil. Hence, God's original intention for man to bear His image was seemingly deterred. But God is never actually deterred. He will fulfill His own purpose regardless of how strongly the devil opposes it.

How then did God continue in the fulfillment of His grand purpose? First, God sent His own Son. In the fullness of the time, the eternal Son of God was incarnated as the Man, Jesus (Gal. 4:4). He became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). He was Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). And as a Man, Jesus Christ expressed God. He testified God. He was the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). He was "the Word" who expressed and explained God (John 1:1, 14). Before the coming of Christ, God gave the law through Moses. The law certainly

testified of God's righteousness and holiness. But the law was not God Himself. However, Jesus was God incarnate, the very reality of God Himself. And as such, God could be known. Jesus Christ was the perfect and complete expression of God in a manifest way.

Thus, during the time of His earthly ministry, if someone wanted to know God, he would only need to know Jesus (John 14:8-9). If someone wanted to see God, he would only need to see Jesus. If someone wanted to talk to God, he would only need to talk to Jesus. If someone wanted to hear God, he would only need to listen to Jesus. Jesus expressed and explained the mysterious God. As John said, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). This word "declare" in the original Greek language means to explain, to exegete, to fully expound. Jesus explained, exegeted, and fully expounded God. God was no longer mysterious and invisible, but was explained and expressed for man to behold. He was the Word who became flesh. He was the Word of life that the disciples could hear, see, look upon, and handle (1 John 1:1-2).

Moreover, through death and resurrection, Jesus was glorified. In other words, He brought man into glory. What does it mean for man to be glorified? It means that God has so filled and saturated man from within, that man radiates God as glory without. Man actually expresses the glory of God. He is the instrument, the means, for bearing God's image. And this is what Jesus Christ did! He brought His humanity into glory. He did not put off His humanity in His death and resurrection. Rather, He glorified it. Thus, today Jesus is the Man crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:6-10). He is the effulgence of God's glory and the very image of His substance (Heb. 1:3). As a Man, He is radiating glory, the expression of God (Acts 7:55-56).

### *The Church as God's Expression*

Although God's purpose to have man bear His image was perfectly fulfilled in Christ, God was still not fully satisfied. This is because God desires a *corporate* expression of Himself through *many men*. Jesus Christ is one Man. He is now in glory. But we must see that today God, through Christ, is leading many sons into glory (Heb. 2:10). He is conforming many brothers to the image of Christ, which ultimately will consummate in their glorification (Rom. 8:29-30). He is transforming us into the image of Christ, from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). In other words, God is gaining an expression of Himself through *the church*. He is expressed not only through Christ, but also through the church. His expression is greatly expanded, enlarged, and magnified through the church.

God expressed through man. This is a great mystery. Paul says, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh . . ." (1 Tim. 3:16). When God is manifested in the flesh, there is godliness. That is, there is the expression of God. And Paul states that godliness is a great

mystery. That God lives in and is expressed through man is mysterious. Nevertheless, it happened in Christ. He was God manifest in the flesh, the mystery of godliness. But this mystery continues to happen today in the church. And we must note that the surrounding context of the above verse refers not to Christ, but to the church. Paul is instructing Timothy about how he ought to conduct himself "in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth" (v. 15). The church is the entity that is holding up and supporting as a pillar the truth of God. The truth in this verse is not propositional truth, or mere doctrine. Instead, it refers to the *reality* of God. In other words, the church is the unique entity on this earth that is supporting and holding up the reality of God. No one else is doing this, and nothing else is doing this. Certainly the unbelievers and the world are not holding up the reality of God. Only the church does this. Why? Because the church is the house of the living God. It is where He lives, moves, and speaks. Thus, God is still being manifested in the flesh (2 Cor. 4:10-11). The mystery of godliness is still ongoing. Two thousand years ago, it was through Christ. Now it is through the church. And one day, when Jesus comes again in glory, we too will be glorified with Him. God will be radiated through Christ and the church to the entire universe. What a glorious expression God will have! He will no longer be mysterious, but fully manifested. How? Through Christ and through the church. The church will magnify and radiate the effulgence of God's glory (Col. 3:4; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2; Rom. 8:17-21). She will be the glorious church (Eph. 5:27). No wonder Paul declares, "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

How God desires to be expressed through the church! Paul disclosed God's desire so succinctly when he said that God's eternal purpose was to make known through the church the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10-11). We must pay attention to the words "*make known*" and "*through*." God wants His own wisdom to be made known to this universe—even to all the evil principalities and powers. He wants to be testified and expressed. But God does not express Himself directly—it is through something. It is through the church. The church is the means, the vehicle, through which God's wisdom is displayed. And as Paul declares, this is "according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord." In other words, God's eternal purpose is to have His expression through the church.

### *The Need for Reality*

Thus, today when people come to the meetings of the church, what should they encounter? What impression should people come away with? What "taste" should people receive? If the church is in a proper condition, people should sense that God is there (Ezek. 48:35). There should be an impression of life, light,

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*Into all the generations of the age of the ages*

At the end of his prayer in Ephesians 3 Paul says, “To Him be glory in the church [and in] Christ Jesus [into all generations of the age of the ages]” (v. 21). When Paul speaks in Ephesians 3:10-11 about the church as the vehicle to exhibit God’s manifold wisdom to the whole universe, he says that this is according to the purpose of the ages. This means that there is one unique, solitary purpose hanging over all the ages. If we are a human being living in God’s created world, we need to know that this unique purpose is specifically related to Christ and the church.

*The framing of the ages*

Hebrews 11:3 refers to the framing of the ages. It says, “By faith we understand that the worlds [the ages] were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” All the ages were framed and prepared by the word of God. Again we see that God brought all the ages into being with a uniquely prepared purpose — the purpose of the ages.

THE GOAL OF ALL THE AGES IS CHRIST

Having understood something of the meaning of the ages, we now need to clearly see the goal of all the ages — Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, “God . . . has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.” The word “worlds” here is really the word “ages.” This verse tells us that Christ is the appointed heir of all things. It was through Christ — *our* Jesus, *our* Christ — that God planned and made all the ages. This indicates the centrality, supremacy, and transcendent position of Christ in the universe. That is, the very meaning of time, the meaning of our humanity, the meaning of families, the meaning of your marriage, the meaning of your work, the meaning of all your problems, is Christ. He is the one unique meaning. Christ, the Son, is the heir of all things. God planned all the ages through His Son, unto His Son, and with His Son. Christ is the purpose, the goal, of all the ages.

In our experience, something happens when we

inwardly touch the spirit, when we get to the Lord, when we stimulate the life that is within us. Our problems — the intensity of it all, the anxiety of it all — will lose their grip and power over us by our touching the divine value system in the universe. That value system is the Father’s, and it is very simple. It is His Son. It is Jesus. It is Christ. And it is more of Christ. So the goal of all the ages is Christ.

*Purpose means one thing in this universe*

In Romans 8:28 Paul says, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” In most Bibles, the word “His” is in italics — *His* purpose. The translators supply the word “His” because purpose here obviously refers to God’s purpose. But *His* is not in the original language. Neither is there a definite article before the word purpose. It is not “according to *the* purpose.” It is just “according to purpose.” *The New Translation* by J. N. Darby actually translates the phrase that way. Then we might ask, what purpose? In God’s thought there is only one purpose. This means that if you and I are not calibrated to Christ in our lives — with every detail from morning to night — then we are not living according to purpose. We are in vanity.

In this universe everything apart from Christ is vanity. Only Christ gives purpose to all things. Only Christ is reality and meaning in life. This is why when we turn to the Lord in the middle of all things in our life and begin to call and touch Jesus, we have such a sense of significance in our being. But if we are indifferent to Christ, if we try to figure things out on our own, then notice what it does to our insides. There is a sense of emptiness, the sense that we have nothing to fellowship with others. But if you allow all kinds of environments to press you into the Lord, then you are filled with a sense of meaning. Then there is so much significance, and there is so much to share. This spiritual phenomenon happens because we are experiencing the meaning of our human life, which is to be conformed to the image of His Son. All things working together for good in Romans 8:28 is connected to verse 29: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many [brothers].” The Firstborn and the many brothers conformed to His image is simply another way of

speaking about the church (cf. Heb. 2:11-13).

We are called according to purpose, and purpose in this universe means one thing. Thus, in our daily life, everything is so significant because we know we have been predestinated, marked out ahead with a destiny, which is to be conformed to the image of God's Son. So turning to the Lord and interacting with Him, calling on Jesus, is the meaning of my life. It is the meaning of every shortage I find in myself.

Do you understand that the meaning of your shortages and weaknesses is Christ? Your shortage is not something for you to overcome, to get through, to be rid of. That is not what it is for. It is for you to find a living Christ. We may think that for Christ to make His home in our hearts, we need to clean up the house. This means that we would be the savior. We would present ourselves to God in a perfect condition, as though we were the ones doing it. Actually this is not the way Christ makes His home in our heart. Instead, you bring your rickety, broken-down house — with the messes, with the clutter in the closets, with the whole thing — you bring it to Him and say, “Jesus, now *You* live here. *You* cleanse it. *You* come in and do all the work, Lord.” This is what our problems are all about. It is about Christ taking over the job and making home in our heart. It is not arriving at a perfect state that I have accomplished by my energy. It is a perfect touch, a perfect interaction, with a perfect Person who is my supply. As we interact with Him in our weaknesses, though our outer man is perishing, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16). So we can see that purpose is Christ for our experience hour after hour. This is what Romans 8 unveils to us.

### *The uniqueness of purpose*

In 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul speaks of God's unique, or particular, purpose: “[God] Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His *own* purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before [the times of the ages].” The Greek word for “own” is ἰδιος – *idios*, from which we derive the English word idiomatic. Idiomatic means something peculiar, or unique, to a person. The Spirit uses this terminology in relation to God's purpose. It is God's *own* purpose. Oh, what a mighty thing

it is to have an inward turn and call “Lord Jesus” when you are passing through some evil or doubtful thought. When you call “Jesus” in the middle of something, you have entered into God's *own* purpose. And not only is it His own purpose, but it is “His own purpose and grace.” Thank God that grace goes along with purpose. The grace is there to supply us along with the purpose.

### THE FOCUS OF THE PURPOSE IS CHRIST

Let us look again at Ephesians 3:10-11: <sup>10</sup> “To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known [through] the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, <sup>11</sup> according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This portion of the Word tells us something about the purpose of the ages. It tells us that the purpose of the ages was accomplished, or made, in Christ Jesus our Lord. This means that the focus and the aim of the purpose is centered in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the past we saw the relationship between verses 10 and 11 but emphasized the phrase “through the church” in verse 10. Through the church God's manifold wisdom is being made known. Then verse 11 says, “according to the eternal purpose.” In these verses we saw the church as God's eternal purpose. But somehow the last part of verse 11, “which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,” was almost overlooked. It was as if the church in verse 10 had a more prominent position than what was accomplished and made in Christ Jesus our Lord in verse 11. But actually the relationship is vice versa. These verses show that the purpose of the ages has its centrality, its focus, in one Person in this universe — Christ Jesus our Lord. The church is the vehicle, the showcase, to display Christ. It is Christ that is being displayed to the universe. It is not the church displaying itself. The church is not an end in itself. The church is the means to display Christ. He is the atmosphere. There is an atmosphere of Christ through the church. The emphasis is not so much the church. The emphasis is Christ. The church, according to the purpose of the ages, is an entity that expresses what has been accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Hallelujah!

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*The formation of the purpose in His Son*

We have seen that God planned and made the ages through His Son. The purpose of the ages is His Son. Ephesians 3:11 tells us that God accomplished the purpose of the ages in His Son. There are two things related to the purpose being accomplished in Christ Jesus — the formation of the purpose and its execution. The formation of the purpose took place in eternity past, before the foundation of the world. Romans 8:29 reveals that the purpose was formed in the Son: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Thus, in eternity past the formation of God’s purpose was in His Son.

*The execution of the purpose in His Son*

God not only formed His purpose in His Son, but He also executed His purpose in His Son. Let us look further at the connection between verses 10 and 11 in Ephesians 3: <sup>10</sup> “To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known [through] the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, <sup>11</sup> according to the eternal purpose which *He* accomplished . . .” What is the antecedent of the pronoun “He”? The antecedent is “God,” or more specifically “the manifold wisdom of God,” in verse 10. The manifold wisdom of God is to be made known through the church. The church is the vehicle, the channel, to display this manifold wisdom. Then verse 11 says, “which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This means that “the manifold wisdom of God” is not an isolated phrase, but is connected to what God accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In verse 10 we see that God makes His manifold wisdom known to the universe through the church. This making known is according to the purpose of the ages which God, in all His manifold wisdom, executed and produced in Christ Jesus our Lord. This means that if you want to trace the manifold wisdom of God, look at what has been accomplished in His Son. Look at His Son in eternity past, in His incarnation, in His human living, in His crucifixion, in His resurrection, in His ascension, and then in His descension as the Spirit, coming into thousands of people, making them organi-

cally His very own Body, and being made Head over all things to the church. Watch the process of the Son in every step of God’s economy. In this process you see the manifold wisdom of God executed perfectly in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(To be continued)

— Bill Freeman

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(Continued from Page 5)

and even glory. People should come away with the feeling that they have encountered the reality of Christ. They have heard Him, seen Him, touched Him, and enjoyed Him. In some cases, people might even fall on their faces, worship God, and declare, “God is certainly among you” (1 Cor. 14:25). That is how radically different the church should be from the world! When people come to the meetings of the church, they should sense that they are coming out of darkness and into the light (Col. 1:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:9). In the world there is nothing but darkness and death. But in the church is light and life. This is how the church should be when she is truly the expression of God, the testimony of Jesus. She is a city on a hill. She is a golden, shining lampstand. She is the saints in the light. She is a pillar upholding the reality of God.

Yet, to have this kind of reality in the meetings of the church, Christ must be a reality in our daily lives. We cannot live in darkness in our daily lives and expect that there will be an expression of God when we come together and meet as the church. We must walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7). We need to be sons of light and sons of day, laying aside the deeds of darkness and putting on the armor of light (Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5; Rom. 13:12). Otherwise, the testimony of God will be absent. We cannot “fake” or imitate light. We cannot manufacture it. Light only comes from God Himself. As we live in the light, enjoying Christ, knowing Him, loving Him, and experiencing Him, He will be spontaneously expressed through us. As we allow Him to walk among us and live through us, then without effort His light will shine forth to others. We will be a lampstand, expressing God and testifying Christ.

— Kirk Eland

*the* **Christian**

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