

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ELEVEN)

“ALL THINGS TOGETHER AGAIN IN CHRIST”

EPHESIANS 1:3-10

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

In our previous **Lesson**, we looked at verses **8** and **9**. In doing so, we learned that the riches of God's grace toward us has not only resulted in our redemption and the forgiveness of our sins, but has abounded to such an extent that they have also resulted in our receiving the wisdom and prudence which are absolutely necessary if we are to understand the mystery of His will. We noted that not only has God purposed and planned our salvation from before the foundation of the world, He has revealed it to us. It is a mystery that He has made known. The riches of God's grace have abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence in order that we might have a knowledge and appreciation of the "*mystery of His will.*"

We explained that the term "*mystery,*" as it is used in the New Testament, does not refer to something that can never be understood. But it does mean that it cannot be understood without divine assistance. It is a mystery in the sense that the human mind can never understand it as a result of its own efforts. But when it is revealed to the human mind by God, it is understood. The great truths concerning God's purpose and plan regarding salvation can only be known and understood when God reveals it.

Now in verse **10**, the Apostle Paul explains to us the nature of the "*mystery*" which God has been pleased to reveal to us. He writes, "*That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.*" This verse is undoubtedly one of the most important in this epistle. In fact, it is one of the most important verses in the entire Bible, for in this verse, the central theme of the Holy Scriptures is revealed to us. In this verse, we are allowed by the Holy Spirit to contemplate God's ultimate purpose with respect to the world. There is no higher privilege than this. In this verse we are transported above the matter of our personal salvation into the realm of God's comprehensive and final purpose for all things!

What we have here is a statement that reveals something which is going to occur whatever human beings may or may not do. We have here a revelation of God's supreme, all-encompassing, complete plan, a plan which is absolutely certain of being fulfilled. What is this plan? It is a plan *"That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."* The **New Living Translation** renders the verse as follows: *"And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ — everything in heaven and on earth."*

The word *"dispensation"* is the translation of the Greek word **oikonomia**, (**oy-kon-om-ee'-ah**) which refers to "the management of a household, or of household affairs, the management, oversight, administration of other's property, the office of a manager, overseer, stewardship." The word, as it is used here, refers to an administration by God of a certain period of human history referred to as *"the fulness of times."* The word "dispensation" is often used by Christians to refer to a certain period of time marked by a certain method in which God administers the affairs of mankind, such as the dispensation of Innocence, Conscience Human Government, Law, Grace, etc. The word does **not** have that meaning here. Instead of referring to a dispensation itself, it speaks of the **method** by which God administers the particular period of time referred to in this verse as *"the fulness of times."* The *"mystery"* that has been revealed is that God Almighty has a great purpose and a great plan as it relates to the management and administration of the affairs of this world and that He will, without fail, bring this great purpose and plan to a successful completion. There is nothing that can prevent Him from doing so for He is absolutely sovereign. **Psalm 2** gives us a clear indication of this:

- 1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?*
- 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,*
- 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.*
- 4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision.*
- 5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.*
- 6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*
- 7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.*
- 8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*
- 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*
- 10 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.*
- 11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.*
- 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*

The expression *"the fulness of times"* informs us as to when this great purpose and this great plan of God is to be fulfilled. The word *"fulness"* is a translation of the Greek word **pléróma**, (**play'-ro-mah**), which means "fulness, completeness." The Greek word translated *"times"* here is **kairos**, (**kahee-ros**). The noted Greek New Testament scholar, Archbishop **Richard Trench**, defined the Greek word **Kairos** as *"the critical, epoch-making periods foreordained of God ... when all that has been slowly, and often without observation ripening through long ages is mature and comes to the birth in grand decisive events, which constitute at once the close of one period and the commencement of another."* The word could be translated "seasons." When Paul refers in this verse to *"the fulness of times,"* he is speaking of the time when the succession of the ages has come to a close in the plan of God.

Brothers and sisters, the climax of the ages occurred when God became a human being through the incarnation. Time was divided once and forever by that event. What Paul desires for us to understand is that God's great plan of bringing everything in heaven and on earth, together under the authority of Christ, began to come into operation with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the present time, this plan of God is being worked out by God and in "*the fulness of times*" it will be brought to completion and perfection.

Paul tells us that this great plan is being carried out and will be brought to completion in and through the Lord Jesus Christ: "*That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things **in Christ**, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even **in him**.*"

In the first nine verses of **Ephesians** that we have examined in previous **Lessons**, we have encountered the phrase "*in Christ*" or some similar phrase several times. Let us remind ourselves of these instances by considering the verses listed hereunder:

We Are faithful "In Christ Jesus" (verse 1)

*"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful **in Christ Jesus**."*

We Are Blessed "In Christ Jesus" (verse 3)

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places **in Christ**."*

We Are Chosen "In Christ Jesus" (verse 4)

*"According as he hath chosen us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."*

We Are Accepted "In Christ Jesus" (verse 6)

*"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted **in the beloved**."*

We Are Redeemed "In Christ Jesus" (verse 7)

*"**In whom** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."*

And now in verse **10**, we encounter it again. "*That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things **in Christ**, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.*"

My beloved brothers and sisters, everything is "*in Christ!*" Jesus Christ is central, He is essential and anything that is associated with Christianity which is not located "*in Christ*," is not Christian at all.

Paul informs us that God will "*gather together in one all things in Christ both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, in Him.*" The words "*gather together*," are the translation of a Greek word which means "to bring together again to unite again." It is a compound word beginning with the preposition "**ana**" which means "again." The word looks back to a previous condition where no separation existed. God's purpose and plan is to regather, to restore all things to that former condition when all things were in perfect unity, and served His purposes joyfully.

Originally, all things were in a perfect state of harmony and unity with God. This state of harmony and unity was broken by sin. First, there was a rebellion in heaven itself. The devil revolted and it is apparent that many of the angels were persuaded to join him in his insurrection. As a result of their rebellion, they were ejected from heaven. But the discord was not confined to heaven. Satan, the chief of the fallen angels, brought about a rebellion on the earth and occasioned the fall of man. The fall of man not only affected the human race but the entire creation also. The harmony and unity were lost.

Paul is advising us that God's ultimate plan and purpose is to reverse this fallen condition and to re-harmonize and re-unite the whole of creation to Himself in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the Apostle tells us in **Romans 8:19-21**: *"For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay"* (**New Living Translation**).

The mystery of God's will includes the restoration of this harmony and unity in and through Christ. Ultimately there will be one kingdom on earth and in heaven — a new heaven and a new earth in which shall dwell righteousness, and the entire creation shall be delivered from the bondage of death and decay into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Paul tells us that God is going to gather together again in Jesus Christ, *"all things which are in heaven, and which are on earth."* It is my belief that the "all things which are in heaven" includes the "elect angels" referred to in **1 Timothy 5:21** and that "all the things which are on earth," refer to the redeemed who will be on the earth when our Lord returns and also to the created universe, including plants, animals and the earth itself.

The purpose of God, therefore, is with a view to the administration that has to do with the completion of the seasons. At the close of the Messianic Kingdom, the Great White Throne judgment will take place at which all lost human beings, fallen angels, and demons will be judged. The material universe cursed by sin will be brought back to its perfect, un-fallen condition, the saved of the human race will live on the new earth, and the endless eternal ages will begin. This is what is meant by Paul when he writes, *"That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."* God will accomplish all this restoration work in and through the Lord Jesus and His atoning death on the Cross. He is the Head, the center around which God revolves everything He does in relation to sin and salvation.