

## Ephesians 1 Work of the Son

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### Overview

- 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~~ **unto** the dispensation of the fulness of times *that* he might gather together in one all things in *the* Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth;
- [even] **in him**:
- 11 **In whom** also we have ~~obtained~~ *been made* an inheritance, being predestinated **according to** the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:
- 12 That we should be **to the praise of his glory**, who first trusted in *the* Christ.

The divine purpose outlined in the previous paragraph faces a challenge. God “chose” us “to be holy and without blame.” He “predestinated” us “unto the adoption of sons.” But we sinned, becoming common and guilty instead of holy and without blame, taking the place of enemies instead of sons. This incompatibility between the counsels of the Father and the sin of the creatures is reconciled in the work of the Son.

The grammatical structure calls out two great events involving us, each introduced by “in whom”:

- We receive redemption and forgiveness
- God takes us as his inheritance. (“obtained” is more naturally “been made.”)

### 7-10, We receive

Consider first *what* we receive, then *how* we receive it.

#### 7, *What do we receive?*

Two great blessings:

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- redemption through his blood
- forgiveness acc. to the riches of his grace

Both definite, viewed as things rather than as qualities, as befits a gift.

### *Redemption through his blood*

This particular word for redemption focuses on the *means*, the price paid, that is, the blood of Christ.

Distinguish three words, with counts after

	Plain	Compound
λυτρ-	λυτροω (3), λυτρον (2), λυτρωσις (3)	απολυτρωσις (10, here), αντιλυτρον (1)
αγοραζ-	αγοραζω	εξαγοραζω

The roots:

- λυτρον is a ransom; focuses on the price paid.
- αγορα is a marketplace; focuses on our status as cattle, slaves.

The word here is απολυτρωσις, with the focus on the price made more explicit by the reference to our Lord's blood. NB: the price he paid was not his *death*, but his *blood*. When the focus is on his obedience to the Father (as in Phil. 2), we think of his death, but when it is on our redemption, we are taken to his blood: cf. 1 Pet 1:18,19 (redeemed λυτροω with the blood of Christ), Heb 9:12 (Christ enters the holy place by his own blood), Heb 9:18-22 (parallels with the old covenant).

- liberals will suggest that Paul emphasizes the blood only to accommodate the OT practices.
- Rather, God established the OT practices in the form he did so that they would more accurately point to the form of sacrifice that in due time he would require of our Lord.

### *Forgiveness of Sins*

Focuses on the *effect*.

Note "acc. to the riches of his grace." Not just "because of." Recall Hendriksen's story of two rich men giving to a charitable cause. One gives a gift that anyone could afford; he gives *from* his riches. The other awards half his fortune to the cause; he gives *according to* his riches.

We need both of these. Some are purchased but not forgiven (2 Pet 2:1). We can be thankful that he has purchased us, not as vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, but as vessels of honor, fitted for glory.

### **8-10, How do we receive it?**

The rest of this section shows that God's forgiveness is not granted us "in the dark," but as part of a program of revelation. Again, two aorists, "hath abounded ... having made known," the second expounding the first.

#### *v.8, the Summary*

(See 2 Cor 9:8 for a close grammatical parallel.) "Abound" here is background, not foreground: it reiterates the "riches" in the previous verse. He has given us forgiveness acc. to the riches of his grace. The new information is that this act of abounding in grace was conducted "in all wisdom and prudence." It was not a spur-of-the-moment impulse, but a manifestation of both deep understanding (wisdom) and skill in execution (prudence).

**Application.**—Paul would imbue us with a deep sense that God is completely in control. The course of events in our Lord's life and ministry is not an accident, as tragic as some aspects seem, but the execution of a strategy explicitly designed to maximize God's glory.

#### *v.9-10, the Amplification*

These vv. amplify what Paul means by "abounding ... in wisdom and prudence." This "abounding" is not only a bounty for *our* sakes, but also a "making known," a revelation, of the "mystery of his will." Paul calls this a mystery: we need to understand what he means by "mystery" before we can understand this particular "mystery."

### **What is a "mystery"?**

A "mystery" in Paul is just the opposite of a human mystery story:

- A human mystery is something unknown that a clever enough person (say, Sherlock Holmes) can discover.
- God's mysteries are things that no person could discover, but that God has chosen to disclose. Generally truths revealed in the NT that are not completely clear from the OT.

The use of the word derives from our Lord's comment in Matt 13:11 and parallels, "it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." Examples of mysteries:

- Rom 11:25, the partial blinding of Israel to admit the Gentiles (the OT prophets, looking ahead to the millennium, made it appear that the Gentiles would come in under the rule of an obedient Israel)
- 1 Cor 15:51, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed"; the existence of rapture alongside resurrection (OT knows resurrection, but not rapture)
- Eph 3:3-6, the place of Gentiles as Israel's peers in the body of Christ (same as Rom 11:25)
- Eph 5:32, the nature of that body (OT knows only the external organization of Israel as a nation, not the spiritual dynamic of the church)
- Col 1:27, the indwelling of Christ in the believer (OT knows of the Spirit in believers under the new covenant, but does not recognize that spirit as the spirit of Messiah)

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- 2 Thes 2:7, the present spiritual influence of antichrist (he is a personal character in the OT, not a pervasive spiritual influence)
- 1 Tim 3:16, the incarnation, “God was manifest in the flesh” (the closest the OT gets is the appearance of God as the Angel of the Lord).

### What is this mystery?

The structure of these verses is a bit confused in the AV, and we need to sort it out a bit before we can understand the argument.

### Structure

There is an ambiguity in how the phrases should be grouped. AV suggests a major break after v.9, all of v.10 giving the statement of the mystery. But for a number of reasons, the syntax is smoother if we divide after the phrase “fulness of times.”

*Technical reasons:*

- *Permits rendering εν αυτω “in him” rather than “in himself,” which is not supported by Greek;*
- *Takes εις in more natural sense of “unto” rather than “in”*
- *Does not require the εις phrase to precede the clause it modifies.*

Let’s focus on the meaning of the phrase, “dispensation of the fulness of times.” The AV translation practically requires us to understand this in the sense of a period of time during which he will gather together all things in Christ. But what do the terms mean?

**Fulness of times.**—του πληρωματος των καιρων. Cf. Gal. 4:4, το πληρωμα του χρονου, and Mark 1:15 πεπληρωται ο καιρος, from which they both are likely derived. Acts 1:7 shows how close these are to one another; cf. also Acts 3:19, 21 (though the context shows that these two periods are different). Classically, χρονος looks more at an extended period, while καιρος looks at particular points, but see Barr for numerous exceptions.

- “Fulness of X” means all of X, the completion of X. Examples:
  - Rom 11:25, “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in,” that is, the full tale of Gentiles is made up.
  - 1 Cor 10:26, 28, “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof,” that is, all that is in it.
- Here, we look forward to the completion of all the ages, the series of ages into which God has divided history. These include the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24, perhaps the four stages in Daniel’s vision of the statue)
- Mark 1:15 is key; Paul is likely to have taken his usage from our Lord’s basic message.

**Dispensation.**—οικονομια, the work of an οικονομος “steward”: the other six NT occurrences clearly mean “stewardship,” so we should try to understand it this way here as well. This phrase most naturally refers, not to a period called “the dispensation of the fulness of times,” but to responsibility, a stewardship, made by God to his Son; a stewardship of the course of the world’s history.

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**In.**—The word translated “in” is really “unto.” It does not refer to what takes place in a period of time, but rather identifies this “stewardship of the fulness of the times” as the aim of God’s good purpose. This is even clearer when we realize two further details from Greek:

1. In 1:9, “in himself” is really “in him,” that is, “in Christ.” The verse is speaking of the Father’s purpose in the Son.
2. The “that” at the start of 1:10 really belongs in its middle.

So translate, “his good pleasure which he hath purposed in him [Christ], with a view to stewardship over the fulness of the times, that he might gather together in one all things in Christ...” We can envision the event: the Father sends the Son into the world, saying, “All right. Let’s finish up this program. I want you to go down and tie all the ends together.

**Application.**—What a great comfort it is, in the midst of such turmoil as we see in the world around us, to realize that God has placed the course of history under his Son’s responsibility. It should not surprise us that one who would go through death to produce a deeper life should bring the world through such turmoil as it now sees in order to produce perfect civil peace; at the same time, we can be confident that he will be no less successful in this effort than he was in the other.

### The Argument

Thus understood, the verse outlines three successively more detailed descriptions of the mystery.

- 9b: Out of his own good pleasure, God has framed a purpose in Christ. We have already read (1:5) that this good pleasure led him to predestinate us unto the adoption of sons. Now we learn that this good pleasure has a purpose for the Lord Jesus himself.
- 10a: That purpose involves making him (Christ) the steward responsible for administering the fulfillment of the ages. We are made Sons; he is made Steward.
- 10b: More specifically, it is his good pleasure to gather together in one all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.

Let us now consider this third point, the detailed description of our Lord’s stewardship, described as a “gather[ing] together in one all things in the Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.” We must identify these things, and then consider what it means to gather them together in Christ.

**“Things ... in heaven and ... on earth.”**—First, what are these things? Usually understood to cover angels (in heaven) and humans (on earth). Cf. Dan 4:35, “the army of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth.” The “army” of heaven is the same as the “host of heaven” that announces the birth of the Lord Jesus to the shepherds, and humans are often called “inhabitants of the earth” in the Pss.

Phil 2:10 introduces a third group: “[things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth.” The third group is likely related to fallen angels (cf. 2 Pet 2:4) and the damned (Num 16:30-33); they will bow, but will not be reconciled.

**“Gather together in one ... in Christ.”**—Second, what does it mean to gather these together? At Paul’s time, they were divided from one another.

- Heavenly beings (angels) were separate from humans. Throughout the Bible, it is a terrifying thing for people to encounter an angel knowingly; cf. Dan 10:5-8; Rev 19:9-10; 22:8-9.

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- Jews were separate from Gentiles.

God is giving the Christ the responsibility to bring these all together under his single headship.

- We don't *become* angels when we die, but we "are come ... to an innumerable company of angels," Heb. 12:22.
- Part of our Lord's work now is to unify Jew and Gentile in one body.

This expression thus emphasizes half of his work, the horizontal unification of creature with creature across every possible divide, except that of the damned and the saved. The unbelievers are forever severed, but his people will be united with the angels in a great chorus of praise.

*Application:* Here is the only real solution to the things that divide people from one another. God has given to our Lord Jesus the task of uniting all of these things with one another.

There is another dimension, that of reconciling creatures to the creator, and we find it addressing the same two divisions in Col 1:20, "And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, [I say], whether [they be] things in earth, or things in heaven."

Eph. 2:11-19 captures the combination of the two, in the case of the Jew-Gentile difference, with its alternation between the horizontal and vertical separations.

### 11-12, God receives

- 11 **In whom** also we have ~~obtained~~ *been made* an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

- 12 That we should be **to the praise of his glory**, who first trusted in *the* Christ.

**What does God receive?** An Inheritance. Two inheritances are in view in the Bible: compare Deut 4:20,21.

- We are God's inheritance, his chosen portion; this sense is in 1:18.
- He gives us an inheritance. This sense is in 1:14.

Here, the second sense is most likely.

1. The verb form is most directly translated as a passive, "we have been made an inheritance," that is, joined to God's people, who are his inheritance, an idea that is developed in ch. 2b-3 following.
2. The following explanation is in terms of what we are to be, not what we receive.

Compare Mal 3:16-17, God's solicitous care for his own possession.

**How do we attain to this status?** The OT knows of two routes to becoming God's inheritance, and both are in focus in the context here.

1. God's elective choice, Ps 33:12, in focus in v.4 and this immediate verse;

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2. His redemption, Psa 74:2, cf. v.7. This is why the reference to the inheritance is placed in the “Son” section; to focus on the redemption that makes us God’s inheritance.

**Why does he appoint us as his inheritance?** The purpose for which he has added us to his possession is given in v.12, that we might bring praise to his glory.

Illustration: sometimes the manufacturer of a product will advertise it as “heirloom quality,” “a purchase to leave to your children.” The implication is that the product will reflect well on you, and people will think well of you because you own this product. God’s purpose in choosing us as his inheritance is that we might bring glory to him.

**Application.**—How our lives should be marked by the realization that we are God’s chosen possession, selected to bring glory to him. The world knows him through us. What sort of picture of him do we portray?