

*The Eternal
Purpose of God*

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LESSON 1 - THE MYSTERY OF THE AGE

Ephesians 1: 9-10 - Having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for the administration of the fullness of times; to head up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth.

We want to thank the Lord for gathering us together here at this time. Every time God's people gather together, we feel very thankful to our Lord because we are living in the last days and God still allows us to be together. This really shows how much He loves us.

As we waited before the Lord regarding the theme for this conference, we felt that it was of the Lord to have the theme: God' Eternal Purpose and the Overcomers. To some of you this may be familiar. You may have heard it numbers of times. To others it may sound quite remote, but we know that this is a very important theme. We believe it is God's will that we should know His eternal purpose. It is the desire of our Lord that we become overcomers. So whether you have heard it before or you are hearing it for the first time, we hope we will be before the Lord and really pray that the Lord will give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation that, when we hear His word, the Spirit of God will send these words into our very spirit, that we may really hear what we should hear and even see what we should see. This is our prayer and we hope that as we are fellowshiping together you will have a prayerful spirit before the Lord. We trust He is with us and we believe He wants to speak to us.

May we have a further word of prayer:

Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee for gathering us together here this evening. We thank Thee because we believe it is Thy gift to us and we do want to offer this conference back to Thee. We acknowledge Thee as the Lord of this conference, and we believe that Thou art here with us. Lord, we are on holy ground. We want to remove our shoes, and we want to bow before Thee and say, 'Lord, what dost Thou want to say to us?' Speak Lord, Thy servants heareth. We ask in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Before we share on this matter of God's eternal purpose, first of all we want to spend a little time on this matter of purpose. We know that purpose is very important to our lives because our purpose governs and gives meaning to our lives. If we live on this earth without any purpose then we will just be drifters. There is no meaning to our existence. Purpose is very, very important to our lives.

When we read the Old Testament, in the book of Daniel, we find that when Daniel was a teenager, he was taken as a hostage to Babylon. He was of the royal or noble families in the kingdom of Judah. But when he was young, around fifteen or so, during the third year of King Jehoiakim he was taken from the land of Judea into Babylon, where he served as a hostage. Now you might think that this was the most tragic thing that could happen to a youngster because he was not only taken away from his home, he was taken away from his own country. He became a hostage; he was not free anymore.

After he was taken into Babylon, it seemed that his fortune began to change. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, wanted to choose. from among the young people of these captives those who were good-looking, who had wisdom and knowledge, who understood signs, and who were able to stand before the king. In other words, from among all the captives he would take out the elite and train them. He would nourish them for three years, give them the royal food and royal wine, and teach them the learning and the language of the Chaldeans.

Now just think for a moment. What if you were that young man and suddenly you found that you had a great opportunity before you? As a hostage there was no hope. You were not able to continue your education, and of course, you would not have such abundant food and drink. But suddenly a great opportunity was opened to this young man, who was only around fifteen years old. Now suppose this happened to you. How would you respond

to it? Of course, you would just latch onto it. You would think it was the greatest opportunity that you could ever have. You would just enjoy the king's food and the king's drink, and very soon you would forget your home and your country.

Yet this was not so with Daniel. As young as he was, the Bible tells us he purposed in his heart that he would not be polluted by the king's food and wine. He realized that he was of the chosen people of God. Even though the country was supposed to represent God on this earth, it had failed. The name of God was upon that nation. They were the vessel of God's name, but the nation failed God. Yet Daniel did not forget. He still remembered that he was of the chosen of God. His life on earth was to testify to God, and he was to live for God. So in spite of his almost impossible environment, he was not free. If he were free he would be able to do whatever he chose, but he was a hostage. And this was the king's command. Yet he purposed in his heart that he would not be polluted by the king's food and drink.

How would Daniel be polluted? There might be two reasons. Number one, during those days the king's food and wine were first offered to the idols, and then afterwards eaten. Daniel felt that because he believed in the living God, the one true God, he could not eat the food that had been offered to idols because that would pollute him. So he refused to eat the king's food and drink. There might be another reason. Even if they were not offered to the idols, he felt that if he should really be occupied with food and drink probably, very soon, he would forget who he was. He would be so attracted by the things of this world that he would forget his own identity. Perhaps for these two reasons he purposed in his heart that he would not be polluted and he would keep himself pure for God. This is a noble purpose.

However, so far as environment was concerned, that purpose could not be fulfilled because he was not a free man. He was under the king's command, and yet he had faith in God. He believed that if he stood for God, God would open a way for him. So he talked to the prince of the eunuchs that was governing them and asked him just for vegetables to eat and water to drink. He would not take the king's food. The prince of the eunuchs was favorable to him. He said, "If you do that and you become very thin, unlike the other young people who grow fat because of the good food they eat, then my head will be cut off by the king because I am responsible."

Daniel sensed there was a favorable response in that answer, so he spoke directly to the steward that was over him. He said, "Try me for ten days. If I become very thin and very weak, then give me the king's food, but you try me for ten days." And the eunuch let him do it. We know that after ten days Daniel and his three friends grew fatter than anybody else. So they were allowed to eat just the vegetables and drink the water.

God honored their purpose and gave them wisdom and understanding. And especially to Daniel, God gave the wisdom of interpreting dreams and visions. After three years, all these young people from different countries were taken before the king. The king tested them and found that Daniel and his three friends were ten times more intelligent in judicial things, and they were allowed to stand before the king.

We know that Daniel served two different kingdoms, not only the Babylonian Empire but also the Persian Empire. Yet while he was outwardly serving earthly kings, even the Persian king recognized that he served God. What a testimony he gave!

Dear brothers and sisters, here you see the importance of purpose. To the young people, especially the young people who are now here, remember it is most important to have a right purpose before God because it will affect your whole life.

Saul Had a Purpose

If you read the New Testament, you find another young man, Saul. Saul the Pharisee was a young man, but he had purpose. When he was young, he purposed to be the top in Judaism while other Jewish young people were seeking other things, he spent his life and time studying the Jewish Law. Even though he was young, he was already more advanced than his contemporaries. Probably, very soon he would be *the* rabbi of Israel. That was his goal, his purpose at that time because he had no revelation from heaven. All he received was human tradition, the tradition of the fathers.

Therefore, at that time he thought that Jesus and those who believed in Jesus should be persecuted because according to these Pharisees, according to the traditions of the fathers, according to their understanding of Biblical prophecy, they were looking for the Messiah. They were under the Roman rule at that time, so they were looking for the Messiah. When the Messiah came, He would deliver them from the yoke of the Roman Empire and make them first of the nations.

When our Lord Jesus first came into their midst, they welcomed Him because they thought maybe He was the Messiah. But gradually, they were disappointed because our Lord Jesus did not overturn the Roman Empire and make Israel first of the nations. He came to seek and to save the lost. He was doing spiritual work, so they were disappointed with Him They rejected Him They crucified Him. They considered Him as an imposter of Judaism Therefore, Saul thought it was his duty to wipe out the followers of Jesus. He had no revelation. He had purpose and he almost reached his goal, but because there was no revelation he went the wrong way. He thought when he persecuted the believers of the Lord Jesus that he was serving God. He did not know he was doing just the opposite.

Saul's Purpose Changed

One day on the road to Damascus, as Saul was nearing the city at mid-day, a light from heaven suddenly shone upon him and he was stricken to the ground. He heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." And Saul said, "Lord, who are You?" And the heavenly voice said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

His eyes were blinded by that light but his inner eyes were 'opened. He said, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" And there he capitulated himself to the Lord.

Now his purpose changed. He was still a man of purpose, but the purpose underwent a transformation. Instead of purposing something for himself, now he purposed God's purpose.

Before his martyrdom, Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy-II Timothy. In chapter 3, verse 10, he reminded Timothy: "But thou hast been thoroughly acquainted with my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings." Timothy was his son in the truth, so before Paul's martyrdom he reminded Timothy: "You are fully acquainted with me. You know my teaching. You know my conduct. You know my purpose. "

Paul purposed the purpose of God. He never deviated from that purpose. No matter how much he suffered, he pressed on toward the goal. And because of that he could say before his death: "I have kept the faith, I have run the race, I have fought the good fight. And now there is a crown of righteousness waiting for me; and not only for me but for all those who love the appearing of our Lord Jesus." As a man with a right purpose, how different his life would be!

Linked with God's Purpose

In 1942, during the Pacific War, the Lord led me out of Singapore to India I am from Shanghai, and in Shanghai we have a proverb that says, "If you are really unlucky you land in India." I did land in India, but it was a most blessed time. There I met a sister who told me her story. At that time she was already in her sixties. She was an English woman, a titled lady. Her parents were millionaires and her husband was a titled military person. But they had all died and she was left alone. She inherited all the wealth. She lived in Italy in a marble palace, but she felt life was meaningless. When her parents were living, she always traveled with her parents around the world. She had everything but she felt life was meaningless. Even though she was a believer, she felt there was no meaning in life.

One year she went back to England. As a matter of fact, she went back every year to attend the famous Keswick Convention the second week of July. But before she attended the Keswick Convention she went to another convention, the Swanwick Conference, sponsored by Mrs. Jesse Penn-Lewis. While she was at that conference she heard a young man speaking on the eternal purpose of God. When she listened to the word, the Spirit of God opened her understanding. She began to see that her life had a purpose and that purpose was linked with God's eternal purpose.

If your life is linked with God's eternal purpose, then it is not a matter of sixty, seventy, or eighty years. If your life is linked with the eternal purpose of God, can there be a more valuable, useful, meaningful life? She was completely taken up with God's eternal purpose. She purposed that purpose and she gave herself completely to God. This sister was Lady Ogle, and she was the one who supported brother T. Austin Sparks in his ministry.

So dear brothers and sisters, do not think that God's eternal purpose is very academic, very remote, just a teaching, a theory, something for you to contemplate, and has nothing to do with your everyday living. It is just the opposite because the eternal purpose of God affects our whole being.

Purpose is important, but the kind of purpose you purpose is also important. If your purpose is low then you live a low life. If your purpose is high then you aim high. If your purpose is for yourself-how can I promote myself? how can I be successful?-then you become a self-centered person. But if your purpose is linked with God's purpose, and you want to live God's will, then you will live a heavenly, a spiritual, a rich life.

This is our prayer, whether we are young or old, we need to purpose God's purpose. But how can we purpose God's purpose if we do not know what His purpose is? God's purpose is the highest of all. It is the noblest of all. There is no purpose that can be higher, and God's will is that we should take His purpose as ours. We become a part in His purpose. It is not something outside of us. It is something within us and we are within that purpose. Let's pray that it will be real to every one of us.

What is God's Purpose?

Now we come to God's eternal purpose. In Ephesians 1:9-10, he said, "Having made known to us the mystery of his will." It is God's will that we know. What does He want us to know? He wants us to know the mystery of His will. Our God is a God of will. He is the supreme will. That is the reason why when He created us, He created us with a will. Everyone has a will. If you are a will-less person, then

you are nothing. God is the supreme will. But that will is a mystery because God is a mystery. Who can figure out God? Nobody can. He is a mystery. Therefore His will is also a mystery.

And when He made up that will, He made up His will according to His good pleasure. God is the supreme will. He can will anything He wants to will. Nobody can challenge Him because He is God, and when He wills a will,

it is according to His good pleasure. It is what pleases Him. Nobody can challenge that. If God wills such a will, you cannot say, "Why do You will such a will?" You cannot challenge it because He is God, the supreme will, and He wills according to His good pleasure. But we must believe that His good pleasure is not something that just comes like a whim. Because He is the supreme wisdom, when He willed according to His good pleasure it must be good. If it can please God, certainly it is the greatest pleasure in the whole universe. So there you find He made a will and that will is a purpose; that is to say He decides on something. It is called God's eternal purpose.

God Has Only One Purpose

God's purpose is singular in number. God has one purpose. It is a purpose that includes all other purposes. It is a purpose that governs all the other purposes. Remember, it is one purpose, one will.

Before the foundation of the world, before He created the universe, He already made that will. He already set a purpose. As a matter of fact, even His creation is according to that purpose. It is decided even before the foundation of the world, and that purpose will govern everything. So it says here: "Which he purposed in himself." He purposed that purpose in Himself. He does not consult anybody because there was nobody there. He purposed in Himself according to His good pleasure. But it is a mystery because it is in Himself. Nobody knows. That is a mystery, a secret.

God has a top secret and He knows how to keep secrets. We do not know how to keep secrets. We say, "Let me tell you a secret." And the secret is out. We do not know how to keep a secret, but God knows how to keep a secret. He purposed that purpose even before the foundation of the world, but He never told anybody. The angels did not know it. Man did not know it. Through the ages nobody knew the mystery of His will, and yet you find God is working.

"For the administration of the fulness of time." Now "the administration" in the original simply means *management of household affairs*. God has a household affair and He manages it. He has a plan; He has a counsel. Then according to that plan He will just work it out.

God is not like man. When we do things, we may not think it out beforehand. Therefore there are many things that are accidental, incidental; things come by chance. But God never does. God is a God of purpose, and after He set down His purpose, then He laid the plan, and He manages that plan through times. Time is the agent of God's administration. God set time after time, so in some versions it says "dispensations." God planned time after time, age after age, and gradually worked out His purpose, but He never told anybody what that purpose was.

In the Old Testament time, here and there, He dropped some hints. Sometimes He used a personal history to drop some hints and made that person as a type of that purpose. But it is just a little bit of it. Sometimes He used some words. Sometimes He used some prophecy. Sometimes He even used an object lesson like the tabernacle. So here and there God is dropping some suggestions and some hints. But still nobody knew. What was God doing? What is He really aiming at? What is the mystery? It has not been revealed through the ages. If you asked Abraham, he would say, "Well, I faintly see something, but I really do not know." If you asked Moses, he would say the same thing. If you asked Elijah or Ezekiel or any of the prophets, they would say, "Well, I do catch a glimpse of something, but I do not know what that is."

But thank God, that mystery of His will is now being revealed. Brothers and sisters, you cannot know God unless He reveals it to you. So here in Ephesians 3, Paul said, "As you read you know that I know the mystery because that mystery is now being revealed to the apostles and the prophets." Today we know what the mystery is. The eternal purpose of God is now made known to us. So when we see what that purpose is, and then we look back in history to the Old Testament, everything becomes clear. God is working out His purpose.

God's Eternal Purpose is a Person

What is God's eternal purpose? "To head up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth." God's eternal purpose is not "something". God's eternal purpose is "Someone". In that purpose He has one Person in mind, and that Person is His beloved Son. When we talk about the eternal purpose of God, it is so all-inclusive. No one can measure the width and length and depth and height, and yet it is all summed up in Christ.

When you read the Old Testament, you find there are many commandments and many laws. Even with the Ten Commandments you have ten. Yet in the book of Romans Paul said, whatever commandment it may be, whether it is thou shall not covet, thou shall not kill, and so on, they are all being summed up in one: Love your neighbor as yourself because love is the sum of all laws.

In this universe there are so many things, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. There are angels-thousands and thousands of angels. There are countless people on this earth, and you have mountains and rivers and trees and birds-numberless. Yet, there is only One; they are all summed up in Christ. In other words, everything will express Christ, and everything will point back to Christ. This is God's eternal purpose.

God's eternal purpose is a Person. He loved His only begotten Son and for His Son He does everything; aside from His Son He does nothing.

If God opened up His heart to you, what would you see? I have to confess that in the past I always had the concept that in the heart of God there are two not one. One is His Son; the other is the church. Is it right or wrong? It seemed to be very right to me for a long, long time because in the eternal purpose of God you do find His Son. That is in Ephesians 1:9-10. But when you come to Ephesians 3:10-11, you find there is another thing in the eternal purpose of God, which He purposed in Christ Jesus, and that is the church. So I always felt that in the heart of God there are two and they are equal. But one day, I saw in the heart of God only one Person-His beloved Son. Aside from His Son there is nothing. I cannot see myself there. I am not that important to God. I am nothing. I am not there. There is only Christ. But I looked further. I looked into the heart of Christ. And I saw the church. I saw myself there.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you see this? In the heart of God there is only His Son. Everything comes out of His Son. Everything will return to His Son. Aside from His Son, God sees nothing. Whatever is not of His Son is not in God. No matter how good it is, God will not have it; it is only His Son-to head up all things in Christ.

But thank God, when you look into the heart of Christ, you find the church there. You find yourself there. We are all there because to our Lord Jesus we are His treasure. For us He was willing to give up everything.

So dear brothers and sisters, it is very simple. What is the eternal purpose of God? Christ is the eternal purpose of God. If we hold fast to Christ, then everything will fall into the right place. But if we do not allow Christ to be our all, then you will find that we will miss somewhere. So in our lives we need to purpose a purpose. We need to take God's purpose to be our purpose. "God, aside from Your Son let there be nothing in my life. Anything that is not of Thy Son is an offense to Thee."

We need to see this. Our whole life must be taken up with Christ. Let Christ be everything to us. "God has made Him head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

Now I hope you begin to see how glorious, how blessed to know the eternal purpose of God and how practical it is. So may the Lord help us.

Shall we pray:

Dear heavenly Father, we do thank Thee because it pleases Thee to reveal Thy Son in us. We do praise and thank Thee that Thy Son is Thy all. We do pray that He will be all in all to us. We acknowledge that in our lives we are far from it. We need Thy revelation. We need Thy light to expose us. We need Thy grace to deliver us, so that Christ truly may be all and in all to us, and that Thy eternal purpose may be fulfilled even in us, to the praise of Thy glory. We ask in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

LESSON 2 - ALL THE FULNESS IS IN CHRIST

Colossians 1: 9-20 - For this reason we also, from the day we heard of your faith and love, do not cease praying and asking for you, to the end that ye may be filled with the full knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so as to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by the true knowledge of God; strengthened with all power according to the might of his glory unto all endurance and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light, who has delivered us from the authority of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love: in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins; who is image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation; because [in] him were created all things, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or authorities: all things have been created by him and for him. And he is before all, and all things subsist together by him. And he is the head of the body, the assembly [the church]; who is the beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that he might have the first place in all things: for in him all the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell, and by him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of his cross-by him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens.

Hebrews 1: 1-4 - God having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly to the fathers in the prophets, at the end of these days has spoken to us in the person of the Son, whom he has established heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory and the expression of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, having made by himself the purification of sins, set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high, taking a place by so much better than the angels, as he inherits a name more excellent than they.

Hebrews 2:8b-10 - But now we see not yet all things subjected to him, but we see Jesus, who was made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; so that by the grace of God he should taste death for everything. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make perfect the leader of their salvation through sufferings.

Shall we pray:

Dear heavenly Father, we gather together this day in the name of Thy beloved Son. We are here to hear what Thou hast to say to us. We have read Thy word and now we ask Thy Holy Spirit to quicken Thy word to our hearts. May it please Thee to reveal Thy Son in us, that we may be so attracted by Him as to surrender our lives to Him, that Thou may be glorified. We ask in the precious name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

The apostle Paul was in prison in Rome. He was visited by his fellow worker Epaphras, who brought him the news about the condition of God's people in Colossae. The apostle Paul had never been to Colossae himself, but he was in Ephesus for three years. While he was in Ephesus, God used him to spread the good news around Asia Minor, including Colossae. So in all Asia, that is the Roman province of Asia, all have heard the gospel.

Evidently, Epaphras came to the Lord through Paul. So indirectly, through Epaphras, the church in Colossae was raised up. It had a very good beginning because they believed in the Lord Jesus, they loved all the saints, and because of the hope, they endured all sufferings. It was as if they had a very bright future. But unfortunately, something happened in Colossae, and Epaphras came and brought the news to Paul. When Paul heard these things, he was so burdened with their condition, he prayed unceasingly for them.

Paul's Prayer for the Colossian Believers

Paul did not pray just a general prayer. He prayed with burden, and he prayed especially for them. He knew what they needed, and he asked God to give them what they needed.

In verse 9 he said, "For this reason we also, from the day we heard of your faith and love, do not cease praying and asking for you, to the end ... " That is to say, his prayer had a specific motive.

What did he pray for the Colossian believers? He prayed that they might be filled with the full knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. The full knowledge of God's will is nothing other than God's eternal purpose. He prayed they would be filled in such a way that it was in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. In other words, he prayed not only that they might know the full will of God, but that they might know it with wisdom.

We know that there is a difference between wisdom and knowledge. Knowledge is something that you know, but wisdom is something that you experience and apply. The eternal purpose of God is to be known in all wisdom. It is not only knowing about it, but we really experience it and we find it is applicable to our daily life and spiritual understanding. It is not only something we understand with our mind, but something we understand in our spirit. If we understand something with our mind, we know the theory of it, but if we understand it in our spirit, then we really experience it. God's eternal purpose is something that we must know, experience, and apply. It is not just something that we know in our mind; it is something that we must know in our spirit. The Holy Spirit will reveal it in our spirit. Just like Paul said, "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." If we know God's eternal purpose in such a way, then what will happen to us?

Walk Worthily

"So as to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing." It means this knowledge will affect our walk upon this earth that we may walk worthily of the Lord. Now I believe we all desire to walk worthily of our Lord. How can we please Him in all things? This is the secret. If you really know God's eternal purpose, then you will find it will affect your walk. It will enable you to walk worthily of the Lord with all well-pleasing.

Bear Fruit

"Bearing fruit in every good work." You will bear fruit not only in your life-bearing the fruit of the character of our Lord Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit, that the character of Christ will come forth in your life-you will also bear fruit in your labor because all your labor is according to God's will.

Grow Spiritually

"And growing by the true knowledge of God." We want to grow spiritually. We often ask the question: "How can I grow?" There are many books that tell us how to grow in the Lord. Unfortunately, so far as I know, none mentions that our growth is according to God's eternal purpose. If we know God's eternal purpose, then we will grow spiritually.

Give Thanks

"And we will be strengthened with all power that we may endure sufferings with joy, also giving thanks to our Father." I think we know how to murmur but giving thanks to the Father in all things is something for which we need to know God's eternal purpose. "And make us fit to have part with the saints in light."

What I would like to impress upon you is simply this: When we hear of God's eternal purpose, what is our natural reaction? We may think, "Well, it is very high, very deep, something for us to think about, to contemplate, but it is something that is floating in the air. It really does not touch the earth. It does not really affect our lives. It is a theological discussion; it is not practical." Now I suppose this will be our reaction.

When we first mentioned that the theme was to be the *Eternal Purpose of God*, maybe you thought it is good to talk about, to think about, but it is abstract. It has nothing to do with my spiritual life. So what I want to say is simply this: God's eternal purpose has everything to do with your spiritual life. Without knowing God's eternal purpose, your spiritual life will be frustrated. Your life has to come into oneness with God's eternal purpose. God's eternal purpose must control your whole being. Then you will find your life is meaningful because it will line up with God's will for you. That is all I want to impress upon you brothers and sisters.

Naturally, it is difficult, and that is why Paul had to pray. It is something that no human being can do. The Holy Spirit has to impress this upon our heart. So may there be a prayer within us that the Lord really will give us the full knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

The Trouble in Colossae

What was the trouble in the church in Colossae? They had such a good beginning, but something happened. So far as we understand, someone came into their midst and began to entice them with philosophy and vain things. The effect of this was they were led away from Christ and into something other than Christ. These Colossian believers really had a heart for God. They wanted to grow; they wanted to be spiritual.

Many of God's people are content just to be barely saved. I remember a story of someone who said: "If my two legs are just within the door of heaven I will be satisfied." But the Colossian believers were better. They were not only saved but they really wanted to grow in the Lord. They wanted fullness and were not content just to remain as they were. Because of their desire for growth, someone came in and told them if they wanted to grow there was a shortcut: "If only you do this and do that, if only you believe this and believe that, then you will enter into fullness."

The Colossian heresy is a strange combination because it combined heathen Gnosticism and Jewish ritualism. Now these two things are opposite because if you really are occupied with Gnosticism, that is trying to know the secret of the universe, and if you are all involved with philosophy, then you will be floating in the air. You will not touch the earth. If you are occupied with ritualism, it is very earthly. Everything is visible, tangible, and touchable. So these are opposites; but they were strangely combined. This was not only true in those days; it is even true today. In other words, according to this, if you want to find fullness, believing in the Lord Jesus is not enough. You have to keep certain things: Do not touch; do not eat; keep certain days and certain festivals. At the same time, you need to be initiated into a secret-knowing that the whole universe has a system - and that there are different degrees of emanation of God. If you can grasp such knowledge and if you can keep such rituals, you are full. That is fullness.

The Fullness is in Christ Alone

Brothers and sisters, the Colossians were led to the teachings of men, the elements of the world, and they were led away from Christ. So the apostle Paul wrote this letter to correct them. He wanted to show them that all fullness is in Christ because all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily and you are complete or perfect in Him. This is the will of God because God's eternal purpose is His Son. God has put everything He has into His Son. Nobody can figure out the fullness of the Godhead. God is a mystery, the greatest mystery in the universe. How full is God? How full is His love? How full is His righteousness? How full is His holiness? How full is His power? How full is His purity? How full is His knowledge?

No one can figure out God~ No one can figure out His fullness. Yet all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in the Son, in Christ bodily. That is to say, everything that is of God, everything that God is, it is all in the Son. Aside from the Son, God has nothing. And God has nothing to give. He put everything in His Son, and if we have His Son we have the fullness.

I like to tell a story. Some may have heard it, but I am not tired of telling it. Once upon a time, there was a rich man, and he had many lands, many cows, many sheep, many slaves, many fields, many buildings, but he had only one son. He sent his son abroad to study, but while his son was abroad the man suddenly got sick, very sick. He called his son to come back, but he figured he would probably die before his son arrived. The man wanted to write a will, so he consulted a lawyer and wrote a will. Unfortunately, when the son arrived, he had already passed away.

After the funeral was over, the lawyer gathered the household together to read the will. The will was very simple, only one sentence. "I give all my properties to my steward, but I allow my son to choose one thing among all."

When the son heard that, his face fell. "Something has happened. How could my father give everything to his steward and allow me to choose only one thing? If I choose the house, I lose the field. If I choose the ox, I lose the sheep. Something is drastically wrong."

Then the lawyer whispered in his ear. Suddenly the son's face brightened, and he said, "I respect my father, so I will honor his will. I will choose one among his many properties. I choose the steward."

Isn't that wise? He got everything. The father had so much he could not list everything and he was afraid his son might lose something. But the steward controlled all things, so the son got everything.

Our heavenly Father did something like this. He loved us so much He put everything in His Son and then He said, "Choose My Son. If you have My Son you have everything. All the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies have been given to us in Christ Jesus. So it is God's will that we behold the Son, that we choose the Son, so that we abide with the Son and not be led away from Christ. That is Colossians. So let us have a closer look at the Son.

The Image of the Invisible God

"Who is image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). Our God is invisible because He is Spirit. You cannot see Him, but that does not mean because He is invisible, therefore we cannot see Him. There is a way to see the invisible. There is a way that the invisible becomes visible. God Himself is invisible, but His Son is the image of the invisible God. Now *image* in the Scripture means "representation and manifestation." Our Lord Jesus is the perfect representation and complete manifestation of the invisible God.

In John 1 it is said, "No one has ever seen God but the one who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him. "Nobody has seen God, and yet the one who is in the bosom of the Father has declared Him to us. Through our Lord Jesus we know our heavenly Father.

In John 14, during that last evening when our Lord Jesus had His last discourse with His disciples, Philip asked this question: "Lord, show us the Father and it suffices us." How it grieved our Lord Jesus! The Lord said, "Philip, you have been so long with Me and you still ask to see the Father. Do you not know that seeing me is seeing the Father? Do you not know that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?"

Dear brothers and sisters, so far as the relationship of our Lord with God is concerned, He is the exact image of the invisible God. Image is a derived likeness. Image is not a likeness that you put on. That would be superficial.

Image is a derived likeness; that is, it is a likeness that comes from within. Therefore, image has all the essence of the Godhead. It is not something put on from outside. It is derived, so it is the same.

The word *image* in the original also means "a copy." It is just like the image of a king upon a coin. You remember one day the Pharisees came and tried to tempt our Lord Jesus by asking Him whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not. He asked them to bring Him a coin, and the Lord said, "Whose image is this?" "Well," they said, "it is Caesar." So the Lord said, "Give the things of Caesar to Caesar and the things of God to God." Now that is image. In other words, it is just like the sovereign, the king. Our Lord Jesus is the perfect representation and manifestation of God.

In the Old Testament times, there were the patriarchs, the prophets, the kings, and the priests. In a very small and fragmentary way they represent or manifest something of God, but the Son is the full representation and manifestation of the Father. He is God; He is one with God. He subsists in the form of God. He is equal with God, which is not something to be grasped at. This is our Lord Jesus. So we need to see our Lord as such. He is God and everything of God is in Him. How much we need to worship Him, to come to Him in all things and find our all in Him!

The Firstborn of All Creation

"Firstborn of all creation." According to William Barclay this verse has caused lots of problems. We know that Barclay actually was a liberal, yet this is what he said: "This word in English caused lots of misunderstanding because according to English you may think that Christ is the first created—that He is created, but the first one created. And yet according to Hebrew and Greek it is not so. It has very little relationship to time sequence. It is a title of honor (Exodus 4:22). It is the title of the Messiah," and he quoted Psalm 89:27. Then he said, "Firstborn is priority."

Bishop Lightfoot, who was a very learned person, said, "Firstborn has two *meanings—priority and sovereignty*. Ordinarily, to us, when we say He is the firstborn, we think in terms of time, that He is born first. So when it says "Firstborn of all creation," you would think that means He is created first. But *firstborn* has a very special meaning. It does not mean that He is born first in time. It means that He is superior, that He is sovereign.

In Exodus 4:22, God sent Moses to tell Pharaoh: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. Let My people go." Now so far as time is concerned, Israel was not the first nation formed on earth. As a matter of fact, Edom had a kingdom and kings before Israel became a kingdom. Of course, Egypt, Babylon, and all these ancient nations were ahead of Israel. Israel, at that time, was not a nation. Yet God said, "Israel is My son, My firstborn," because it pleased God to choose Israel and put them in a superior position.

The same thing is true in Psalm 89. It is a Messianic Psalm, but of course it refers to David, and David is a type of Christ, the Messiah. God said, "You are My son, My firstborn son, the highest of the kings of the earth." Again you see that David was not the first king in Israel; Saul was the first king. David was king much later than many kings in the world, but God made him the firstborn among the kings of the nations. So it means priority and sovereignty.

So far as the relationship of our Lord with creation is concerned He is not created. He created all things. If you read on, it is very clear because He is before all things. He is before them, so He does not belong to them.

What does it mean by the firstborn of all creation? "All things were created in Him." When the translators translated the Greek to English, they said, "By Him all things were created." The word *by* there in Greek is "en" and means "in" But it did not make sense to the translators. How can the creation be created *in* Christ? The

universe is so big, how can it be created *in* Him? And so they used the word *by* Him. But actually it is *in* Him. Why? It is because He is the designer, the architect of all things.

A building is built by an architect. The personality of that architect is expressed in the building. If it is a good building, it is a living building because it expresses the character of the architect. That building is in the mind of the architect, and of course his mind is controlled by his character. If he is a very artistic person, he will design a very artistic building because the building comes out of him. It is conceived in him and expresses his personality. If that architect is very practical, then he will design a building that is very practical, operational.

All things-the things in the heavens, the things upon the earth, things visible, things invisible-were created in Him. The angels are invisible; men are visible. Some things are invisible; other things are visible. Whether it is principalities, authorities, powers, or dominions, everything was created in Him. It expresses His 'character. It reflects His glory. That is why when you look at the universe you can see the deity and the wisdom of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). Everything is created in Him. Of course, that includes you and me too.

Everything is not only created in Him, it is created by Him. He is the engineer. Not only is He the architect who designed, but He is the engineer who built. When God created the universe, as we find in the Old Testament, He was the engineer. He Himself created all things. All things were created by Him and outside of Him there is nothing created.

All things are created for Him. In other words, He is the owner of all things. He is the Heir of all things. All the creation was created for Him. He is the goal of creation. He is before all things and all things subsist in Him. All things have its beginning in Him and all things have its continuation in Him. He holds all things together by the word of His power. The universe is not chaotic. It is because our Lord Jesus holds all things together. What a Christ He is! This is His relationship with creation.

The Head of the Body, the Church

"He is the Head of the body, the church." The church is a new creation and it is created in Him. The church is His body. He is the Head. Everything of the church comes out from Him, everything in the church is under Him, and everything in the church is to grow up into Him. The Head is the seat of authority, the center of unity, the center of control, and the center of supply. The Head is everything to the body.

Brothers and sisters, that is His relationship with the church. You do not try to make it upside down by putting the body up and the head down. The head is always at the top and the body is always under the head. So we need to hold fast the Head. If we hold fast the Head, then all the members of the body will be united together and will minister one to another.

He is the beginning. The church had its beginning in Christ because of His death and resurrection. Our Lord Jesus is the Head of the whole universe because He is the Creator. Our Lord Jesus is the Head of the church because He loved the church and gave Himself for her.

The Firstborn from Among the Dead

"He is the firstborn from among the dead." In the Old Testament time and in the New Testament time we have records of people being raised from the dead. So how can He be the firstborn from among the dead? Time wise He was not the first one who was raised from the dead, but He is the firstborn from among the dead because He was the first one resurrected. He entered into death, robbed death of its power, and He came out in resurrection.

He was buried in His physical body, a crucified, mutilated, weak, mortal body. But when He rose from the dead, it is immortal; it is a spiritual body.

He is the firstborn from among the dead. Christ rose first, then those who believe in Him. Our resurrection is patterned after Him. He is the firstborn. Not only was He the first one who really resurrected, but because of His resurrection we shall also be raised from the dead.

So far as the new creation is concerned He is everything. To God He is everything. To the old creation He is everything. To the new creation He is everything because God wants Him to have the first place in all things. First place in the Scripture does not mean that He is first and you are second. It means He is the first, the last, and all in between. He is all and in all. This is God's purpose. God put all into the Son and made His Son all to everything.

Brothers and sisters, this is our Lord. How we need to submit ourselves completely to Him! Do not try to find anything outside of Him, but find your all in Him. The church is the body, the fulness of Him who fills all and in all. And the same is true to each individual. In the book of Colossians, Paul said, "I want to present every one of you perfect and complete in Christ, that in everything you will find your all in Christ because this is the will of God.

He Reconciled All Things

"He reconciled all things to itself" God's eternal purpose was purposed before the foundation of the world, and His will, His purpose never changes. He may change His ways of doing things. That is why in the Old Testament you find that God repented. On the one hand the Bible says, "God is not a man that He should repent." And yet there are cases where God repented. Now He never repents of His purpose. He can repent of His means and ways of doing things, but God's purpose is set. His Son should have the first place in all things. Everything will find its meaning in His Son and everything will reflect His Son's glory. But that purpose has been challenged.

In the first world, the highest of God's creation were the angels. Among the angels there was one archangel whose name was Lucifer, the brilliant star. Very possibly he was the masterpiece of God's creation at that time. If you read Ezekiel 28, which is a prophecy, God used the king of Tyre as a kind of type because the description that followed cannot fit any human being. So it is a description of that angel. He was created almost perfect. God gave him power, gifts, and position. He was an anointed cherub that covered God's throne, and he was supposed to lead all the angels in worship. When he was created, he was perfect, but gradually, something happened to him.

If you read Isaiah 14:12-15; you will find that this angel began to think of himself instead of fixing his eyes upon God. The anointed cherubim who were over the mercy seat had their eyes upon the mercy seat. But this archangel began to turn and notice himself, and a kind of pride began to rise within him. "I want to be equal with God. I am not content to be below God." As a matter of fact, he wanted to take the place of God's Son. Then you find unrighteousness in his doings. He challenged God's eternal purpose, and because of this he was punished by God. He was cast down from heaven and one third of the angels followed him. The dominion that God had given him to rule came into ruin along with him because God is jealous for His Son. God will not allow anyone to challenge His eternal purpose. That is probably the reason why the earth we inhabit was once covered with water and darkness. We do not know how long this continued on, but God's purpose cannot be defeated. What He has decided He will perform, and that brings us to Genesis 1.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." But somehow the earth entered into ruin and emptiness. Today, we believe it was because of the rebellion of that archangel, who turned himself into Satan, the adversary of God. But God's purpose cannot be defeated.

God used six days to repair the ruined earth, to make it habitable, and on the sixth day He created man. He created man according to His image, after His likeness, because when He created man, He had something in mind. It was related to His eternal purpose. It was as if Satan had delayed God's eternal purpose. How will God redeem the situation? Here is the wisdom of God. He created man a little inferior than the angels, and He used the inferior to defeat the superior. For God to defeat Satan is nothing. But God will use man, who is inferior to the angels, to defeat that challenge. That is the glory of God. He created man and gave this earth to man to subdue it and bring it back to the feet of the Lord Jesus. But unfortunately, man rebelled. Our forefathers ate the forbidden fruit. They chose to develop themselves and be independent of God. They wanted to take the place of God's beloved Son.

But thank God, even though the man that God created failed, He will still use man to redeem the situation. So He sent His beloved Son into this world. The Word became flesh and "tabernacle" among us, full of grace and truth, declaring the Father. How much He loved us! And at the last He offered Himself as a sacrifice. Through the blood of the cross He reconciled all things back to His fullness.

The work of reconciliation is done by Christ and Christ alone. It is not God being reconciled to us; it is we that are reconciled to God. Yet the offended God is the One who provided the means of reconciliation. That is the love of God, even to give His only Son for us, and not for us only but for all things. Because of the blood of the cross, all things are being reconciled back to God, and this reconciliation is bringing everything back to God's original purpose. All things will be subjected to Christ and Christ will have the first place.

Hebrews tells us that we have not seen all things subjected to Him, but we see Jesus, who was made a little inferior than the angels, and He suffered death for all. Because of what He has done, He will lead many sons to glory. And He, as the Son of Man, the second Man, along with the redeemed who have taken on His character-the overcomers in the church-eventually will bring all things back to fullness.

Today, the whole creation is groaning because it is under corruption and emptiness. It is not something that was intended; it is man that put it in such a situation. But one day there will be the manifestation of the sons of God. Christ as the firstborn will lead many sons into glory. The whole universe will be restituted restored, and all things will be subjected to Him. God's purpose will be fulfilled in Christ, and we will find our fulfillment in Christ.

Let us pray:

Our heavenly Father, we bow before Thee recognizing Thy love, recognizing that Thy purpose cannot be defeated. We pray that by Thy grace we may be part of that purpose, that Christ may be all and in all because He is worthy. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

LESSON 3 - THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL

Ephesians 1: 11-14 - In him (that is in Christ), in whom we have also obtained an inheritance, being marked out beforehand according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will, that we should be to the praise of his glory who have pre-trusted in the Christ: in whom ye also have trusted, having heard the word of the truth, the glad tidings of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, ye have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance to the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of his glory.

Colossians 1:21 - And you, who once were alienated and enemies in mind by wicked works, yet now has it reconciled in the body of his flesh through death; to present you holy and unblamable and irreproachable before it, if indeed ye abide in the faith founded and firm, and not moved away from the hope of the glad tidings, which ye have heard, which have been proclaimed in the whole creation which is under heaven, of which I Paul became minister. Now, I rejoice in sufferings for you, and I fill up that which is behind of the tribulations of Christ in my flesh, for his body, which is the assembly [the church]; of which I became minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given me towards you to complete the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been made manifest to his saints; to whom God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you the hope of glory: whom we announce, admonishing every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom, to the end that we may present every man perfect in Christ. Whereunto also I toil, combating according to his working, which works in me in power.

Let's have a further word of prayer:

Dear heavenly Father, we want to thank Thee that Thou hast gathered us together again. We do gather in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we realize that Thou art here with us. Lord, speak, Thy servants heareth. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

We have spent some time together on this matter of purpose. We find that purpose is most essential to our lives because purpose gives us the meaning of life. The kind of purpose we purpose is also important because it makes us the kind of persons we are. There is no purpose nobler or higher than to purpose God's own purpose because it is the will of God that our purpose be one with God's purpose. That alone will give us the meaning of life.

Even before the foundation of the world, God purposed a purpose in Himself. We have mentioned again and again that God is a God of purpose; He never does anything by chance. In Him is one purpose; which embraces all other purposes. That purpose governs all the other purposes and He purposed it before the foundation of the world according to His good pleasure. As a matter of fact, He never told anyone about that purpose. So this is called the mystery of the ages. According to the purpose that He made, He laid a plan, which is called the counsel of His will. After He laid down such a plan, He worked according to that plan with all His power towards the realization of that purpose.

God's purpose was made in eternity past but when He works out His purpose it is through time, and its fulfillment will be in eternity to come. This mystery has now been revealed to us. God's top secret is out, and it has been revealed to us who are His own.

Today, every believer should know that purpose because it is God's will for us to know it. If God should keep it away from us no one has the wisdom even to guess what that purpose is. But since God has revealed it, we have a responsibility. God will hold us responsible to know this purpose. We cannot say that we do not know His purpose and we cannot walk accordingly. There is no excuse. Whenever there is a revelation, there is a responsibility. When we receive this revelation, remember that we are held responsible for it.

What is that purpose? In the fullness of time God will sum up all things in His Son. Some versions say, "God will head up all things in His Son," that His Son may be, ~"~e Head over all things, that everything will express Him, and everything will glorify His Son. This is God's eternal purpose. When it is revealed, it is very simple. In the very heart of God you can only see one Person-His own beloved Son. Because He loves His Son so much He will do everything for His Son.

Dear brothers and sisters, even though we human beings are very small, somehow we think we are very important; we are very self-important. Even when we come to spiritual things, we think we are in the center of God's heart. "God so loved the world"- we say that makes us very important. But if you take a closer look into the heart of God you find that you are not there. It is true God so loved the world, but you are not there. You see in the heart of God only God's beloved Son. We are there in the heart of God's beloved Son.

We shared together on the revelation of God's eternal purpose and that is to behold His Son. In His relationship with God, He is the image of the invisible God. He makes the invisible God visible and He is a perfect representation and manifestation. If we see Him, we see the Father because He comes to declare the Father to us. He is with God and He is God. He and the Father are one. That is our Lord Jesus.

So far as His relationship with creation is concerned, He is the firstborn of all creation. That means He is the one in whom creation comes into being. Creation takes its character from Him because all creation is created in Him, by Him, and for Him. The whole of creation comes out of Him and returns to Him, and that includes you and me. We come out of Him and we return to Him. We are His forever.

So far as the new creation is concerned, He is the Head of the body. We who believe in the Lord Jesus are one body. In one Spirit we were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, but our Head is our Lord Jesus. The body comes out of the Head, is under the Head, and is to grow into the Head. He is the beginning of the new creation and He is the firstborn from among the dead. That is to say, the church today is on resurrection ground because He is the firstborn from among the dead.

All these relationships are for one reason, that He may have the first place in all things. He is the first, the last, and all in between. Or to put it in another way, it is God's purpose that Christ be all and in all. Such revelation is found throughout the Bible. The whole Bible is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

You remember on the day of our Lord's resurrection, two disciples left Jerusalem and went to Emmaus because they were disappointed. The One whom they believed in as the Prophet, as the One whom God had sent was crucified and buried. Their hope was smashed. So in their disappointment they left Jerusalem and went to Emmaus. And suddenly, another Man came and walked with them.

The Bible says that our Lord appeared to them in another form. That is why they did not recognize Him. The Stranger said, "Why are you so sad?" They said, "Were You in Jerusalem and yet do not know what happened?" And they told him about how the Prophet, the Messiah was crucified, and so on. The Stranger said, "How slow is your faith." And He opened the Bible to them from Moses through the prophets and the Psalms, showing them everything that referred to Him. And while He was explaining the Scripture to them, their hearts grew warm.

After they arrived in Emmaus, this Stranger seemed to be going onward so they forced Him to stay back. When they had the meal, the Stranger blessed the bread and gave it to them. Suddenly their eyes were opened. It was the Lord, and that gave them strength to go back to Jerusalem. There the Lord appeared to the disciples who gathered in that house. And again He went through the Scripture with them beginning with Moses, through the prophets and the Psalms, interpreting the things that spoke of Him. So the whole Old Testament is a revelation of Jesus Christ, and of course, the whole New Testament is the revelation of Jesus Christ God wants us to see Him and to be wholly filled with Him. This is the will of God, that He may be all and in all.

Our Place in God's Eternal Purpose

Now we would like to look into one thing. Having seen the eternal purpose of God, His Son, what is our place in that eternal purpose? We said before that we have no place in God's eternal purpose. We have no place in that purpose which He purposed in Himself before the foundation of the world. Now I want to repeat something because probably you are puzzled.

So far as God's eternal purpose is concerned which He purposed in Himself before the world's foundation (Ephesians 1:9-10), we find that it is not only centered in His Son but His Son is everything, because His Son occupies the whole, undivided, heart of God. Our hearts are divided but God's heart is pure and single. So in His heart there is only one Person. Everything is focused on that Person. Aside from that Person God has nothing; God will do nothing. God gave everything to His beloved Son. All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him. Outside of Him God has nothing because God has put Himself totally in His Son. That is why we have no place in it.

But then you come to Ephesians 3:9-11: "And to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, who has created all things, in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the all-various wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages, (notice this) which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In Ephesians 1:9 he said, "Which he purposed in Himself" That is to say, He purposed that in Himself Yet in chapter 3, He said that He purposed that purpose of the ages in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus you find your place in God's eternal purpose.

In God's Son

Now what I want to present is very simple. God's eternal purpose is His Son. Whatever is in His Son is related to God's eternal purpose. Anything that is not in His Son is outside of God's eternal purpose. The reason there is a place for us in God's eternal purpose is not because of us; it is because we are in Him. When we are in Him, then we are in God's eternal purpose. If we are not in Him, then we are outside of God's eternal purpose. That is why we want to see our place in God's eternal purpose.

In Ephesians 1: 11 it says, "In him, in whom we have also obtained an inheritance." The whole mystery of the gospel can be summed up in two phrases-in *Christ* and *Christ in us*. These two phrases sum up the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Often, when we think of the gospel, the salvation of God, we think of something as outside of Christ Himself, something that He has done and then given to us; but it does not have that inward relationship with Himself.

We often think of salvation as having our sins forgiven, as going to heaven. Now this is true. But our concept is: I have sinned and the wages of sin is death; but, now Christ has completed the work of redemption, so I come to our Lord Jesus. I confess my sins and I ask Him to forgive my sins. So He hands me a package called "forgiveness of sins." When I get that package, my sins are forgiven. Or He may give me another package called "eternal life." I take that package and I am assured that when I die I can go- to heaven because it is an insurance policy, but it will not be operative until I die. So our concept is that He gives us something and it really has nothing to do with Himself.

But according to the word of God, the mystery of the gospel is not external because when we believe in the Lord Jesus, God puts us *in Christ* and *in Christ* we experience forgiveness of sin and the assurance of heaven. We must see that when we believed in the Lord Jesus something inward happened. Our relationship with Christ is not an external one because we are in Him and He is in us. Now this is a mystery because before our Lord Jesus died,

when He was with His disciples during that last evening, He told Phillip: "Do you still want to see the Father? Do you not know Me? If you know Me you know My Father because I am in the Father and the Father is in Me." But of course Phillip could not understand because this is something that had never been seen in this world. How can one person be in another person? He can be alongside but not inside. It is a mystery. But our Lord Jesus said, "On that day (the day of His resurrection), you shall know I am in the Father, the Father is in Me, I am in you, and you are in Me." This is how the mystery of the gospel is revealed. The gospel can be summed up by, *in Christ and Christ in us*.

How are we in Christ? In I Corinthians 1:30 it says, "By God, are ye in Christ Jesus." It is God who puts us there. Actually, according to the gospel of John, the word "*believe*" means "believe into." So when we believe in the Lord Jesus, we believe into Christ. When you believe, God puts you in Christ. When He puts you in Christ, do you know what happens? "All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him and you are complete in Him." Everything that is in Christ is now made available to you.

The Blessing of Being in Christ

That is why it says in Ephesians 1:3 "Thanks be unto God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." Here you find every spiritual blessing that you can think of, that you need. God has already blessed you with all the blessings of God in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus. Sometimes we try to explain it by the way the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land. God promised this land flowing with milk and honey to the children of Israel, and He gave the land to them. It is a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of plenty.

Brothers and sisters, you are in Christ, and in Christ, every spiritual blessing now belongs to you. By faith you enter in. Paul tells us a few of these blessings in Ephesians 1.

"According as he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation (v. 4)." God has chosen us before the foundation of the world. But how did He choose us? He has chosen us *in Him*.

"That we should be holy and blameless before him in love (v. 4)" In other words, God has chosen us not just that we may go to heaven. God has chosen us that we may be holy and blameless before Him in love.

"Having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself (v. 5) ... taking us into favor in the Beloved: in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences (v. 6-7) ... and to know the mystery of His will (v. 9)."

Christ in Us

All these blessings are in Christ and God has put us in Him. Not only has He put us in Him, but He is also in us. In Colossians 1:27 it says, "It is the riches of the glory of the mystery. It is Christ in you the hope of glory." Because Christ is in you, therefore He has become the wisdom of God to you. God has given Christ to us to be our inheritance and He has already given us the Holy Spirit of promise to be an earnest or a pledge. God has already put a down payment in you, and the Holy Spirit is the down payment to show that God will lead you into the fullness of God.

Christ is Our Inheritance

In Christ and Christ in us is how we are put into the eternal purpose of God. So remember that Christ is our inheritance and everything that is in Christ is ours. What we need to do is possess our possessions, just like the

children of Israel who entered into Canaan. Every place they put down the soles of their feet belonged to them. This is how we are related to God's eternal purpose.

In Ephesians 1: 11 it says, "In him, in whom we have also obtained an inheritance." This is our translation. In other words we have obtained an inheritance. In the eternal purpose of God we obtain Christ. All that is His is ours. How glorious that is! But the best translation is different. It says, "In whom we were designated as his heritage."

In Deuteronomy 32:9 it says, "For Jehovah's portion is his people; Jacob the lot of his inheritance." It is true that God has given Canaan to Israel as their inheritance but this verse is different. This verse tells us that Jacob is the Lord's portion, that the children of Israel are God's inheritance. Now that gives us another side of the picture.

When we see that Christ is our inheritance, I think that is such a glorious revelation. Often we see Christ only as our Savior and that's it. What more is He to you? All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him and you are complete in Him. He is everything to you. Whatever you need, that is in Christ. Do not try to find the supply other than in Him. Stick with Him, go to Him, and by faith and obedience you will receive everything. Now if you see this, it really opens your eyes.

But brothers and sisters, we still think we are the center-He for me. So I think probably that different translation fits it better. "In Him we were designated as heritage." In other words, we become the inheritance of Christ. I think that gives us a better understanding because when you read that portion of Scripture it does give you this thought. You find that in verse 13: "In whom ye also have trusted, having heard the word of the truth, the glad tidings of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, ye have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."

Sealed with the Holy Spirit

"The seal of the Holy Spirit." What does it mean? Seal in the Scripture refers to a transaction that is finished, accomplished, and then you seal it. When you seal it, it means an ownership. It gives the security there. For instance, we find this in Jeremiah 32. It was in the tenth year of King Zedekiah and Jeremiah was in prison. Jerusalem was surrounded by the Babylonians, and God's word came to Jeremiah: "Your nephew, Hanameel, will come to you and ask you to redeem, to buy his portion of land in Anathoth."

His nephew came and said, "Now you, my uncle, have the right of redemption. You should buy this land." Now remember, it was during the time when Babylon had already surrounded Jerusalem. So what could it mean to buy land at that time? God had already said through Jeremiah that the nation of Israel would be taken into captivity; yet God told Jeremiah to buy that land.

So Jeremiah weighed seventeen shekels of silver and bought the land. Then he had everything written and he sealed it. During those days they had one book sealed and one book open. After the transaction was done, Jeremiah said, "Put them in an earthen vessel. Keep them because the day will come when there will again be the transaction of land in Israel." So that is one meaning of "sealed."

What is meant when it says we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit? Some people have said that maybe the background of sealing is this. In the old days when people came to the forest to buy wood, they would look at a tree and say, "I want to buy this." So they would put their seal on it. After that, the tree would be cut and transported to the seashore. Those who bought this wood would come and when they saw their seal on the wood, they knew it was theirs.

We have all been sealed by the Holy Spirit. Now whose seal is that? Who bought us? Who declares that you are Mine? Of course, it is our Lord. He has bought us with a price and said, "You are mine." He puts His seal on you and that is secured. You belong to Him. So you are His inheritance.

"Who is the earnest of our inheritance to the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of his glory (v.14)."

Now "earnest" is a down payment. It is a down payment that says, "I am going to pay everything." He is the earnest of our inheritance. In other words, Christ is our inheritance and the down payment is the Holy Spirit who dwells in us because He will glorify Christ in us. He will transform us that we may be like Christ.

How are you going to explain this verse that says, "By the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of his glory"? Darby suggested the antecedent that required the redemption of the acquired possession is the "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." Then you put "who is the earnest of our inheritance" in parentheses, So this is the way you read it: "You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (who is the earnest of our inheritance)." Then you have connected the Spirit of promise with the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of His glory. In other words, the acquired possession is you. He has begun a work in you and He is to finish that work in you. When that work is finished, it is to the praise of God's glory.

His Inheritance in the Saints

"Being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (v. 18).

Here you find the riches of the glory of *His* inheritance in the saints. Now think for a moment. Christ is our inheritance, the riches of the glory of our inheritance. But to say "the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints," we cannot imagine how it is possible. Our God is a bad businessman. In that transaction we got Christ as our inheritance, the riches of the glory of our inheritance in Christ, but He got us. It is a desert, a ruin. What an exchange! How can it be glory? How can it be riches of glory? Impossible! But what is impossible will be made possible because of the exceeding greatness of His power. His power that works in Christ in raising Him from the dead, even putting Him on the throne, will work in those who believe so that one day we will be transformed and conformed to the image of His Son. When that happens, there will be the riches of the glory of His inheritance because His Son will lead many sons into glory that He may be the firstborn of His brethren. When you see this, you see your place in God's eternal purpose.

God's Purpose Cannot Be Defeated

"And you" (Colossians 1 :21). God created all things for His Son, so that His Son may be glorified, but unfortunately there was rebellion in creation. We have already said that God's eternal purpose was challenged. In the former world some of the angels rebelled against God. Who is equal with God? The Son is equal with the Father, yet Lucifer wanted to be equal with God. He wanted to take the place of God's only beloved Son, and there was rebellion. Evidently our solar system was under his rule, so when he was cast out of heaven, our system entered into ruin and emptiness. But God's purpose cannot be defeated and cannot change.

God began to work. The Spirit of God brooded over the ruined earth, and the Holy Spirit began to work upon this ruined and empty earth. In six days He restored the earth to be habitable because God was going to create man, and use man to defeat the enemy.

That is negative, but there is also a positive thing. He wants to give man to be His Son's life companion. Man has a very important place in God's plan. That is why God created man in His image according to His likeness; but

unfortunately, man rebelled against God. And because of the sin of man, the whole world entered into emptiness and was under corruption. That is why you find the whole created world is groaning. It is because of the sin of man. But God's purpose cannot be defeated. It is still with man. It is the second Man.

We see Jesus who tasted death for everything. He accomplished a work of redemption, to reconcile all things back to God, to the fullness of God, to the eternal purpose of God. As far as all of creation is concerned the Bible just mentions, "By the blood of the cross He reconciled all things to itself" (See Colossians 1:20). The whole universe is in chaos because it lost its meaning, its focus, and disintegrated when they rejected the Son. But now, through the Son, the whole universe comes back to order, is reconciled to God's eternal purpose.

The Work of the Cross in Us

"And you." Here you find something more is added. He said, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in mind by wicked works, yet now has it reconciled in the body of his flesh through death" (Colossians 1:21-22a).

Brothers and sisters, with all creation, the blood of the cross is sufficient; His blood purified all creation. But with man, we need not only the blood of His cross; we need the body of His flesh through death. Why? It is because we have a will of our own. We have that self-will. We have that fallen flesh and because of these, we not only need cleansing through the blood, we need to have the work of the cross in our lives.

In Hebrews 10:19-20 it says, "Having boldness to enter into the holy place through the blood of the Lamb, and by the way which He had dedicated for us through His own flesh."

We need the blood of our Lord Jesus to cleanse us from all our sins, and we need to walk the way of the cross. He has dedicated, opened that way to us. His body was rent and this is the new and living way. In other words, His cross has to work in our lives to put our flesh to death, to put our self to death, that in resurrection we may be conformed to His image, so that we may be holy, unblamable, and irreproachable before Him. This is the will of God because when we are going through this working of the cross in our lives, we are being identified with Christ in death and resurrection. We will be delivered from our flesh and self, and Christ will be formed in us. When Christ is formed in us, there will be the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. It is when we allow the Holy Spirit to use the cross to work in our lives to take away everything that is not of Christ and to fill us with Christ, Christ becomes all and in all to us. Then the eternal purpose of God is fulfilled. When we surrender ourselves to Him in such a way, as when man led the whole creation into ruin, now through Man the whole creation will be brought back to Him.

The Bride of the Lamb

Romans 8 says that the whole creation is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God because when the sons of God are manifested they will be emancipated. The sons of God are grown up children of God. They grow up through the discipline of the Holy Spirit, by walking the way of the cross, and in doing that they become overcomers. They overcome the accuser by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and they love not their soul-life even unto death. That is negative.

The positive is they become the bride of the Lamb because God has made them ready. They are clothed with bright shiny linen, which is the righteousness of the saints. This is how God's eternal purpose in Christ is being fulfilled in the church.

In Ephesians 5 it says, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, washing her by the water with the word that she may be sanctified and be without spot or wrinkle or any of such sort, holy and without blemish, a glorious church as the bride of the Lamb." Now God's eternal purpose in Christ is fulfilled.

Let us pray:

Dear heavenly Father, on the one hand we are most grateful. We praise and thank Thee that Thy purpose is perfect and it is all in Thy beloved Son. But on the other hand we feel humbled. With all the grace that Thou hast shown us, instead of cooperating, we are delaying. Lord, have mercy upon us. We do want to offer ourselves to Thy beloved Son that He may be all and in all to us that Thou may be glorified. We ask in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

LESSON 4 - THE ETERNAL PURPOSE THAT GOD PURPOSED IN HIMSELF -- CHRIST

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favor in the Beloved in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of his grace; which he has caused to abound towards us in all wisdom and intelligence, having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for the administration of the fullness of times; to head up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth; in him, in whom we have also obtained an inheritance, being marked out beforehand according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will, that we should be to the praise of his glory who have pre-trusted in the Christ: in whom ye also have trusted, having heard the word of the truth, the glad tidings of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, ye have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance to the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of his glory.” (Eph. 1:3-14)

Let's take a closer look at verse 9.

In Chinese, it says that “according to the good will of His predestined will so that we know the mystery of His will.” In English, via Darby's translation, says “having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which he purposed in Himself.”

We need to emphasize “Which he PURPOSED in Himself.”

Let's bow down and pray.

“Lord we thank and praise you that we can gather here in Your name. We praise and thank you that we have already read Your Word. We look to your own Holy Spirit to open Your Word. So that we can truly see the mystery of Your Word. So we can be drawn into your own will. So that your glory can be praised. We entrust this time into your hands. We look to your own Spirit to flourish at this moment. So that no matter the speaker, the translator, and the hearers. We are all anointed with your Holy Spirit. So that your will can prevail. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.”

We thank the Lord that he gave us this time to worship Him together. The subject of our sharing this morning is “God's Eternal Purpose”. We all know that in the epistles, written by Paul, two letters speak specifically about the eternal purpose of God. These two books are the highest standards of the revelation of His truth. These books are Colossians and Ephesians. Although the viewpoints of these two books are slightly different, their themes are one and the same; that theme is the Eternal Purpose of God.

Colossians teaches us that in order to know the Eternal Purpose of God, we need to know that Christ is the head. Ephesians teaches us the other part of knowing the Eternal Purpose of God: how the church should be the body of Christ. These two books have touched the eternal purpose of God. If we compare the book of Ephesians to the letters to the Romans, we know that in Romans, the focus starts with the condition of man, and then it shifts towards the will of God. The book of Ephesians focuses first on the will of God, and then it focuses on how man is saved by grace.

Usually, the book of Romans is easier to understand because it starts from the standpoint of a man. Ephesians is a little more difficult because it starts from the view point of God. We know that men are usually self-centered. So

it is easier for us to understand the book of Romans. But brothers and sisters, we all know that man is not the center. We know that God is the center.

The will of God is the beginning of all things; it is the process of all things, and it is the consummation of all things. But as men, we always think that we are the center. We even think that God and His Will revolves around us. Naturally, if we do not understand the eternal purpose of God, we will think of ourselves as the center. We will think that everything is to be centered upon ourselves. In this way we will easily fall into the trap of humanism. We know that humanism is man-centered. Man is exalted and denies the position of God. This completely violates the Will of God.

Now, if we are self-centered but do not exalt ourselves, we fall into a different condition. We will think that man is nothing but a toy (plaything) in the universe. We lose the honor that actually should belong to us. We think that our life has no meaning and no purpose. If we think this way, not only we fall short of the glory of God, we have also lost our purpose in which God has created us. So we know that it is extremely important to understand the Will of God. If we can truly understand God's Eternal Purpose, then we can be saved from ourselves. I think in our own spiritual experiences, we ourselves are the biggest hindrance. Whether it is my sinful self or my good self, it is the self. This is the main hindrance to our spiritual growth.

What can save us from our self-centeredness? We can only be saved from being self-centered if we know the eternal purpose of God. If we can truly see the eternal purpose of God, then we can see the position we are to take in His Will.

It is not everything, but it is also not "nothing". We can find our rightful position in God's purpose, and we can truly be one with our Lord. Now, it is extremely important to understand the eternal purpose of God. This is the secret to our spiritual growth.

How do we grow from being a baby in Christ to a mature man full of His stature? This has to do with whether we can understand the eternal purpose of God. We know that the eternal purpose of God influences all the things He has done and will do. All that God has done is according to His eternal purpose.

We know that God has many specific purposes. Take for example, after we are saved, we may start to question whether particular matters are in God's Will. Before we were saved, we paid no attention to the will of God. But after we are saved, very naturally, we begin to ask if the matters we concern ourselves with are according to God's Will. For example, I've decided that I'm going to do something, after salvation, I would naturally ask whether this particular thing I want to do is a part of God's Will. Or I've decided to go somewhere. After salvation, I would ask whether it is God's Will for me to go to that place. Or when I have to make a decision, I would ask, which decision would fit in with the Will of God? Of course, these are all questions that a Christian would naturally ask. And it is also very reasonable. If we do not ask those questions, we are in trouble. We should indeed ask whether all these matters are in the will of God. But brothers and sisters, we know that although on the surface, the will of God encompasses all things. Looking deeper, however, the Bible tells us that God has **one** vast eternal purpose. Our God does not have many different wills. God has destined in Himself only one purpose. And God's specific purpose controls all the different purposes. If we have not understood God's specific purpose, then it is not easy for us to understand the various purposes of God. Many often times, brothers and sisters will ask,

"What do you think about this thing? Is this according to the will of God?" "Please tell me, so that I can follow through."

But brothers and sisters, if we can touch the eternal purpose of God, the varying purposes are easier to understand.

In 12th chapter of Romans verse 2, it tells us that we "have to prove what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God". The will mentioned there, in the original language is singular. If we have committed ourselves to the

Lord, if we have offered our bodies as a living sacrifice, then this is holy, acceptable to God, and it is our reasonable service. If we offer ourselves to God in this way, our mind will be transformed and renewed. Then we may proof of what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God

Let me emphasize that will is singular. This singular will is, as the Bible tells us, the eternal purpose of God. And this particular will has been predestined by God before the creation of the world. This will is what God has purposed in Himself. Because our God is good, His will is good also. Because our God is pure, so His purpose is perfect. Our God is accepting.

I don't know, brothers and sisters, whether you think our God is pleasant and accepting. Sometimes we may think that our God is not that pleasant and accepting. That's because you do not know Him. If we know our God, we know that He is truly accepting and pleasant. His will is also accepting. There is no other will that is more perfect than the eternal purpose of God. If you can truly know that will, then you know that that will is the most accepting. And it will give you a heart of worship.

So brothers and sisters, let's should summarize this. Often times we think the eternal purpose of God is so far away, because it is a mystery. When we think about the word mystery, we think feel that it is something we cannot touch or understand, so it is better not to touch it. We think if we try to touch it, maybe we will be confused. And if we touch it too much, we will be overwhelmed. When we think of the eternal purpose of God, we feel that it is better to keep it at a distance.

But brothers and sisters, we have to know that knowing the eternal purpose of God has personal relationship with us. If we want to know God we have to know His eternal purpose. If we want to know ourselves, we need to know the eternal purpose of God. If we hope to be saved from ourselves, we have to understand the eternal purpose of God. If we hope to grow in our spiritual stature, we have to know the eternal purpose of God. This eternal purpose of God not only does it have a great deal to do with God Himself, it has a very close relationship with ourselves.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that we can change our attitude about this. We hope that brothers and sisters do not have a mindset that the eternal purpose of God is something we can see from far away, but we cannot touch. We have to change our attitude. We should have the attitude that we can pursue and understand the eternal purpose of God.

In the first chapter of Ephesians, there are four steps concerning the eternal purpose of God. The first is the will of God. The second is His plan. The third is His way. The fourth is His realization.

Our God is a living God and our God has His will.

Lifeless things have no will. But if you are living, if you have life, then you have a will. Our God is a living God, He must have His will. That will was predestined before the creation of the world. Before the universe was created by God, God had destined this will in Himself. He has predestined this Will according to His own pleasure. We do not know why God has predestined this will, but we know only one thing: His will He has predestined it according to His own pleasure. It's not according to our pleasure, because at that time we did not exist. He has predestined according to His own good pleasure. Brothers and sisters, we know that we can know the pleasure of God and that is the most blessed thing. Often we ask that question: Why does God do it this way? Why does God do it the other way? We do not understand. Sometimes we do not want to cooperate. Sometimes we grumble and complain. Sometimes we rebel. But if we can truly see what ...

And they were not moved, even when they saw the wonders that He did. When our Lord turned to this situation, if they ask then we would question.

“That I worked so hard. I poured out myself. That you are truly ignorant. That you are truly stubborn.

Not only have you murmured against man, you murmur against God. “God, why do you allow these things to happen?” Why don’t you bless your own work? You sent me here to do this work! But why did the work turn out to be this way?

But brothers and sisters, when our Lord was in this situation, He didn’t explain anything. This kind of condition cannot be explained. But our Lord had one explanation:

He raised His head and said, “Father I thank you. For this is Your good will, and this is Your pleasure. If this is Your pleasure, I like it too. If this is Your pleasure, no matter how this matter turns out: I willingly accept it”.

So, our Lord, even in that condition, worshipped God. Dear brothers and sisters, if today we can see the true pleasure of God, He is God, and He has His own pleasure. If this is His pleasure, no matter how I feel, I have to be happy, then I can worship Him. You know that today God is looking for worshipers on this earth. How can we be worshipers? We need to see His good pleasure. He has predestined His will according to His pleasure. So today we have to rise up to receive that eternal purpose with joy.

Our God not only has His own will, He also has His plan. It is not too clear in the Chinese translation. In verse 11, it says “in whom we have also obtained an inheritance, being marked out beforehand according to the purpose of him”.

It says according to the counsel of His will. “According to His counsel” means according to His plan. Not only does He have a will, but according to His will, He has a plan. Our God works with a plan. Often times we do things as they come. Often times we do things without a thought or a plan. We like to take care of things as they come up. But our God does not do it this way. After He established His will, then has His plan, then He has His counsel. And this is also the administration mentioned in verse 10.

We know that this word, administration, or arrangement, in English, there are several different translations. And sometimes it’s translated as administration, sometimes dispensation. That has to do with time or sometimes economy. The Chinese translation calls it arrangement. God has His own arrangement regarding His will. The arrangement is different at different times. And often times when we read the Bible, we sometimes feel that God does things different ways at different times. He seemed to be doing something one way in the period of the Law, but during the period of promise and the period of grace, He did things differently. Sometimes it seems difficult for us when we read the Bible. We tend to think our God does things without an order. This is because we do not know His plan, and we do not know that God has destined His will.

God will do everything according to His counsel according to His time. During the time of Adam, He did things a specific way. In the time of Noah, He did it the other way. At the time of Abraham, He did it another way, and at the time of Moses, He did it even another way. He even did things a different way during the reign of King David. And in the fullness of time, Christ came and he did it even another way. When our Lord returns, He will do it another way. And He has His own counsel. He has His own arrangement. And we have to understand how He made the arrangement to accomplish His will.

The third. Not only does He have His counsel and His way, He also has His work. He worked His will out according to His plan. Sometimes we have a will, but we don’t have a plan. If that is so, then the will cannot be accomplished, but sometimes, we have the will and plan, but we don’t do it! Or we have no strength to do it, so that cannot be accomplished either.

But our God not only He has His will, His plan, but also He has His work. We remember our Lord Jesus’ death. He says “My Father worketh hitherto I work”. Our God is a working God.

Do not think that our God is sleeping. Some would think that after God created heaven and earth He fell asleep. That He didn't care for anything. That everything evolved by itself. No. Our God is a working God! He keeps working. Although His work of creation was accomplished, He still has work to do. He wants to accomplish His eternal purpose. His eternal purpose was not accomplished in creation. When He created heaven and earth that was only the beginning of His will.

He keeps working until His own will is accomplished. We thank and praise God. Our God is all powerful, almighty! And He can do all things! We can believe in our God, that He will work everything out in His will according to His counsel.

In fact, the accomplishment of His will, is not dependent on us. Although He uses us, He does not depend on us. If He depended on us, then His will would not be accomplished. We can have assurance that His eternal purpose will be accomplished. This is a strong faith that we should have in us.

Fourth, it is the realization. When His eternal purpose is accomplished, then His glory will be praised. Now after all this, I am yet to tell you what the eternal purpose of God is. What is that eternal purpose of God? In the first chapter of Ephesians, Let's see verses 9 and 10.

“Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself for the administration of the fullness of times; to head up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth”.

And here, it tells us. The good pleasure is the mystery of His will. According to the administration in the fullness of time, to head up all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. And in Chinese, the translation is to sum all things to one.

In the English Bible, there are different translations. In the original language, all these translations, their meanings, are included. Some translations say “to head up all things in Christ”. Everything will be poured together and headed up in Christ. And some other translations say “to gather together all the things in heaven and on earth to Christ”. And some translations say “to sum up all the things in heaven and earth in Christ”. So we see that in the original language, there are these different meanings there. What is that eternal purpose of God? It is to sum up, to head up, to gather up, all things in Christ. To make Christ the head of all things. So that Christ can be all in all. Our God loves His Son. Because He loves His Son, He wants to give all things to His Son. He wants all things to magnify the glory of His Son. And He wants His Son to be the head of all things. He wants His Son to fill all things. And this is the eternal will of God. And this is the good pleasure of God

And how about us? He wants to give us to His own beloved Son as the bride for His Son. As the helper for His Son. So brothers and sisters, the eternal purpose of God, is to have His Son having first place in all things. And also that His Son has to have the first place in each one of us.

And there is a Bible scholar, Govet. He said “This verse is to head up all things in heaven and on earth in Christ”. He said “There are three meanings to this word. This first is to renew. To renew. In order to renew, It says that something is already wrong.

When God created heaven and earth, all things are created for His Son. When God created all, the book of Job tells us that all stars were singing, the angels praised. For all things are for the service of God. And He is the head of all things. The whole universe is one in Him, all for Him. But we know that in history, not only the human history, but even in the history before human history, we see that there is rebellion in the universe. And in the previous world, in the creation of God, the highest was the angels. But among the angels, there was rebellion. One archangel, Lucifer, and he was the son of the morning star. And he had pride in him, because God gave him much

gift. God adorned him with beauty, and God gave him power to rule all things. Very possibly, this archangel was the highest among all angels. He was right under God.

But this archangel was proud, he wanted to grasp the position of the son of God. He was not willing to be a created angel. He wanted to be equal with God. Only the beloved Son of God can be equal with God. He wanted to grab that position. And he did not want to see the Son of God to be the center. Our God was a jealous God. So God punished this archangel. And this archangel is Satan today.

God did not create Satan. Satan means to oppose. God did not create Satan. God created a beautiful archangel, full of gifts. An archangel full of position and power. But this archangel turned himself into Satan.

So we saw there's a great change in the universe. And the universe disintegrated.(was torn asunder). It was not in Christ. It became purposeless. But God did not give up.

So when we read Genesis, we saw the spirit of God hovers over the waters. He started to do the work of God's recovery. On the 6th day, He created man. You know that the man created by God was His masterpiece. Why? Because God has His will when He created man. And He created us according to His own image. And even when He created the angels, He did not create angels according to His image. Why did he create us according to His own image? Because He wants us to be united with Him. Angels could only worship Him. Can only serve Him. But could not unite with Him. But now, God created man. And man can be one with God in light.

But we also see, God gave man power. He gave man the authority to rule the things in the heaven and the earth and under the earth. And God told Adam: You have to view all things, you have to subdue all things.

Why? Because God wants to use man to bring, to sum up all things unto the foot of Christ. Man is not only the bride of Christ. This is the union in life. God wants man to be the helper of Christ, to bring up all things under the foot of Christ.

So we see the rebellion of Satan. Not only did he not hinder the purpose of God, but God went one step ahead of him to accomplish His will. But too bad, man sinned. Because man sinned, man had interrupted the eternal purpose of God.

Not only man are not worthy to be the bride of Christ, that we could not eat of the fruit of the tree of life. Not only we could not subdue all things, we ourselves were subdued. But God did not give up. Although we man failed, Adam failed and all the men in Adam failed. But in the fullness of time, God raised up the second man, and this man is Jesus Christ. Word becoming flesh And dwelt among men. Full of grace and truth. Brothers and sisters, we see that in Adam all have died, but in Christ, we become all alive. In Adam, the plan of God was interrupted. But in Christ, this whole counsel is realized. So to the head of all things in Christ, the first meaning is to renew. And all things now became old. They were subdued under the void and corruption. All things were disintegrated. With no purpose. There was no connection.

But today in Christ, on the cross, our Lord, the book of Colossians tells us: First chapter,

“By the blood of our Lord Jesus He has reconciled all things on heaven and on earth to be reconciled to God”. And through His broken body on the cross, He has brought all of us before God, so that we can be reconciled to God.

According to the original language, to what extent? The reconciliation is to the fullness, the abundance of God. That is to recover to the original purpose of God. And this is the meaning of renewal.

This is the first part. The second meaning is quite similar.

And Brother Govet put it this way: “He said to it is to collect all things together.” You know that all these things were disintegrated. They all went their own way. As all of us have went our own way. But God has now gathered us together in Christ. He gathered us together under Christ. And this is the second point.

The third point. Is to have all things in heaven and on Earth to be included in Christ

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And this inclusion, this word to sum up, this word was used in Romans chapter 13.

Romans chapter 13, verse 9. And here Paul says that we should not offend anybody in anything. Verse 8 : Owe no one anything, unless to love one another: For he that loves another has fulfilled the law. For, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not lust; and if there be any other commandment, it is SUMMED UP in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Love works no ill to it’s neighbors and therefore, love is the whole law. We know that there are at least ten commandments. If we read the Old Testament, we see there are other statutes and ordinances. But no matter how many commandments, statutes, and ordinances, all are summed up in one word. That is love. Because if there is love, then all these things will be accomplished. Love is the basis of all these commandments. And love also is the accomplishment of all these other commandments.

And in other words, you don’t have to worry whether you should kill or not. As long as you have love, then it is accomplished. If you have love, you will not kill. Because all is summed up in love. So when the lawyers came to test the Lord, Our Lord told them so: He said the first among the commandments: To love God, to love the Lord your God and with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. The next is to love your neighbor as yourself.

Because this is to sum up all the laws and the prophets. And this verse summing up is the same word used in Ephesians chapter 1. So we see that all things are summed up in Christ. That Christ is the basis of all things. And Christ is the explanation of all things, interpretation of all things. And Christ is the summing up of all things. In another words, Christ is all, and in all.

If you can see Christ, then all things are no question. So the eternal purpose of God, it has these three aspects of meaning. And of course, if we see the book of Colossians, let’s turn to Colossians.

We have already said that simply put, the eternal purpose of God is His son. So in Colossians chapter 1 verse 15 all through verse 19. And it tells us that the beloved Son of God, who is He? And here it says that the purpose of God is to have Jesus Christ to have the first place in all things. In ALL things, that He has to have the first place.

And I think that brothers and sisters, you all understand this. The first place. The first place is not to say that He is the first place, I am the second. It’s not so. The first place says that He is the first, the second, the third, all the way to the last. The first place means that He is all. And this is the purpose of God for His Son. For God put the whole riches of His deity in Christ. The fullness of God. So He has put all His fullness in His Son. And we can put it the other way, because God put all His fullness in His Son, so outside of His Son, there’s nothing else.

ALL the fullness is in His Son. Who is His Son? Here we see several aspects. The relationship between the Son and His Father. Here it says the Beloved Son is the image of the invisible God. Our God is not visible, because He is the Spirit. So we cannot see Him. In the earlier years, when the cosmonauts of Russia were put into space, they came back saying there was no God. They thought that because they went into space and did not see God, there was no God. But not only they cannot see God in space, they cannot see God on earth. Our God is omnipresent,

even though we cannot see him, God is here. But we cannot see Him. Because He is not visible, we do not know Him. And we do not know what kind of God He is. So man tries to understand God in their own imagination. As a blind person trying to touch an elephant. Some will touch their trunk. They say, this is an elephant. And some will touch the nose. And say that the elephant looks like a nose. But none of this is like an elephant. Four parts and none look like an elephant. So people guess. But we thank God. Who is the Beloved? The Beloved is the image of the invisible God. The image. In the original language, it doesn't mean the likeness outside. It speaks about the character, the nature inside. So when our Lord came to the earth, He put on the likeness of man. But He revealed the character of the invisible God. And He said when men see me, they see the Father.

So when we see our God in the image of Christ, we see that God is a loving God. We see that our God is a righteous and holy God.. That He is a God of goodness. Today, we can know God because we know His Son. The Son of God expresses and reveals God Himself. This is the relationship between Christ Jesus and His Father. Besides Him, there's no other who can express God. He is the only begotten Son of God.

So brothers and sisters, today, if we want to know God, we have to know this Beloved Son. Only through His Beloved Son can we see God. Our Lord told His disciples, when Phillip was asking the Lord, show us God, and then we can be satisfied. And our Lord said, Phillip I have been with you for such a long time, and you did not see the Father? When you see me, you see the Father.

This is the relationship between our Lord and His Father. We can see the relationship between our Lord and the creation. Here it says that He was the firstborn, before all the creation. And here I'd like the brothers and sisters to pay attention. This firstborn does not mean that He is the first created. Often, because of this verse, we think that the Lord was created . You know that this interpretation does not work because immediately following this, it says before all creation. If He is before all creation, He could not have been created. And this is very clear. Our Lord is, He is!

And why does it say that He is firstborn? In the relationship between Him and creation, He was the firstborn. The word firstborn has two different meanings in the original language. The first in terms of order in time. The second is in terms of the order of position. For example, Isaac gave birth to two sons. According to the order of time, when these two sons were born, Esau should be the firstborn and Jacob should be the second. But we see after a little while, we know that there is a change of position. Jacob was given the sonship. He also was blessed as firstborn. Esau lost the sonship and also the blessing of the firstborn.

So the first order was according to time. The second order is according to the position. For example in the fourth chapter of Exodus verse 22, God sent Moses to seek Pharaoh. It says Israel is my firstborn. But we know that according to the nations, Israel at that time was not even a nation. Egypt was an ancient kingdom. So according to the time, according to which nation existed earlier, Egypt should be the firstborn. And of course, we Chinese say well, China was the firstborn, because we had a history of 5000 years. But what did God say? God says Israel is my firstborn. And this is the order of position, because this word firstborn, in the original language, can have a general usage, or a very specific usage. And what does special usage mean? Two meanings.

The first meaning is priority. The second meaning is sovereignty. What's the meaning of firstborn? The firstborn has priority. In nature and character, he has the priority. He has sovereignty. And this is the meaning of firstborn. Another example. In Psalms 89, verse 27, God said David is my firstborn, and he is above all kings. Now according to Kings, even in the nation of Israel, Saul was king before David. And even before Israel had its king, all the other nations had their kings. But God said that David is my firstborn. He is above all other kings. So here it tells us that the matter of priority and sovereignty. And in terms of creation, Our Lord has priority, and he has sovereignty.

Why? Then we see an explanation. Because all things were created in Him, through Him, and for Him. All things were created in Him. Now here, it says that specifically in our Chinese translation, So in verse 16, it says: The

Chinese translation says all things were created by Him, but in the original language, it's not by Him but in Him. And still verse 16. All things were created through Him. Through Him And finally, still in verse 16, it says created for Him. Here, we see that all things, no matter whether it's in heaven or on earth, visible or invisible, the things that have the priority in principality and authority, they were all created in Him. What does that mean? Christ is the architect. In him, there's a blueprint, because he has a sense of beauty. So the house that He will build in the future is going to be a beautiful one.

When God was creating all things, who was the designer? The designer was His Beloved Son. He designed the whole thing according to His own character. All things display His glory. Not only is He the designer, He is also the builder. He built all things. He did not only build all things, but all things belong to Him. And He is the one who inherits all things. So here you see how glorious our Lord is. And He is truly having the first place in all things.

The third point, His relationship with the new creation. The new creation refers to us. Here it says that He is the head of the body and the assembly. The church is His body. And He is the head of all church. He is the beginning. And this beginning refers to the beginning of the new creation, because He brings in the new creation. He was the first to be resurrected among the dead, and some say in the Old Testament time, there were people who were resurrected.

And there are ...

He was first one resurrected. But we know that whether in Old Testament or New Testament, the resurrection of those people were not complete. And after they came back to life, they would die again. Because they resurrected, but still have that fleshy body. Only the resurrection of our Lord is the true resurrection. And this corrupted becomes uncorrupted. And this carnal becomes spiritual. And this is the true resurrection.

Now brothers and sisters, today the church is standing on the ground of resurrection. Today, we have become a new creation in His grace. Things have passed and all things are new. All things are from God. All things are in the resurrection. All things will be manifested Christ.

So brothers and sisters, this is the eternal purpose of God. This eternal purpose of God will not just be realized in all things- First, it has to be realized in us who have received His gospel, and believed in Christ Jesus.

First, He has given us His own life, then through His Holy Spirit, He is working in us to eliminate all things out of the old creation. He has become Christ living in us, and He will use us. He is the head of the church. And he wants us to submit all things and to sum up all things under the foot of Christ. And this is the eternal purpose of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have to ask God to grant us the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we can truly see this purpose in the depths of our hearts. This will control our whole life and not only our own life, but also the life of the church.

Let's bow down and pray. Our God and Father, we thank you and praise you. Although Your eternal purpose is a mystery, you have revealed it to us through your apostles and prophets. So that we know that your mystery is Christ. So that we know that your purpose is to have your beloved Son as the head of all things. We thank you and praise you that you have saved us. So Lord we want your eternal purpose to be realized in us. And we offer ourselves to You. And through Your holy and good Spirit, You will work in us, until Your Son has His first place in us and be the head of the church. Hear our prayer. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

LESSON 5 - THE ETERNAL PURPOSE THAT GOD PURPOSED IN CHRIST -- CHURCH

“For this reason, I, Paul, prisoner of the Christ Jesus for you nations, (if indeed ye have heard of the administration of the grace of God which has been given to me towards you, that by revelation the mystery has been made known to me, (according as I have written before briefly, by which, in reading it, ye can understand my intelligence in the mystery of the Christ,) which in other generations has not been made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in [the power of the] Spirit, that [they who are of] the nations should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of [his] promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings; of which I am become minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me, according to the working of his power. To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given, to announce among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and to enlighten all [with the knowledge of] what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, who has created all things, in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God, according to [the] purpose of the ages, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence by the faith of him.” (Eph. 3:1-12)

Let's pay very close attention to verse 11. “according to [the] purpose of the ages, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord,” That is the eternal purpose which God has purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let's bow down in prayer. “Oh Lord our God, we come before you with whole hearts of thanks and praise because your will is so beautiful. We thank you Lord, because you have set up your Son to be the head of all things. You have opened up our eyes so that we can receive your Son to be our head. We thank you Lord because the will you have predestined in your Son is so perfect that we can be saved in your Son. We thank you that we can obtain Sonship because of your Son, so that we can be His bride and His helper. For such wonderful purpose we bow down to worship you. We want to place this time before you. May your spirit enlighten and inspire your own Word so that we can see your glorious purpose in our hearts. And draw us that we may partake in your will. Listen to our prayer. In the name of our Lord Jesus, Amen.”

Yesterday morning we have shared together the eternal purpose of God which He purposed in Himself. Before creation, God has predestined in Himself that He has established His will. That will is His own Son. He wants His son to be the head over all things. He wants to sum up all things in the heavens and on earth in Christ, His Son. He wants His Son Jesus Christ to be the head of all things. This will is truly a good will. This will is a perfect will. And this will is indeed an acceptable will because God established His Son to be the head of all things. So today we have to let Him be the head in each one of us. We have to let Him be the head of the Church because the eternal purpose of God is concentrated on His Son, so today we need to know His Son.

Apostle Paul told us in the third chapter of Philippians. Ever since he met the LORD on the road to Damascus, he considered everything else to be dung and considered it excellence to know Jesus Christ. From that point on, he had one wish. He had one passion. And the passion is to know Christ. Because Christ is the eternal purpose of God. If we can know Christ, then we can know the eternal purpose, the glorious purpose of God. He said that I can know Him. That I can know His power of resurrection. That I can fellowship in His suffering. And I can conform to His death. Then maybe I can gain the resurrection. Of course this resurrection is not the ordinary resurrection. And in the original language it is out resurrection, or it is the passing resurrection. And that is the first resurrection according to the Bible. So brothers and sister, if we know that the eternal purpose of God is in His Son, then we need to pursue and to know His Son while we are still on this earth. There is nothing more important than this. We must come to know the Son of God.

This morning we would like to go one step further. Yesterday morning we talked about the eternal purpose which God has purposed in Himself. This morning we want to share upon the eternal purpose which God has purposed

in Jesus Christ. There is a slight difference between these two, but they are closely related. In the first chapter of Ephesians, it tells us that, before the creation, God has established in Himself His good pleasure. Of course in God Himself, there's only one, who is His beloved Son. So the eternal purpose, which He has predestined, has to do with His beloved Son. That His Son shall have preeminence in all things. In the third chapter we see that God has destined in His son an eternal purpose. God has established a purpose once more, but this purpose is established in Jesus Christ. What is this eternal purpose which is established in Jesus Christ? That is the church.

So brothers and sisters you see in the Bible, for example in Colossians chapter 2:2, that the mystery of God is Christ. God has a mystery. The word mystery doesn't mean mystic. This mystery means that there is a secret in God. And with this secret, there is a need for revelation. If this secret is not revealed, then it is only in God, nobody else can understand. What is this secret of God? This secret of God is Christ. This is what we were told in Colossians 2:2. However, in Ephesians 3:4, Paul said, "in reading it, you can understand my intelligence in the mystery of the Christ". Here it says the mystery of the Christ. The second chapter of Colossians it speaks about the mystery of God. The mystery of God is Christ. In Ephesians 3:4 it says the mystery of the Christ. In fact in the original language, it is slightly different from our Chinese translation. Because if it were the verbatim translation from the original language then it would not look Chinese. In the original language, Paul said, in reading this, you can understand the mystery of *the* Christ. We know that before the word Christ, there is an article. Sometimes in the Bible it says Christ. And sometimes before the word Christ there's an article, it says *the* Christ. Those who understand the original language tells us that there's a difference. There's a difference between "Christ" and "*the* Christ". The Holy Spirit is very precise in the use of words. Whether there's an article or lack of it, there's a meaning. What does "Christ" refer to? Christ refers to Christ as a person. What does "The Christ" refer to? The Christ refers to the corporate Christ. Christ refers to Christ as a person. *The* Christ refers to the relationship between Christ and the Church. He is the head of the Church. The church is the body of Christ. So it is called *the* Christ. In the original language the difference was very clear. But please, brothers and sisters be careful. Although there's a difference between Christ and the Christ, but you cannot separate Christ and *the* Christ because *the* Christ is the corporate expression of Christ the person. Christ is Himself, *the* Christ is Christ among us, which it is still Christ Himself.

So Paul here tells us, he deeply knows the mystery of the Christ. In another words, he knows what the church is. We know that the Church is a mystery too. Maybe today in the concept of brothers and sisters, we may think that the church is a very ordinary thing. We all know what the church is. When we walk into town, we see a building there, the so-called church has its particular building style. We see a very tall tower, we see a cross, and we say that is the church. We are used to seeing these many churches, but the Bible tells us, the church is the mystery of the Christ. I hope that the Lord can open our eyes, so that we may truly see that church is the mystery of the Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:12, it shows us the same thing. That even as the body is one, and has many members, but even though there are many members, they are in one body, so also is the Christ. The original language also says, "so also is the Christ." I do not know when brothers and sisters read the Bible, you come across 1 Corinthians 12:12 for the first time. When you are read it, you say for instance that the body has many members. Although there are many members, there is just one body, and you say, so is the Christ. And you say this is heresy. How can you say it? We can only say that the church is so, because the church is a body, and it has many members, every believer is a member. Although we have so many members, but we have only one body. This clearly is the church. And how can this also be *the* Christ? But the Holy Spirit knows what He is writing, because there He refers to the Christ. It is that relationship between Christ and the Church. So here it actually speaks of the church. Although it speaks of the church, it uses *the* Christ to represent the church. Because the church is *the* Christ. If the church were not the Christ, then it would not be the Church.

So here brothers and sisters I hope you see this point very clearly. The purpose that God has purposed in Christ is in fact the Church. In Ephesians, we find a phrase. Here our brother has already mentioned, the phrase is "in Christ". I believe anyone who reads Ephesians must have noticed this phrase, because this phrase appears many times in Ephesians. Maybe 9 times, perhaps more, because sometimes it says "in Him". But when you read it, the Ephesians constantly tells us, "In Christ", because here it shows us, God has made all His fullness to dwell in

Christ, and we are made perfect in Him. So all things are in Christ. Outside of Christ, there's nothing. You and I are not outside of Christ. Outside of Christ there is no Church. We see that all these are in Christ. God has purposed this good purpose in Christ. Please remember this good purpose is not purposed in you or in me. Let us not think the purpose which God has is according to you or me. The good purpose that is purposed by God is according to Christ.

What has He predestined in Christ? He said He will prepare a bride for His Son. He has given all things to His son, but He's not satisfied. He wants to do a greater thing for His Son. Although all things are the property of His Son. Although His son has all these things, and all things will display His glory, but God is not satisfied. So He said, I will prepare a bride for my Son. So that this bride is suitable for him. Be in union with him. Be a good helper to Him. For this purpose God has established a good purpose in Christ Jesus, that is, He wants to give the church to His son. To be His bride and helper.

When was this purpose predestined? This purpose was predestined before creation. But although this purpose was already predestined, it remained a mystery, because this purpose was hidden in the heart of God. Man over the ages did not know this. Our God is the best in keeping secrets. I don't know whether we can keep a secret. Sometimes we tell our friend, this I only tell you, please keep it a secret. He himself didn't keep it, and of 8 out of 10 of his friends will not keep a secret. We do not know how to keep a secret. But our God keeps his secrets. You see over the ages, nobody knew His will. Although this is so, through the ages, He has often time revealed something. You know if you had a precious secret in your heart, although it is not quite time yet, you sometimes cannot help but to reveal some of it. However, even if you reveal something, people still cannot understand. This is in fact the secret which God has in Christ. For example in God's creation of Adam and Eve, this particular secret has already been revealed a little bit. God said, it is not good for man to live alone, I want to prepare a wife as a helper for him. We know that when Adam was created, he was by himself. He did not have a wife, he did not have a helper. God brought all the animals which He created before Adam, and Adam named each one of them. Adam was a very good zoologist. He did not have to go to school. He was the first man who named the names of every animal. But I believe when God brought all these animals before Adam the purpose was not only to give them a name. I believe God brought these before Adam for a greater purpose, because God said, it is not good for man to live alone. He was too lonely. I want to prepare him a wife. So God brought these animals before him. When Adam saw these animals, some were just a very small insect, some were very big like an elephant, some like an Orangutan, some like a crocodile. All kinds of animals were brought before Adam, and when Adam saw each one of them, he couldn't find himself in any of these animals. He felt he could not find a match with them. He also saw these animals could not be his helper. So one after another, these I can rule over them, but they cannot be my wife. Why? Because it doesn't look like me. So God ushered them away. I call this the law of elimination. Each one was eliminated. That is to say, in all creation, Adam could not find one which is suitable for him. Then God said, now I'm going to make a wife for you. Otherwise, maybe if Adam found one he would be satisfied. Maybe he found an ape and said, we look alike! Then he would be miserable. But we thank God, each one was eliminated, then he could accept what God prepared for him. We know that God put Adam to sleep, and pulled one thing out from his side. Today we say it is a rib. In the original language it said, one thing.

(A PART SKIPPED)

We all know that we need to pursue to know the Lord. Of course this is very correct, but when we are pursuing the Lord, we very easily will fall into bias. What is this bias? This is, when we are pursuing the Lord, we only notice our own personal experience with Christ. How we come to know the Lord personally. Of course, this is important, but when we are pursuing the Lord personally in this manner, what is the result of this pursuit? Will the result of this pursuit make you a spiritual giant? Do we have this secret desire in our heart? If I pursue the Lord this way, maybe one day I can be like Madame Guyon. If our pursuit is only at a personal level, then we will be biased towards a narrow view of a spiritual giant. But if we read God's word, we know that the eternal purpose God has purposed in His Son, is not many spiritual giants. It's not that there's an arm which is bigger than others. If you have been to Vatican in Rome, Michelangelo painted a painting on the ceiling, and there is an

arm that's bigger than others, it is a very strange shape. Once I was having dinner at a friend's house, my friend's daughter is an artist. When I was eating I raised my head, there was a painting on the wall. The painting had a table, there were fruits and some other food. Very good looking. In the middle of the table there was a hand sticking out. I asked my friend what did that mean. He said, when his daughter was drawing this she felt there was something lacking, so she drew a hand. If a hand sticks out of the table when you're eating, then you do not feel like eating anymore. So brothers and sisters, in eternity, the eternal purpose of God is not to have many spiritual giants. They are single arms and single legs, but what God wants is a body. What God wants is the members of the body built together. Not a strange growth, but growth as a body, full of the stature of the measure of Christ. This is the eternal purpose which God has purposed in Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot only pay attention to how spiritual I should be. We have to be built up together with brothers and sisters. Sometimes, if you are one who walks faster, you have to slow down your pace for your brothers and sisters. You see Caleb and Joshua, they could enter Canaan 38 years earlier, but they were willing to wander with the Israelites in the wilderness for 38 years. So that a whole new generation of Israel could enter into Canaan at the same time. Brothers and sisters, what God wants in Christ is the church. It is not only you or only me. Of course, your spiritual state is closely related to the spiritual growth of the church. If we are not spiritual, then how can the church be spiritual? But we pursue spirituality not just for ourselves. It is for the Church. Even more, it's for our Lord. So I hope, brothers and sisters, do not take the matter of church lightly. We cannot take church lightly because the church is a very important thing in the purpose of God. If Christ cannot gain His church, then our Lord remains very lonely. If he cannot gain the church, then He does not have His helper. So the Bible tells us clearly, in the eternal purpose of God, the church has a very important position.

Our problem today is here, do we know the church? How do we know the church? If we look at the condition around us, we will never know the church. If we turn back to look for the church in history, we also will not be able to know the church correctly. To know the church, we have to go back to eternity past. We have to go back to the original purpose which God has purposed in Christ, because church is something that transcends history. Before history, God had already purposed the church. Let me make this a little deeper. Before creation, in the mind of God, God has already given the church to His son. Not only in his mind, but God in actuality has given the church to his Son. Why? Because our God is not limited by time. The moment He had this thought in His mind, it was established. Time belongs to us. Today we live in time. So we see that the church is still being built, as if our Lord has not obtained it, but from God's point of view, the Lord has already obtained his church. In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit today, works from what has already been realized to being realized. The Holy Spirit is not making something out of nothing. If brothers and sisters you can see this, then I tell you, you will never lose heart. No matter what condition you see on this world, within you, you can thank, you can praise, because you know that this is already done. So brothers and sisters, the church is a mystery. Is it really a mystery?

So if we want to know the church, the bible tells us that the church is the mystery of *the* Christ. The mystery of *the* Christ. Because this is a mystery, it needs revelation. Without revelation, you cannot understand and see through this mystery. This mystery has already been revealed through the holy apostles and prophets. We have already read this in the book of Ephesians, but brothers and sisters, the principles of the revelation is unchanged. Although this mystery has been revealed and it is written in His Word and we can read it, but if we read it and do not obtain the revelation, then this is only words written on paper. All we have touched are but letters, we have not come to really know the church. To know the church, we need the spirit to reveal it to us. In the first prayer of Paul in Ephesians, he said, I asked the Father to grant you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the true knowledge of God. Without revelation your knowledge is not the true knowledge. You cannot do anything based on that knowledge. Many people when they read the New Testament, they say, I have found the pattern of the church in the New Testament. Now I can rise up to build the church. I assign a few to be the elders, some others to be the deacons and then the New Testament church is established. Then who are you going to be? You must be the apostle. Brothers and sisters, this shows us, even when the mystery has already been revealed in the Bible, but if the Holy Spirit did not reveal what He has already revealed in the Bible in you, you still cannot see the church.

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We were in a special conference, Brother Austin Sparks was still with us. I said, in order to illustrate for the brothers and sisters, I want to give you a very simple formula. I knew Brother Sparks did not like that. Because he likes to talk about high and deep things. If you have heard Brother Sparks speaking, his words are very long words. The universality and centrality..., I am a simple man. So first I asked Brother Spark to excuse me. I said, what is the church? Assuming there were only three Christians on Earth today. Peter, James, and John. Those are good Christians. Assuming there were only these three Christians on Earth. What is the church? Peter, James, and John gathered together, is this the church? If this were so, then this church has many problems. Because Peter naturally wants to be a leader. James and John also wants to be leaders. They brought out their mothers! Because their mother was the aunt of Jesus. The aunt's words are powerful. So if these three people are the church, then there would be three heads of the church. There would be divisions. James and John are brothers, and Peter was only loosely related. Then you see there are divisions in the church. This would not work. What is the church? The church is, the Christ in Peter + the Christ in John + the Christ in James = church. Is this true? In another words, what is the church? Church is Peter, John, James, plus Christ. Is this the church? If this were so, then you see half of the church is spiritual, half of the church is carnal. This is also not the church. What is the church? It is the Christ in Peter, minus Peter, plus the Christ in John, minus John, plus the Christ in James, minus James. This equals the Church. This is true. So what is the church? The church is that Christ. It's not Peter, it's not John, it's not James. Outwardly it appears to be Peter, James, and John. In reality they have all been dealt by the cross. The cross has taken themselves away, what remains is Christ Himself. This is the Christ. This is the church. Brothers and sisters, if this is the church, then what are the things we see today? How great is the requirement on us? Anytime ourselves come out, then we destroy the testimony of the church. This we need to be seriously disciplined before God. What is the church? The church is the body of Christ. Ephesians 1:22-23, God has given Christ to be the head of all things to the church. The Church is the body of Christ. The fullness of the one who fills all in all. The Church is the body of Christ. The body is an organism, it is not an organization. The body is living, it is not dead. The body is not rules and regulations. The body has the Law of the Spirit of life. The body cannot be separated from the head. The body is one with the head. All the fullness dwells in the head, but the fullness of the head also dwells in the body. Christ is the source of all abundance. The church is the fullness of this abundance. Christ is the head of the body. The church is the body of Christ. So you see here, Christ is the authority. The Church carries out all the commands of the head. This is the church.

So brothers and sisters, what is the church? The church is the fullness of Christ. Think about it, the church as we see today, is it fullness or poverty? Why we cannot see the fullness of Christ? Because we have been filled with many other things. We need to empty ourselves, so the fullness of the head can fill the church, then we can manifest the fullness of the Lord. What is the church? In the second chapter we see, the church is one new man. In the old creation, there were many differences. Although in Ephesians chapter 2, the biggest division is the Jews and Gentiles, because there are various reasons for the difference between Jews and Gentiles. Not only the difference in race, but also the difference in religion and the difference in customs. So at that time, the Jews and Gentiles did not come together. In the temple, if you walk in the temple, you can go to the court of the Gentile, and behind the court of the Gentiles is the court of women. And you see there is a sign, "the Gentile stops here". If you want to enter, it is death. The Gentile has no portion. The Gentiles are the outside people. The Jews see us Gentiles as dogs. Why? Because what we eat is not clean. According to Leviticus, they ate Kosher food. So they consider us, the Gentiles, as dogs. The Gentiles see the Jews the same way. So there's a great difference between Jews and Gentiles. They cannot eat together and they cannot visit each other. If you come to their house you defile them. You see how great their difference is, but we thank the Lord. The Lord on the cross, has taken away the wall in between. He has summed up the Jews and the Gentiles as one in Him. So that we may become a new man and bring us before God. That we can be reconciled to God.

Dear brothers and sisters, what is the church? The church is one new man. The old things are past. All things are new now. So in the church, there's no Jews or Greeks. No circumcised or uncircumcised. And no barbarians or Scythian. And there's no servants or those who are free. Only Christ is all and in all. Dear brothers and sisters,

according to the original language, not only there's no division, if there's no division there's still something remaining. Even if you do not divide, you are still there. In the original language there's nothing left, there's neither Jew nor Gentiles. As if, a Chinese coming into the church, the Chinese disappears. Who is there? It's a Christian! A Jew comes in, when he comes into the church, the Jew disappears. Only a Christian remains. When the American comes, and he comes into the church, the American disappears. So you see, there are all kinds of divisions in the world, they forever will remain in the world. Do not think these differences in the world will be removed. The communists tried to break away these things, but we know that there was change in appearance, not in substance. For the sake of sin, these kinds of differences are always in the world. However in Christ, in Church, all these differences are taken away by the cross, and all these are old creation. In the new man, these things have no portion. So brothers and sisters, let us remember. We are all brothers and sisters. We do not have any such differences. I remember Brother Watchman Nee, there was one brother ministering to him. We called him Brother Wong. He truly loved Brother Nee. He cooked for Brother Nee, and Brother Nee could not say this dish tasted good, because if Brother Nee said this tasted good, everyday Brother Wong would cook the same dish. He truly loved Brother Nee. He used all his salary to buy food for Brother Nee. He treated Brother Nee as his master and he was his servant. This is good. Coming to breaking of bread to remember the Lord, he wants to see first where Brother Nee is sitting at. If he sits in front, then Brother Wong would sit in the back, because he said, I am a servant and he is the master. I want to separate myself from him. And Brother Nee, if he sees this brother in the back, he would have him sit by his side, because in Christ we are all brothers. At home there's difference between master and servant, but in the church there's no such difference. So brothers and sisters, what is the church? The church is that new man.

The church is also the household of God. This was told to us in Chapter 2. You know there are two interpretations of the house of God. What is the house? This house is a household, a family, and it can also be the house where we live. In the Bible, both meanings are there. So the Bible say, now you are not the outsiders, you are the members of the household. So we believers are in the same household. You know, God has a household, but in the house of God there's only three members, and they have one mind. And there's no difference. The Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father. The Father and Son are in the Spirit. And that oneness is truly beautiful. And that family is truly a beautiful family. But we thank God, God said, for the sake of love, we have to extend our household. We want to bring many people into the house. He gave them Sonship. Not only He gave us the life of the Son. He makes life grow, so that we can be conformed to the image of His Son, that we have the character of His Son. In this household, it's full of joy.

Brothers and sisters, remember, the church is the household of God. The church is not a court of law. The church is the house of God. The church is not a reformatory. The church is the house of God. You know maybe brothers and sisters in the church want to correct this and correct that. Who is the one correct. The church is not like this. The church is a family. There are the elders, there are the youths, and there are the children. Gradually, they grow. The family tells us we all have the family likeness. So when you come to this family. You can see Christ in this brother and in that brother. You can see Christ in that sister and this is the family. However, today when we come to the church, we see Adam in this brother. We see Eve in that sister. We cannot see Christ and this is not the church. So we need to learn to see Christ in my brothers and sisters. If you see Christ in him, it's easier for you to love him. If you see Eve in her then you cannot love her. When you see Adam you cannot love him. The church is the family of God and we have to pursue to be like our Lord. This household, this family is also a dwelling. This is the place where God dwells in His Spirit. God wants to dwell in His household. Remember in John 14, the Lord said, if you love me, you shall abide in my commandments, and my Father will love you, and we will come to dwell with you. To dwell means to make home in you. Now where does God live today? Where is His house? I often say, in Isaiah chapter 66, the Heaven is the seat of God, the world is His footstool. God said, the temple you've built for me, but where is the place I can rest? I dwell with those who have a contrite heart and trembles at my Word. Heaven and Earth is God's office. His seat is in heaven and his footstool is on earth, this is the office where He works. But where is his house? His house is in the hearts of those who love him, and those who tremble at His Word. Those who have a humble heart and a contrite spirit. Brothers and sisters, this is His house.

What is the church? The church is the bride of Christ. Our Lord through the blood and water He shed on the cross, He built this church. He cared for this church. Daily He cleanse the church with water through the Word, so the church may be holy, without blemish, without spots, without wrinkles, that it may be a glorious church offered to Himself. To be His bride. So brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit is working in the church today that we may be suitable for Him. So that when we become mature, He will come to receive us to Him. Forever we will be His bride. And this is the church.

What is the church? Ephesians 6 tells us, the church is the warrior, who is the helper of Christ. This we will speak in detail later. So dear brothers and sisters, what is the church? In the Word of God, what is the church? Do we need the Holy Spirit to open up our hearts, so that we can truly see what the church is. When we truly see this, then real things will happen in us. He will lead us to see that many things in us have to be taken away by the cross. We need to see that Christ must increase in us. We shall see how between ourselves we should love each other. We hope that this church can be formed early. So that our Lord can be satisfied. Brothers and sisters, we love our Lord. We love His church.

Let's bow down to pray.

“Lord we thank you and praise you, because you love the church and gave yourself for it. That you have cleansed your church with water through your Word, that your church becomes a glorious church presented to yourself. Our Lord, we thank you and praise you, because you have chosen us. Your grace is upon us. Lord, we truly desire for your will to prevail. We want to be a part of the church. We want to be used by you to build this church. Our Lord, we want you to be satisfied. We want you to give us in our heart the desire to place our lives before you from now on, for you and for your church. May you be glorified in your church. In the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.”

LESSON 6 - HOW WILL GOD FULFILL HIS ETERNAL PURPOSE?

*I, the prisoner in [the] Lord, exhort you therefore to walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love; using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace. [There is] one body and one Spirit, as ye have been also called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all. But to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ. Wherefore he says, Having ascended up on high, he has led captivity captive, and has given gifts to men. But that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same who has also ascended up above all the heavens, that he might fill all things; and he has given some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints; with a view to [the] work of [the] ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at [the] full-grown man, at [the] measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ; in order that we may be no longer babes, tossed and carried about by every wind of that teaching [which is] in the sleight of men, in unprincipled cunning with a view to systematized error; but, holding the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ: from whom the whole body, fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply, according to [the] working in [its] measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up in love. - Eph 4:1-16
DBY*

Let's bow down to pray: "Lord when we come before your words, we truly feel that beside the illumination by Your Holy Spirit, we can only touch the letter of Your word, but not the reality of Your word, so at this moment we truly look up to You, we ask that You give us the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation; so that Your words, truly in us, become spirit and life. Lord, we come to You with full reliance, asking that You speak and work here. May Your Son be exalted and receives all glory. Hear our prayer. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Our fellowship together before the Lord at this time is part of the eternal purpose of God. We know that our God has purposed in Himself a purpose. Before creation, He has this predestined good pleasure in Himself. That good pleasure controls all that He does later. That eternal purpose is His beloved Son. He wants His beloved Son to have supremacy in all things, and He wants to sum up all things in heaven and on earth in Christ, His Son, and He wants His Son to inherit all things, so that all things will display the glory of His Son. So all in heaven, on earth and under the earth will bow down and kneel down to proclaim that His Son is holy. Our Lord Jesus is truly the Lord of all. This is what God has predestined in Himself before creation. Not only our God has purposed in Himself such a good pleasure, but also this good pleasure is accomplished through His Son. We know that in God, Christ is not only central but also universal, and this is the purpose that God has purposed in Himself. For this reason, we have to consider Christ to be the center of all things. We have to pursue knowing Him and see that God has an eternal purpose in His own Son.

Not only did God have in Himself a good pleasure, He also had good pleasure in His Son, Christ. He loves His son and has given all things to His Son, but that is not enough. He wants to prepare a bride to be the helper for His Son; hence we see that He has chosen us in Christ. Brothers and sisters, the choice of God is truly a mystery. We do not know why God would select us. The selection of God is not according to us. The selection of God is according to His own glory. Before creation, He has chosen us in Christ. He chose us not only for us to be saved. Some of us believe that the choice and predestination of God only has to do with whether we are saved. If so, then man becomes the center. But we have to see that the choice and predestination of God is according to His own glory. Not only has He saved us, He has also selected us to obtain the sonship.

Romans chapter 8 tells us, God has foreknown, He has predestined them, so they can be conformed to the image of His Son; those He has foreknown, He called them; whom He called, He justified; whom He justified, He

glorified them. So, we know that God selected us for glorification; not only to be saved, but to enter into His glory, and to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that we can be suitable for Him, and to enjoy His glory and reign together with Him. This is the selection which God has predestined us for. We thank and praise our God, that it is not because of us, but it is for the glory of God and for His Son. According to His glory, He predestined to select us. Now that He has selected us, He will never give us up. He will work on us until we are glorified, and this faith is what we offer Him. He has an abundance of grace bestowed upon us, making us holy and blameless before Him, so that we can become a glorious church presented as a bride to Him. This is in the eternal purpose of God.

This morning we would like to go further; we want to see how God works out in us for his own purpose. God has showed us how He has the eternal purpose in Himself and also in His Son Christ, and how He has accomplished this eternal purpose through His Son. We can say this is the objective truth. What is an “objective truth”? The objective truth is what God had done in Christ. This objective truth has already been done. Knowing this, what we need to do is to see it and believe it. When Paul spoke about the objective truth, he had a prayer. He said, “May the glorious God grant you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the true knowledge of God”. Now that God has already done things in Christ, things not done by you or me, but the things God has done in His Son Jesus Christ, His eternal purpose can be accomplished. For these things we need a spirit of revelation. We need to see, not outwardly from our mind, but in the depths of our spirit. We can see how glorious this purpose is which God has in Himself. We can truly see that the beloved Son of God is the center of all things. We can truly see how God has chosen us in Christ, and how the Lord Jesus has accomplished all things on the cross so that the eternal purpose of God can be accomplished in us. This, we need to see in our spirit. The Holy Spirit will reveal the mystery of God in our spirit, so that we can truly see Christ. We can truly see and know the church and Christ.

This we need the Holy Spirit to reveal and enlighten our spirit, so that we know the hope of His calling and the riches of His glory in the inheritance of His saints. We need to know the great might of God and what He has done in us the believers. We need the revelation of God in order to see the objective truth. The objective truth is the eternal fact. This eternal fact requires us to see it. If we can see, then we can believe it, and we can receive it. This is the first part of the book of Ephesians.

The second part is from the chapter 3 verse 14 through chapter 6 verse 24. we see the subjective experience. Here, we are told that because of the fact that God has already accomplished his will in Christ, God will now help us to realize that in us, through His spirit, these things become our true experience. But for this purpose, our inner man has to be strengthened because this requires our response. He asked the Father, according to His glory, and through His holy spirit, that our inner man will be strengthened so that Christ can dwell in us. By faith, we know that Christ dwells in us.

We have been called individually, but we have also been called to corporately. Although God has called us individually, He did not call us to be individual spiritual giants. He called each one of us to become part of a whole body, where we are members of each other. Christ is our head, and we are His body. According to Ephesians, what is the grace of our calling? Do you remember what Paul said in the first chapter? May the Lord open the eyes of our heart, so that we know may the hope of his calling. So what is this call of grace? What is that hope? We are called to be the body of Christ, and the hope is that when the body is full grown, we will become the bride of Christ. Today we are the body of Christ. In the future, we will be the bride of Christ. Today we are the body, but this body needs to grow. When the body matures, the Lord will come to pick us up to be his eternal wife. This is the hope of our calling.

Now that we know our calling, Paul tells us that our walk should be worthy of the calling. How can we be worthy of this call? Ephesians 4:1-16 tells us two things: first, use diligence to keep unity in the spirit, so that we can be worthy of our calling. Second, we need to build up the body in love; then the whole body will fit together and be connected.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have been called to be the body of Christ. How many bodies does Christ have? We know that the Christ is the head and we are His body, all of us who are believers. From the first believer until the last believer, all throughout the centuries, all the believers are members and collectively we are a body. There is only one head and there is only one body. We cannot have two or more heads, nor can we have two or more bodies. If we have one head and one body, that is normal and beautiful. But if we have one head and several bodies or several heads and one body, that is a monster. Dear brothers and sisters, here we have to clearly see that today, we have only one head: Christ. He will not allow any other heads outside of Him, for under the head, there is only one body. Although we are many, we have only one body. In one body there are many members in Christ. Brothers and sisters, here we see there is only one body, and knowing that we have only one body, one thing is very important. We have to use diligence to keep the oneness of the body; I think this is pretty clear. If you do not use diligence to keep the oneness, then the body will disintegrate. That will cause us to fall short of the great glory of God. But how do we keep the unity? We praise and thank our Lord. Here it says to keep the unity which is already given by the Holy Spirit. In our Chinese translation, there is a lack in the tone. This oneness is given by the Holy Spirit, that is true, but this oneness is a little deeper than that. In English, it says the unity of the spirit, and this unity of the spirit is given to us, every believer, and every member. We have all obtained this oneness of the spirit because the spirit has already given to us. What we need to do is to maintain and keep it. Brothers and sisters, can you keep something that doesn't belong to you? If we want to keep something, we have to keep something that belongs to us. If you have something precious, then you must have the diligence to keep it. If I walk on the street and I have several coins in my pocket, I walk naturally and don't care to look right or left. Why? If someone stole something small like a coin from my pocket, it wouldn't hurt me too much. But if I have several bars of gold in my pocket, not only would I put my hands in my pocket, but also I would look all around, lest someone would want to steal it. I use diligence to keep it, and keep it safe. Dear brothers and sisters, God have given a great gift to His church, and that is the oneness of the spirit. How precious is this oneness of the spirit! Through this oneness of the spirit, the body can be fitted together and not disintegrate. So the Bible tells us to use diligence to prevent the enemy from stealing the oneness of the Spirit. We have to stand our ground. What is the ground of the church? The ground of the church is the unity of the spirit. We have to stand on the unity of the church, not allowing anything to move us away from this ground.

Dear brothers and sisters, today somebody said that the ground of the church is local church. We have to stand on the local church. (We have to first register the church, and then we say we have a claim to the location.) We have to first acquire and record the location. Dear brothers and sisters, this is not the case. Although the assembly has to do with the locality, there is a manifestation of the church in locality, but the ground of the church is in the unity of the body. If you wanted to talk about local churches, please remember that the local church is not a doctrine in the Bible. In the Bible the local church is an example, it is a practice but not a teaching. What is a teaching of a local church? The teaching of the local church is the unity of the spirit. If you keep the unity of the Holy Spirit, then the church is manifested in that locality. So dear brothers and sisters, we have to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. We have to use diligence to keep the unity of the spirit. But how do we use diligence to keep the unity of the spirit? We need to have the right attitude. Paul tells us here that "in all things be humble, lowly and meek, and long suffering, bearing with each other in love, and in the bound of peace." If we want to keep this witness, we have to have the attitude of being in all lowliness. To be lowly is to be selfless. What is lowliness? Lowliness is not just reducing the "self" a little. Lowliness is to not have any "self". What is meekness? Meekness is to ask nothing for myself. Long suffering is to endure for a long time. How do you become tolerant? You have to tolerate in love. How do we unite? We unite in peace. We know all these are the fruit of the spirit. We need to have such an attitude, only then we can use our diligence to keep the unity of the spirit. If we do not have humility, and we are very proud, then how can we keep this oneness? If we strive and ask for our own rights, then how can we keep this oneness? If we gather a whole group of people and keep them at arms-length, then there will be no problems among us. For example, we the believers, we don't have any association normally. Only once a week, for one hour, we put on our Sunday clothes, and we come to the Sunday worship, we sing the hymns and listen to the message. If we are happy, we nod our head. If we are not happy, we just shake our head. When we go out, everybody says good bye and nothing is getting in the way between us. Brothers and sisters, it seems this is very nice, but this is not the body. In the body, the members join together so

there is a very close relationship. For example when I have my meal, sometime I eat fast, and when I may accidentally bite my tongue. Would my tongue then say "I'm on strike and I'm not going to cooperate with you."? Can this happen? So many times, I have bitten my own tongue, but my tongue is long suffering, and it still cooperates with me. We think we are eating with our teeth, but you know when you eat, you have to use your tongue. If you don't have your tongue to move the food around your mouth, then how would you eat? And sometime you have to move some of the food backward so you can crush it, and sometime we have to bring it to the middle so the sharper teeth will do their work. Do you know who does this work? Your tongue does this work. Without the tongue, you would have to use your finger to move around.

So brothers and sisters, you have to have long suffering. If you suffer once, and you are willing to suffer one more time, then you can keep the oneness of the spirit. Of course you have to tolerant with your love. Peter said "my brother offended me seven times." He is a mathematician; he is counting, once, twice, three, . . . , seven times. It is really hard for people like Peter to forbear. We know that the Peter is very quick tempered. He thinks it is already something to be patient with my brothers for seven times, and he comes to the Lord to ask for a reward. He said, my brother offended me seven times and I forgave him. What is your thought? The Lord said "I'm saying not only seven times, I'm saying seventy-seven times." Then Peter falls apart in his mathematics. He can't count anymore, and he went away depressed. He said there is nothing I can do, he is my brother therefore I have to forgive him. However he offended me, I have to forgive him. Dear brothers and sisters, without love you cannot forgive. But brothers and sisters, how can we have lowliness, meekness, forbearing, peace, and love? Where is the secret? The secret is in Paul's first word. He said, I, called the prisoner of Christ. I am the prisoner of Christ. On the surface he is the prisoner of the Romans, but he said "I am the prisoner of Christ, I am bound by Christ." Dear brothers and sisters, this is the glory of Paul. Not only he is a servant of the Lord, not only he is a bond-slave of Christ, but he is a prisoner of Christ. A prisoner has no freedom and he cannot do according to his own will. He is totally subject to the rule of the Lord. So brothers and sisters, we have to offer our body as a living sacrifice, then we can be the prisoners of Christ. It is Christ who rules us and not that we rule ourselves. For this reason, we can have the character of Christ shining out. In the character of Christ, we can maintain the unity of the spirit. Outside of Christ, there is no way we can keep the unity of the spirit. How can we keep the unity of spirit? Only in Christ. So, we have to be prisoner of Christ, only then we can keep the unity of the spirit. What is the unity of the spirit? And this is the seven oneness . The answer here is one body, one spirit, and one hope. All these have to do with the Holy Spirit. Because, today, no matter whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, we have been baptized into one body, in one Holy Spirit, and this Holy Spirit dwells in us and He is going to lead us into that one hope. Dear brothers and sisters, every believer has to have the three oneness. We have the Holy Spirit living in us. We have to be baptized to be in one body. We have the hope that we can one day be His bride. This oneness is for all the believers: one Lord, one faith and one baptism. These have to do with the one and only Son of God. He is our Lord. We have only one Lord, not many Lords. We have only one faith, what does one faith refer to? This refers to our very fundamental faith, that we believe that our Lord is the Christ and He is the son of God. We are baptized in the name of the Lord, and we are baptized into His name. From now on, we belong to Him: not to ourselves and not to this world. This oneness is something that every must believer have. We have only one God, and this God is the father of us all. He is your Father and my Father too. He is over all, through us all, and He is in us all. Do you see what the unity of the spirit is? What is this thing? This is the unity we have in the triune God. This is something each one of us believers have, and now we have to use diligence to keep it.

(turn to verse 13) It says until we all arrive in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God. In our Chinese translation, there is some need to go deeper. Here it says until we all arrive in the unity of the faith of the knowledge of the son. Here we see another mention of the unity. What is this unity here? It is the unity of *the* faith. *One* faith and *the* faith have very little difference. *One* faith refers to our fundamental faith. If you do not believe that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of the living God then you are not saved. This is our foundation; this is something all of us already have. But *the* faith mentioned in verse 13, what does it refer to? It refers to the totality of our faith and this is the faith mention in the book of Jude. It says that you have to defend this faith which has been given to the saints once and for all. It encompasses a lot of truth, and this truth requires us to believe in and to accept. This is what is referred here as "*the* faith". One day we will arrive at a stage where we have unity in the

whole faith in God. We know that this has not been accomplished as of yet. We have the same fundamental faith, but we may have various interpretations of Biblical truths. For example, regarding the rapture our brother mentioned last night, some believe that before the tribulation there will be this rapture. Some believe that after the tribulation, all will be brought to rapture, while others believe that during the tribulation, we will be raptured. See that we do not have unity in this belief, but one day we have the unity in the truth. It also said we have the unity in the knowledge of the Son of God, and this knowledge is the true knowledge, and this is the knowledge that comes through experience. It tells us that one of these days our experience of the Son of the God will be the faith. And today each one of us have different experiences of the Son of the God. Some experience the love of the Son of God, and some will experience the severeness of the Son of God. Once, I met two brothers. I was sitting by their side as they were talking. One brother had Catholicism as his background, and in the catholic teachings God is far away, up above. He felt a fear in his heart whenever he entered the Catholic assembly heart, but we thank God that later, this brother was saved. After he was saved, he felt that our God was truly a loving one. We know that many of the modern day people, when they mention Jesus, they said "Jesus, Jesus", and they do not call Him Lord Jesus. It's like our Lord is such a pal. He thinks that God is such a loving God and He is someone he can be really close to. But the other brother has a totally different background. His background was based on the belief that "the Lord is loving and someone whom I can be close to". When he came to the meetings, however, he put his feet up on the table and believed it was acceptable. But later when he read the Bible, he believed that God is dreadful, and that we have to have a fear of Him. So those two brothers started arguing. One said, "God is loving!" and the other said "We have to fear Him!" and they referred each other to the scriptures. I was listening at their side, then I interrupted them saying, "Brothers, you are arguing here for no reason." There is an ancient fable of two knights. Coming from two different locations, they found a shield between them. One warrior said "This shield is made of gold." The other warrior said, "This is silver." and because of their quarrel, they fought. The truth was, the shield was gold on one side and silver on the other. I asked the brothers to read the Bible with me. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, the Lord is both loving and to be feared.

One day we will become *one* in our knowledge of the Son of God. Are there two unities in the Bible? No, the Bible has only one unity, but this unity has two ends. At the beginning is the unity of the spirit, which has already been given to us. Every believer has it: you have it, I have it, and he has it. On the other end, towards the end, we will have unity in *the* faith also in the Son of God. Do we have that today? We do not. So the Bible tells us we have to arrive there. This is something we have to reach. If we start from the beginning then we can get to the end, but if we do it the other way around, if we want to start from the end, then we don't even have a beginning. After you believe in the Lord, you may meet a brother. When you start a conversation, you discover that he is a believer. Maybe the first question you ask is "Are you a Christian?" If he says "I am a Christian." Thank the Lord, you may be excited inside. When you meet a fellow brother, is this not so? This is the unity of the spirit. But we may sometimes also ask the second question, "Which denomination do you belong to?" Say that I am a Methodist and I meet this brother who is a Baptist, our difference may become a problem. I am a Methodist, how can you be a Baptist? I might have the mindset that if he does not convert to a Methodist, then we cannot have fellowship. Even worse, sometimes there is a third question. "Have you ever spoken in tongues?" We may feel that "If I have had this experience, if you did not have this experience, then you do not have the Holy Spirit, then we cannot fellowship."

reach the starting point, you will lose even the beginning. You cannot fellowship. If you cannot fellowship, how can you arrive at the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God? How poor we are! This is our condition today. We do all these things, and it divides the body. Dear brothers and sisters, we must use diligence to keep this unity of the spirit. Although we may have differences in the interpretation of the Bible and differences in our spiritual experiences, we all belong to the Lord. We should have fellowship among ourselves, no matter what differences are. We have to have fellowship in Christ and in life. The basis of fellowship is not light; the basis of fellowship is life. The degree of fellowship is according to light, but the basis for fellowship is life, because we all have the same life then we should have fellowship. The result of this fellowship is that we can exchange our light, so that our fellowship should rise higher.

These people are what God has given to the church gifts, and these are the apostles, prophets, the evangelist, shepherds and teachers. These people are raised by God, and they minister to the children with the word of God. What is their function? Their function is to perfect the believers. There are two interpretation of the perfecting the saints, and in the original language both exists. One is to build saints into maturity, so we can mature and grow up in life. The other meaning is to equip the saints, so that the saints can serve. That is the function of these gifts of God to the church. God uses these people to equip His children, to edify them, to bring them up in life, so that each child of God will do his function: to establish and build up the body of Christ. How can the body of Christ be built up? The building up of the body of Christ does not depend on these four gifts. These four kinds of gift of God build up the body of Christ indirectly. Who are the people who directly build up the body of Christ? They are all the saints. When every member fulfills its function, then that is, what we call today, a body ministry. Every believer needs to perform their function. We are different members, we receive different degree of grace or gift, but we have all received grace and gifts. Now we have to rise up to do our ministries, to do our function. Then, in love, this body can be built up.

Because we depend on those few people. Somehow, we believe that building up the church is the duty of the pastor or the shepherd. Today we think that to build up the church is the responsibility of the pastor, the apostles, the prophets, or the preachers, but brothers and sisters, the truth is that the building of church is the responsibility of every saint, because anyone of us in Christ is a royal priest. We all need to rise up to serve our Lord. We each need to do our duty to build up the body. In my own body there are different members, and every member have their own function, the eyes have to see, the ears have to hear, our hands have to take things, the feet have to walk, the heart has to beat, the lungs have to expand and contract, the whole body has to function. There is no single member that can take on the function of the whole body. Every member has to function and work cooperatively, under the control of the head. Each joint will perform its own function, and in love the body is built up.

Now we come to the second point; turn to chapter 4, verse 20. "You have not so learnt the Christ". Let's go over what we've discussed so far. How is the eternal purpose of God realized in the church? When the church is in unity, when the church is built up, then the eternal purpose which God has purposed for his own Son is established. Then from the chapter 4, verses 17-32 says, "You have *learned* Christ." This has to do with our personal daily life. The eternal purpose of God has to be worked out in our daily life. Let's not say that our daily life has nothing to do with the eternal purpose of God- the eternal purpose of God is in heaven and my daily life is on earth. The Bible tells us the eternal purpose of God has to be realized and worked out in our daily life. The Lord Jesus told us, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls..." We the believers are all disciples in Christ. In fact, the disciples and the believers should be one. Today we seem to separate the believer from the disciple. We may believe in Him but not follow Him, or we might believe in Him but not learn from Him. The Bible didn't tell us to do that. The Bible tells that every believer is His disciple, and I have to be blunt, all of them are His apprentices. We all must learn Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, this learning is not a like monkey learning how to walk like a man. If you watch a monkey, it may walk on two legs for show, but if you don't, it walks its natural way. Not so with us, because a monkey does not have a life of man. Today we learn Him because He is in us, which leads us to be disciples. There is life of Christ in you, so you have to learn the life of Christ and let the life of Christ live out from you. This is to learn Christ. It is not to put on a disguise outside. As we first believe in the Lord, we thought that believer had to be humble, so we bowed down. We think that to bow down is to be humble, but we know that this is not so. This has to come out from the depth of our life. The Lord tells us to yoke with Him. He is on one side and we are on the other. He is meek and lowly and He is absolutely obedient to God, without any rebellion. But we, although we have believed in the Lord, we still have our own ambitions. We are like a wild bull yoked with the Lord and the yoke is the will of God. He put us together with the Lord. We want to do the work of God, to be obedient to His way, but we are a wild bull, we do not listen, we do not obey the orders of the master, we want to walk our own way, but on the other side of the yoke is our Lord, although He is meek and lowly, He is mighty, so when we want to turn left, He bring us back, and He teaches us. Until the day we bow down, when our wildness is broken, then we can be meek and lowly; this is to learn Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have taken off the old man. In the past, we lived our own ways, we walked like gentiles. In Christ, we have this taken away, We have put on the new man, so we like to walk as a new man, not I who live but the Lord living in me, living in my attitude, in my speech, in my association with man, in my relationship with God, I have to learn my Lord. So Bible says, do not grieve the Holy Spirit, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will lead you inside, to reveal Christ to you, He will gradually transform you to conform you to the image of the Son. And this is to have eternal purpose of God to work on us and in us. Let us no longer think that whatever we say or whatever we do has nothing to do with the eternal purpose of God. All this is related to the eternal purpose of God. Whether the eternal purpose of God is accomplished or interrupted by you depends on whether you have learned Christ in your daily life. Do not think that this is your own problem; this has a close relation with the eternal purpose of God.

The third point, the first verse of chapter 5, "*Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children.*" This is from verse 1 to verse 20, here it says to be imitators of God and to be as beloved children. This speaks to the relationship between us and the world. We are the children of God, so we should have a testimony of our relationship with the world. We have to give the testimony to the Lord that our God is a loving God, that our God is the God of life, that our God is the God of wisdom. So the way we walk, the way we do things have to be separate from the world. We have to walk in love, we have to walk in light, and we should not be foolish, but we should be wise. We should be not drinking with wine but filled with the Holy Spirit . We should have a heart of thanksgiving to God, and that says we are children of God. This is our relationship to the world.

The fourth point, 21 verse of chapter 5, *submitting yourselves to one another in [the] fear of Christ.* This is from chapter 5 verse 21 to chapter 6 verse 9. This is how the eternal purpose of God will be in our family relationship. Let's not think that our family relationship only belong to ourselves and has nothing to do with the eternal purpose of God. Dear brothers and sisters, the eternal purpose of God has a great deal to do with our family relationship. He wants our family relationship to be normal, and we have to have a fear for Christ often. Every brothers and sisters, whether husband or wife, parent or children, master or servant, we have to have a heart of fear for Christ. Some say that God loves me, in love there is no fear, that when love is perfected there is no fear. That is true, but this fear here doesn't mean that. That fear refers to the fear for punishment, but this fear here is to fear that I may hurt the heart of the Lord. Because we love him, we are willing to see Him being satisfied. We are afraid that His heart may be hurt. We have to have this type of fear. If we do not have that fear, this family is broken. So here we see husband should love his wife as Christ loves the church. Wives should be obedient to the husband as the church is obedient to Christ. Husbands do not read these words that God tells the sisters. If we the husbands keep the word God has given to us in our hearts, to keep His heart in us with fear, then we must love our wives as Christ loves the church; be assured, your wives will be obedient to you. Wives, if you have a fear for Christ and truly obey your husbands as you are obedient to Christ, and this obedience is not to be obedient like a slave. (You know in the original language the meaning is slightly different too, you have to adjust yourself, and you have to adjust yourself to help your husband.) If you do so then your husband will love you, you should not be afraid. Children, you must to be obedient to your parents in the Lord. There is a difference between children's obedience to the parents and a wife being obedient to her husband, because for the wife to be obedient to her husband the relationship should be at the same level. This is cooperation, this is a partnership. But for the children to be obedient to the parents this is a different level, so in all things they have to be obedient to the parents in the Lord. Now when you grow up and have your own family, what's your attitude towards your parents? Are you going to listen to them in everything? The Bible says honor your parents. When you have your own family, you still have to honor your parents, and this is what the Lord has blessed. Parents explain and instruct their children with the word of the Lord, so that they can be brought up, not only to be a man, but also to be a Christian. This is the responsibility of every parent. Between master and servant, it should be the same. Servants serve the master with the fear of the Lord, as serving the Lord. The master, with the fear of the Lord, is not to hurt his servant. So you see that the eternal purpose of God can and must prevail in the family. We know that this has to be the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes what God has already have accomplish in Christ, he works it in us one by one, to bring us into the eternal purpose of God. So brothers and sisters, when we are before the Lord, we not only

receive the objective truth, but also the subjective experience. We thank the Lord for what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ. This purpose, how glorious it is! Brothers and sisters, we need the Holy Spirit today to work out the eternal purpose in us and in the body.

LESSON 7 - CHURCH AS THE HELPER OF CHRIST

For the rest, brethren, be strong in [the] Lord, and in the might of his strength. Put on the panoply of God that ye may be able to stand against the artifices of the devil: because our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against authorities, against the universal Lords of this darkness, against spiritual [power] of wickedness in the heavenlies. For this reason take [to you] the panoply of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having accomplished all things, to stand. Stand therefore, having girt about your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with [the] preparation of the glad tidings of peace: besides all [these], having taken the shield of faith with which ye will be able to quench all the inflamed darts of the wicked one. Have also the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word; praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication in [the] Spirit, and watching unto this very thing with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints; and for me in order that utterance may be given to me in [the] opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the glad tidings, for which I am an ambassador [bound] with a chain, that I may be bold in it as I ought to speak. Eph 6:10-20 DBY

Let's bow down and pray.

“Dear heavenly father, we truly thank you because you have given us another chance to gather before you. When we gather before you our hearts are filled with thanks and praises because we, the saved ones, can gather before your table to remember you. We thank you that people like us can be saved and can serve you. We want you to be satisfied. Lord, when we gather and sit here to read from Your Word, we ask You, once again, to reveal Your Word in us- And to reveal Yourself and open the spiritual reality in us so we can clearly see Your glory and Your victory. We put forth this time in your hand. We look up to You for You to glorify the name of Your son. Amen.”

We thank the Lord that he has given us the chance that we can gather together before him.

These several mornings that we've gathered together to fellowship all centered on the Eternal Purpose of God. We see that before creation, God has predestined in Him a purpose, and that purpose is from the eternity past to the eternity in the future. Since that purpose was established, God has never changed it. God has established for Jesus Christ to gather all things in His son. God loves His Son, and accordingly, God wants to gather up all things and give them to His Son as an inheritance. He wants His Son to inherit all things. He wants all things to display the glory of His Son. For this reason, God has created all things, but God thinks this is not enough.

So in Christ, He has established His eternal purpose. He wants to give a bride to His Son as a helper, and that is the church we know today. Simply put, what is the eternal purpose of God? The eternal purpose is Christ and the church. I remember our beloved brother Watchman Nee once said, "... if we truly know Christ and the church, the whole Bible is opened up to us." The entire Bible speaks only of Christ and His church. This is the mystery of God. This is the mystery of *the* Christ. May the Holy Spirit reveal it to us so that we may truly know Christ and His church so we can truly pursue Christ. Because we pursue Him, and because He has revealed Himself to us, He can obtain the church.

This is what we have seen in the first chapter of Ephesians to the beginning of chapter three. This is the purpose that God has purposed in Himself: what He has purposed in and how He has accomplished His eternal purpose through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Starting Ephesians 3:14, we come to see that God wants to work into us His own eternal purpose. This speaks to our subjective experience. What God has already done in Christ is the objective truth. Now, through His Holy Spirit, God is going to work in us this very fact that He has already accomplished in Christ. This becomes our experience, subjectively. We have shared on how God has worked out in us His own eternal purpose through His own Holy Spirit. Now, He has called us and wants us to walk worthy of that calling. Now that he has saved us, He

wants us to rise up and be imitators of God. Now that He has made us children by His grace, we want to rise up and imitate God. He wants us to be subject to each other with the fear of Christ.

No matter whether it is the life in church, personal life, social life, or family life, we have to display and magnify this eternal purpose of God. The eternal purpose of God has to be magnified in all aspects of our lives. And this is how God is going to work out in us His own eternal purpose. We are going to share one step further, because from the tenth verse of chapter six until the end, God is going to work out His eternal purpose through us. There is a slight difference.

Previously we talked about how God wants to work out His eternal purpose in us. We want to see how God wants to work out His eternal purpose through us using us as a His channel. What is this eternal purpose that God has purposed into His son? He wants us to be the bride of Christ.

It is a matter of life to be the bride of Christ. It is a matter of life to be the counterpart of Christ. He wants us to be the real counterpart in life. The Bible says it is to be with his "likeness". We can be His true counterpart, but the Bible tells us that He did not prepare simply a counterpart for Adam, but also a helper. So when you talk about a helper it has to do with work.

The counterpart has to do with life, and the helper has to do with service. Not only does God want to work in us so that we can be the counterpart of Christ, He also wants us to rise up to be His helper. Here we see these 2 different aspects. Not only are we the vessel of Christ (we can receive the abundance of Christ and magnify His glory), we are also His tool to be used to accomplish His works. Not only is He going to work in us, he's also going to work through us. That work is to accomplish the eternal purpose of God. When Paul came to this point, he said: "I do have some words for the rest". Some translations say for the rest, others say finally. He said "I still have words to tell you, I haven't finished it yet". I remember Brother T. Austin Sparks once said the original meaning of the word "finally" does not mean something supplemental. Something that indicates the end of a sentence, and then further thought is put it in. The meaning in the original language was that after one had said much, he summed up all those words, and he took one step further to say some more words. This is the meaning of that word "finally".

Brothers and sisters, we see the Lord has said many words. He has done many things. He has done much work in us. He is going to sum it up, but He has also moved one step further and said: "Now you are going to be a helper." In the past you were not qualified. Now that you have worked to become my counterpart, so now you'll be my helper.

Brothers and sisters, when we read the book of Genesis, it becomes clearer. After God created Adam, He said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Adam and Eve were united in one to do the will of God together. After God had created man, He told man to rule over the birds of the air, the animals on the earth, and the fish in the water. He wants man to subdue all things. He wants man to tend the Garden of Eden and to work there. So here you see that Adam and Eve were not only counterparts, but were also helpers.

Brothers and sisters, in this visible world, there is a spiritual realm. We see the visible world, which is the material world. In addition to this material world, there is an invisible and spiritual world and in this spiritual world and there is a battle that is going on. This battle influences the visible world. Not only does it influence, it actually controls this visible world.

Where is the focus of this spiritual battle? Why is there this spiritual battle? We know that the focus of the spiritual battle is the eternal purpose of God. We know that God has predestined in Himself this purpose. It is for His Son to have supremacy over all things, so His Son can inherit (and become) the center of all things. This is the eternal purpose of God. According to this purpose God created all things. At one point in His creation, angels

were the highest created beings (because angels are spirits). At that time, the highest created beings were the angels and they were together praising God.

When we see in the book of Job, the sons were all singing. The sons of God praised God. The sons of God at that point were the angels, because they were created by God. At that time, the whole universe was filled with praises and worship. The whole of creation has arranged for Jesus Christ to be the head.

He was truly the head of all things, that condition was truly glorious, and the Son of God truly exalted Him. But we do not know how many years had passed before there was a rebellion in the universe. One of the archangels, Lucifer (bright star) led this rebellion. This archangel (perhaps the first one created) was perfect.

If we see Ezekiel chapter 28 and Isaiah chapter 14, Isaiah (14:12-15), we see the prophet Isaiah was talking about a king of Babylon. When he was talking about the king of Babylon, suddenly there were several verses that couldn't be applied to any man.

Although he was talking about a king of Babylon, these words could not have been applied to the king of Babylon. Here it tells us in 14:12,

[Isa 14:12 DBY] 12 How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning! Thou art cut down to the ground, that didst prostrate the nations!

Here we see a bright star, which is Lucifer. He is also called son of the morning, because he was created the earliest.

[Isa 14:13 DBY] 13 And thou that didst say in thy heart, I will ascend into the heavens, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit upon the mount of assembly, in the recesses of the north;

God said that this archangel who was created first had an evil thought coming into his heart - he said "I" repeatedly. He started to pay attention to himself. He was originally created for God as the "Son of God". But at some point, he started thinking about himself and an evil heart arose, saying "I'll be ascended into the heavens and I'll be equal to the most high". Dear brothers and sisters, who can be equal to God?

There is only one who is equal to God. Philippians chapter 2 says "Christ did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped". Only the Son of God is equal to God. This is not something that can be grasped. This equality is His alone. But here is an archangel who wanted to grab that position. He wanted to be equal to God. What does that mean? It means that not only he does not agree with the eternal purpose of God, but he also opposes it. He wanted to destroy the eternal purpose of God.

If you read Ezekiel chapter 28, it talks about the King of Tyre. In the second verse of chapter 28, it says "Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyre, ..." That part of the prophecy speaks about the leader (in NAS) of Tyre, but why was he called the leader when it was actually talking about the king of Tyre?

In the Bible the word "leader" was used. In the past, a king was called the son of heaven and this is the meaning here. Though he is called a leader it was referring to the King of Tyre. Coming into verse 11, the tone suddenly changed. Here it says "son of man, take up a lamentation upon the King of Tyre", but the King of Tyre is, in fact, nothing but a leader for there is a king behind him. In this passage we cannot really refer to anyone in this world as a king. What's described here is the condition in the heavens and paradise.

Here it says when God created him, all things was created. He was full of wisdom and full of beauty. He had the gift of music. And God set him up to be a anointed cherubim before the ark of testimony of God.

When we read Exodus, we know that what's on the earth is a shadow of what's in heaven. God told Moses that you should build a tabernacle according to the pattern I showed you on the mountain. We see the ark of testimony and a seat on it. On two sides of the seat are two cherubim covering it. On high, God has his seat there and He also has an anointing cherubim that covers Him and is closest to Him. That is the highest position.

That archangel was originally a cherubim which was anointed to cover the throne.

God gave him all the power to rule over many places. Very possibly the universe we live in was under his rule. But because of his beauty, his wisdom, and his authority, pride began to arise in him. Then he began working according to his own will, but not according to the will of God. There is unrighteousness found in him. When God created Satan, he was perfect, but now, he works in unrighteous ways. He wanted to grasp the position of the Son of God. He wanted to rebel against the eternal purpose of God, but God did not allow him because God is a jealous God for his son. He threw out Satan from the Garden of Eden and thus, Satan fell. That was the origin of Satan. Satan means “adversary”. God did not create Satan.

God created a beautiful archangel, but this beautiful archangel became an adversary of God. In the 3rd chapter of Revelation, when the dragon (Satan) was thrown out, he brought out one third of the angels to rebel with him. He created and has his own kingdom. He wanted to be an adversary to the kingdom of God. Even though God punished him, he did not repent. He wanted to grasp the position of the son of God. He still refuses to wake up. He stubbornly wants to oppose the eternal purpose of God. For his rebellion, the universe that he rules is now in darkness and under God’s judgment. The Bible tells us the earth now became void and dark, without purpose and in desolation.

This is the result of the rebellion of the archangel. It seemed that the eternal purpose was interrupted, but since our God has established His own purpose, His purpose did not change, instead, it progresses. We do not know how long of a period had passed (since the fall of Lucifer). This is what chapter one of Genesis says: “The Spirit of God hovers...” He uses his love and passion to restore this corrupted world. In six days he had restored this corrupted earth so that this earth is habitable. We thank and praise God. Not only has He restored this universe in which we live in, but on the sixth day, he also created man. Dear brothers and sisters, if you understand this eternal purpose of God then you can only bow down and worship Him. God did not simply refuse to give up His eternal purpose. God moved one step further, and according to His image he created man. Now, he has given man the power to rule over all things in heaven, on earth, and underneath it. He has told man to multiply, to cover the world, and to subdue it.

Dear brothers and sisters, we know God’s creation, man, was and is His masterpiece because God created man according to His own image. God created all things according to His wisdom and might, but God created man according to His own image. This image, in particular, talks about the character within. Only those created according to His own image can receive Him. All things can display His glory, but not all things can be united with God. Only those who are created according to His own image can accept His life and be united with God. Dear brothers and sisters, what does this mean? This means that God wants to prepare us to be a counterpart for His son.

This person is the counterpart of Christ. God blessed that person. God gave him the dominion. God wanted him to subdue all things. Why subdue? Because all things are in rebellion and they are divided. They are under the dominion of Satan and the tools of Satan. God wants man to subdue all things and bring them under the feet of Christ. In other words, we are to be His helper. This is the eternal purpose of God. We man are closely related to the eternal purpose of God. God wants his son to have a counterpart, to have a helper.

So not only did God *not* retreat, God moved *forward*. But we also know, by reading the third chapter of Genesis, Satan was indeed crafty. He knew the eternal purpose of God. He knew God wanted man to accomplish this eternal purpose. So Satan came to tempt man, and man fell into his temptation. That temptation was according to

Satan himself. How did the archangel become Satan? Because of “I”. Now he uses this “I” to tempt Eve. If you eat of this fruit, your eyes will be bright. You’ll be like God. You will no longer need God. You can become God yourself. Brothers and sisters, Man fell into the trap of “I”. Man was not created for himself. Man was not the center, Christ was the center. Man was created for Christ.

But after accepting the temptation, Man thought only of himself: “I want to do this, I am the center.” He chose to walk on Satan’s path. He fell into the dominion of Satan. We know that the world today is under the dominion of Satan, and every person in the world is under the power of darkness. Satan is indeed cunning. He wants to defeat the eternal purpose of God through man and prevent the eternal purpose of God from being accomplished. Dear brothers and sisters, did God give up? When we read Psalms, chapter 8, we read what’s recorded in Genesis chapter one. God says “I will create man according to our image. I give him authority.” According to chronology, it may be around 4000 years before Christ. Although man failed (turn to Psalm 8), David was moved by the Holy Spirit and wrote this beautiful psalm. He wrote:

[Psa 8:4-5 DBY] “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and splendor.”

“According to the creation order, man is a little lower than the angels, but You have crowned him with glory and splendor. You made him rule over the entire world.” Although man failed, man still remains in the purpose of God. David most likely wrote this Psalm about 1000 years before Christ and approximately 3000 years after creation. We may forget things in 3 days, but God did not forget this after 3000 years. He still says “man, you are the one that I visited”. “I will complete my praise in the mouth of a baby”, because in terms of creation, man is a baby as he was created rather late. Although man is a little lower than an angel, God has crowned him with honor and splendor. But where is the man now? Where is the man that can accomplish the eternal purpose of God? After 4000 years, we could not find this man. One day, in the fullness of time, God sent his Son to be a man. The Word became flesh, full of grace and truth. We have seen His glory just like the glory of the Father. The first man, Adam, failed. When he was tempted, he fell into temptation.

Now the second man came. When He came, He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Wanting Him to change from “I” to “me”, Satan said: “If you are the Son of God, you can turn this rock into bread. You can jump from atop the temple, and when everyone sees it they will believe you are the Son of God. If you just worship me you can have all things. As long as you think of yourself that’s enough.” But what was the Lord’s response? The Lord said, “You shall not tempt your God”. “Man lived not by bread alone, but by the word of God”. Here, you see how our Lord Jesus, even when He was a man on earth, placed God as His center.

He had no self. He rejects Himself.

He was obedient to His Father until death, even the death on the cross. Our Lord Jesus, though he lived as a man, was a man in the heart of God. When he was on earth, he bound the strong man, and that strong man was Satan. He has bound the strong man. He has taken the spoils - us from him. Because he has bound the strong man, we are now out of Satan’s control. He has saved us and transformed us into the kingdom of His beloved Son by taking us out of the darkness. Our Lord Jesus, when he was on earth, overcame Satan. In that battle, He was completely victorious. He was standing on the side of the eternal purpose of God. Brothers and sisters, when He was on the cross, the Bible tells us He subdued all the powers, the authorities and the principalities. He bound them and displayed their shame, and he was boasted by the cross. That was Colossians chapter 2 verse 15. When our Lord Jesus was on earth He overcame Satan. That was His victory. On the cross, He struck the head of the snake. Although the snake bit His heel, He crushed his head. He bound all these principalities. He displayed them and he was boasted by the cross. That victory was not only for Himself, but also for His church.

That was the victory for us. Because He defeated the enemies, we can enter into His triumph.

Dear brothers and sisters, here we see a spiritual battle. This spiritual battle lasts until today and if He comes today, then it will truly be the last day. In the last days, the battle will be more severe because Satan knows his time is almost over. Brothers and sisters, we have to remember one thing, the deciding victory is already won on the cross.

Do you know that in a war, there are many battles, but only some of them are decisive? That decisive battle is already fought. The war may still be going on, but those minor battles are a part of the aftermath. The victory has already been decided. Brothers and sisters, on the cross of Calvary our Lord Jesus has already fought the victorious battle. Satan has already been defeated. But though he has no chance, he still won't give up.

So what will we do? After our Lord had taken the victory, He ascended into the heavens, receiving glory and honor as His crown. This is what we are told in the second chapter of Hebrews.

He has received His crown of splendor and honor. Our Lord is now on the throne. He is already victorious and He will execute his victory. Who on earth can be used by Him to carry out this execution? His church. So there is a mission for the church. The church is not only to grow and build itself up, the church is built up so that upon its completion, we may take part in this spiritual battle. Interestingly, if you do not know the eternal purpose of God, you may not experience much of this spiritual battle. But if you know the eternal purpose of God, then you will see the spiritual battle become more and more severe because now you are on the battleground. Dear brothers and sisters, what kind of battle are we engaged in? Our battle is just to clean up. The battle is already won, but when you go into the city you still find snipers. You still have to clean up. This is the work of the church. Here, we come to be the helpers of Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Bible tells us that we are not only His counterpart, but we are also His helpers. We have a vocation. We have to subdue all things and place them under the feet of Christ. If the church does not have Jesus as its head, then we'll have no strength and no power to bring these things under the feet of Christ.

Today we are called to engage in this spiritual battle. What did the Bible tell us? It says that in order to fight the spiritual battle, you must be strong in the Lord and in the might of His strength. Here we see the first thing, and that is to be prepared on the inside.

Our internal preparation is to be strong in the Lord. It is not to be a strong man through Him but to be strong in Him. We are in Him. Dear brothers and sisters, do you know that in a battle, there are strategic positions that you must take? When you are standing on higher ground, fighting becomes like splitting bamboo. It is easy. The position where we stand in this battle is very important. When we fight this spiritual battle, where is our position? Thank and praise God that our position is in Christ. It's in the Lord. Ephesians tells us that when He was raised up from the dead, we were raised with Him, and we ascended into the heavens with Him. Our Lord is now sitting on the right hand of the throne of God and that is also our position. Our position is a position of resurrection and ascension. We are standing up there and looking down. What is our strength? We are not strong ourselves. On the contrary, Paul says, "Whenever I am weak then I am strong. His power is completed in my weakness." Dear brothers and sisters, the first thing that we have to see is that we are in the Lord. You cannot fight the battle in yourself. In yourself, you are a defeated man because Adam was defeated. But if you are in Christ, you are standing in Christ. His strength is your strength. His triumph is your triumph. Here it says "in the might of His strength". What is this strength?

It is what's said in Ephesians Chapter 1 verse 19-21,

[Eph 1:19-21 DBY] "and what the surpassing greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of the might of his strength, [in] which he wrought in the Christ [in] raising him from among [the] dead, and he set him down at his right hand in the heavenlies, above every principality, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in that to come;"

The might of His strength is already manifested in Christ. Through this might and strength, He is risen from the dead. He is now sitting on the right hand of God

In other words, He is the head of all things. His might will work in you and it will going to operate in the church, so that all things in heaven and on earth can be subdued under us.

Ephesians chapter 1 verse 22 says

[Eph 1:22 DBY] “and has put all things under his feet, and gave him [to be] head over all things to the assembly,”

That is to say, He is the head of all things for the church. He is the head of all things and this He has given to His church, so that the church can subdue all things and put them under the feet of Christ. The church is His body and the fullness of Him that fills all in all. If we want to fight in the spiritual battle, we have to clearly know our enemy. Paul says we are not fighting with the flesh and blood . We know Satan is indeed crafty. He does not show his true form. He has a cover up. He uses man and things of this world because he is king of this world. He uses man and everything else to attack us. Sometimes he uses man, other times he uses situations. And some other times he uses things. He uses these things to deceive us and attack us. He hides himself. If we do not know this, we’ll think that there is either man or situations against us. But brothers and sisters, this is not so. We see we are battling not with the blood and flesh, but against the things behind blood and flesh. Satan has his own kingdom, and he has his own organizations and hierarchy. There are people under His control. Those are the principalities and authorities. There are universal lords of darkness and spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies. In my personal opinion, there are hierarchies of his messengers under Satan and the highest one being the principalities. In the tenth chapter of Daniel, our Lord was fighting with the prince of Persia. He also fought with the prince of Greece. These, I think, are the principalities. Satan would place a prince in each country.

Personally, I feel that the “authorities” refer to what was said in the second chapter of Daniel. In the kingdom of Satan there are authorities. They give orders and when they do so, man of this world will follow. As the universal lord of darkness, Satan uses darkness to rule the world so what man feels in this world is darkness. The darkness refers to lies because Satan is the first liar. So you see that under him there are these spirits of lies. For example, in First Kings chapter 22 the spirit of lies was there. He deceives the world with lies. So the whole world is under lies. This world is a big lie. This is the way that he places us under the darkness. Furthermore, the spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies rules the world with wickedness. Satan is the source of wickedness. He rules the whole world with his evil.

So brothers and sisters, we are battling against those spiritual evils. You cannot fight with your own blood and flesh. Because you are not battling against blood and flesh, you cannot fight with blood and flesh. You are fighting with the evil spirits, so you have to abide in Christ. You have to stand on high ground. You have to partake in His power. You have to put on His full armor. I want to remind you, brothers and sisters, this full armor, strictly speaking, is what the church puts on. Because the church is the warrior, she has to clothe herself with truth. If the church loses the truth, the church fails. Regarding the breastplate of righteousness, if there is sin in the church then the church is under the attack of the enemy. The church has to put on the sandals of the glad tidings of peace, which means to stand on the Gospel. If we do not stand on the Gospel, then we fail. The church has to use faith as a shield. It’s not only a matter of creed, but it is a matter of living faith. We have to put on the helmet of salvation, because the enemy often puts various thoughts into our minds. If we think “You tear me down and I’ll tear you down. If you are suspicious of me then I’ll be suspicious of you.”, then the church is in trouble. The church has to use the sword of the spirit (which is the word of God).

Brothers and sisters, the word of God is the sword of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, it is the Holy Spirit who is using the holy word of God. But today we, in the church, sometimes use the word of God to kill brothers and sisters. If I am not happy with a particular brother, I may use the word of God to strike him. The word of God is not your sword. The word of God is like a two edged sword. It will pierce through you and separate your soul from your spirit. The Holy Spirit is used only by the word of God. In that way, the enemy is struck down. The church has to pray and watch incessantly.

That way, we can stand. We can execute the will and calling of God. We can overcome any resistance. We can bring the purpose of God under the foot of Christ. So the Holy Spirit says, you stand; you withstand and you stand. After the battle, if you can still stand, that is a victory. Dear brothers and sisters, we thank and praise God. His eternal purpose is so glorious. It's for His Son. We thank God that He is willing to grant us grace so we can grow up to be like Him. That, in our service to Him as His helper, may the Lord bless us. Let us bow down and pray.

“Our Lord, our God. We bow down before you. We have to say, what is man that You are mindful of him. Our Lord, we thank you and praise you, because this is what you have accomplished so that we can receive Your grace. We thank you that we can be united with You and that we can be used by You. Our Lord, what else can we say? We can only ask you, Lord, to be above all. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.”