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God's Eternal Purpose and Integral Mission

An Expository Message on Ephesians 1-3

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Abstract

Ephesians Chapter 1 explains how Christians have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ to bring all things under the rule of Christ, for the praise of his glory. The Integral Mission Wheel Illustration shows the kind of life that a Christian must live to magnify the rule of Christ as King and to glorify his name. Chapter 2 emphasizes God's eternal purpose for believers: He saved us by his grace and gave us a position of authority that through our lives, he might show the incomparable riches of his grace as we do the good works which he has prepared in advance for us to do. Chapter 3 focuses on the mystery of the Gospel which we must proclaim. Paul's prayer was that Christians will be immersed in God's love so that they will be able to do more than they could ever ask or imagine in God's power.

Blessed for a purpose

Imagine yourself to be in a small house church in Ephesus when this letter was being read to the congregation by the Pastor or an Elder. Feel the excitement as you hear the Pastor announce: "We have just received a letter from our Brother Paul and I will be reading it to you."

Ephesians 1

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This letter was from Apostle Paul, who wrote from his prison cell. In Paul's Roman prison cell, he had the luxury of time to be alone and meditate on God's message and write it down for his people. Here, he was addressing the Ephesian believers as holy people, the faithful in Christ. The Ephesian church was made up of converts from the Jews and Gentiles alike (Acts 19:8-10). Ephesus was famous for its idol temple of Artemis or Diana. The image of the church being built as a holy temple in the Lord may have been drawn from this beautiful temple. The church in Ephesus is the embodiment of the universal church, as Paul described in Ephesians 2:19-22. Therefore, we, who belong to the church, can actually put ourselves in the situation of the Ephesian believers and hear what God has to say to us through Paul. We are God's holy people, the faithful in Christ. Do we actually deserve to be addressed as such? Well, we can only be holy and faithful by the grace of God and by his enabling power. Let us continue to read what Paul has to say to us:

The Father's work of love

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,

Could such a great message come out of a prison cell? Amazingly, it did! Paul enumerates the Father's work of love in the believers in vv. 3-14. We have been blessed with **every spiritual blessing in Christ.**

It may not be visible here on earth, but it already took place in the realm of the heavenlies. John McArthur described the heavenly realm as the complete domain of God, the full extent of his divine operation.¹ Every spiritual blessing is for all believers to claim. These blessings were enumerated in verse 4-9. *He chose us in him before the creation of the world* when God chose Jesus Christ to be the Savior of Mankind. For those who chose to follow Jesus as personal Savior and Lord, the choosing of God took effect because we are **in Him**. Motivated by his love, God has predestined us to be **adopted** as his sons through Jesus Christ (v.5). The word adoption entails that the adopted son or daughter has all the rights, privileges, responsibilities and inheritance of a natural born son. God reveals his eternal purpose for choosing to adopt us in verses 10-12.

¹⁰ *to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

¹¹ *In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.*

To be chosen by the King to be adopted as his son or daughter is indeed overwhelming. Why has God chosen us (v.4)? Why has he blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ, and adopted us as his sons (vv.3,5)? Why did he redeem us, forgive our sins and lavish us with his grace (vv. 7, 8) ? And why has he revealed to us the mystery of his will through the Gospel of Christ (1:9, 3:6)? Paul gives us God's eternal purpose for all of his divine acts of love in vv. 3-9, which is *to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ* (v.10). This is God's hidden plan for all history which he is unfolding to us and through us his children.

Have you ever asked yourself what is implied by *all things in heaven and on earth*? The heavenly realms mentioned in verse 3 is the complete domain of God's divine operation. To put it in mathematical language, it is the universal set within which earth is just a subset. But within this universal set, which is God's Kingdom, the usurper, Satan,

staged a *coup d'état* and grabbed some territories from God's domain. God's Kingdom is now divided, and the Enemy continues to conquer more territories, both in the physical as well as in the spiritual realm, as part of his Kingdom Expansion and Enhancement Program (KEEP). He wants to keep things on earth and in heaven under his rule. He has been in the business of luring men to rebel against God since the Garden of Eden days. He is exerting his influence in all fields of human endeavor, politics, mass media, sciences, arts, education, to name a few. But God's eternal purpose will prevail *when the times reach their fulfillment*. Eventually, the Lordship of Christ will be fully established on earth, as it is in heaven. That is why the Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). God's eternal purpose is being fulfilled today as we usher his Kingdom on planet Earth. For this to happen, God will have to begin his rule in the life of each believer. Then and only then can God use us in his Kingdom Recovery Program.

The Integral Mission Wheel Illustration (see next page) captures God's eternal purpose in the lives of his adopted children. It shows the kind of life that a Christian must live to magnify the rule of Christ as King and to glorify his name. It illustrates the importance of making Jesus Christ the integrating factor of our lives. If Christ is the center of a person's life, he occupies His rightful place and is in control of every area of his life. He is the source of life and power. He is the source of **love**. The very love that He requires from us, he also generously supplies. The motivating factor that makes the wheel move and keep on moving in the right direction is divine Love. As Melba Maggay puts it, to love God is to love our neighbour, and to love our neighbour is to love God because these two acts of love are seamlessly one.²



The Integral Mission Wheel

In verses 13 -14, Paul goes on to give us the assurance of our salvation and our inheritance which was sealed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

How privileged we are in this generation, that we have the written revelation of God in full. It is like watching an action movie, knowing its end from the beginning. We need not be dismayed if at some points in the story, the leading characters are overpowered by the villain because we know who will triumph in the end. Verse 14 tells us that during the waiting period, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us is

enough assurance of our inheritance in heaven. We will not be able to enjoy the full inheritance... *until the redemption of those who are God's possession* (v.14). And who are these, God's possessions? Psalm 2:8, referring to the Messiah King, says:

Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

It is very clear here that our inheritance will be full when the nations are already Christ's possession. This will happen when every tribe, tongue and nation is represented before God's throne in heaven, as the vision of John described (Rev.5:9, 7:9). But what is our part in the fulfilment of this vision? We must get involved in cross-cultural mission.

Paul's prayer for the believers in Ephesians 1:17-21 is a prayer we can claim for ourselves and our church. Because the task of claiming the nations for Christ is so huge, we need to take part in this task with a power greater than our own.

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^[1] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

The overwhelming description of God's power in this prayer is available for every believer, if only they will know him better and the eyes of their spiritual heart will be enlightened. This same power is what we need to bring the nations at the feet of Jesus and raise them from spiritual death. This power is available for all believers and not just for a selected few because God has already established the rule of Christ over everything for the church (v.22), his body and the filled-up receptacle of his grace (v.23).

Ephesians 2

The Gospel of grace

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

Paul reminds us in verse 1-3 of our hopeless past and leads us to a greater appreciation of his great love and mercy and grace (vv.4, 5). Then he goes on to declare another great truth in verses 6-7.

⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Yes, it is in the past tense and not something we hope to experience in the future. *God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.* This is not a literal position but a spiritual one. John MacArthur describes the heavenly realms as the complete domain of God's divine operation.³ God gave us a position

of authority with Christ, the authority to *show the incomparable riches of his grace!* Just as we have been recipients of his saving grace, God will use our lives to showcase his amazing grace.

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

I first heard these verses during my first year in college, when my Mathematics teacher shared the Gospel to our class. I was so overwhelmed by God's grace that I claimed Ephesians 2:8, 9 as my salvation verses. Inspired by these verses, we named our children Nathaniel (God's gift), Kharisse (Grace), and Evangeline Joy (Good News of joy). Grace is God's love poured out to his undeserving people who put their faith in him. It is not by any work or meritorious acts that we have done that we were saved. We have all experienced God's grace as Christians. We have tasted it. We have been bathed with God's grace for a purpose.

Therefore, there is no reason for boasting about ourselves. We can only boast of God's work and purpose in our lives. The eternal purpose of God is once again emphasized in verse 10. Though we are not saved by our own good works, we were saved for good works.

¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

As God's workmanship, each one of us is a masterpiece in progress, being made more and more like Christ in order to produce his work, the *good work* which God has planned in advance for us to do. As the wise and benevolent Master Planner of our lives, God's preparation surely includes the provision for the work and the training of the worker. In his divine providence, he makes ready the opportunities for the works and makes us ready for their performance. The good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do may fall under any task described in the Integral Mission Wheel. It may be praying for the sick and the needy, caring for a bedridden mother, sharing the Gospel to an unbeliever, seeking justice for the oppressed, doing relief work for

typhoon victims, or simply doing your best as Christ's representative in your marketplace. The good works may not sound spiritual at all. There is no divide between the secular and the sacred in the life of a Christian. Every area of our Christian life must be 'sacred' because it is under the rule of Christ. So when we plant a tree, clean our surroundings or dispose of our garbage properly, we are glorifying God who created our environment for us to enjoy and care for.

Once again, Paul describes how God started his work in a believer's life even before he was saved (vv.11-22) until he is reconciled with Christ.

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (which is done in the body by human hands) ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Paul emphasized what took place in the process of reconciliation with God because every believer is entrusted with a work of reconciliation. In Chapter 3, he unfolds the mystery of Christ. This mystery includes God's plan for the Gentiles (v.6), that through the Gospel, they will become fellow-citizens of heaven.

Ephesians 3

God's marvellous plan for the Gentiles

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

At this point, Paul used his imprisonment for the Gospel, not as a setback, but as an encouragement for the believers to persevere in doing the ultimate 'good work', which is preaching the Good News to the Gentiles.

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and

through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Paul made clear that God's eternal purpose for the church, the body of Christ, is to declare the manifold wisdom of God in the Gospel of Christ (vv.10,11). The role of the Church is to be a witness to the sick and dying world that there is a Savior who heals and who saves. The term witness, according to Maggay, carries with it two aspects of preaching the Kingdom of God: the 'presence' and the proclamation. Social action would correspond to the presence aspect and evangelism to the proclamation aspect.⁴ If the Gospel is to be truly 'good news' to embodied souls, it must address the need of both the body and the soul. In Ephesians 3:14-20, Paul further encourages the believers with a prayer of empowerment to match the great task that is expected of them.

A prayer for the Ephesian church

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

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

Paul prays that the believers may have the inner (spiritual) strength with a power coming from the Holy Spirit (v.16) so that Christ may be at home in their hearts by faith (v.17). The difference between having Christ as a visitor and having Christ dwell in our heart is this: a visitor

has limited access to the rooms of the house, while a dweller is at home in every part of the house. In the booklet *My Heart, Christ's Home* by Robert Boyd Munger⁵, he described how a Christian may

have Christ inside his house without making him feel at home because of limited access to some parts of the house. To allow Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith is to make him feel comfortable in every area of our lives, that is, to let him have full control or ownership of our lives.

Paul prays a staggering prayer in verses 17b – 19. He desired that the believers will be able to grasp the full volume of God's love (Volume = length times width times depth), which he knew is beyond comprehension (v.19). In effect, this prayer is tantamount to asking that the believers will be so overwhelmed with God's love, immersed and saturated such that no good work for God's Kingdom will be so hard that they will not be willing to do out of love for him. And when we are so overpowered by God's love, we will be so in love with the King, a condition that will allow him to work unhindered in our lives that he *is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us* (v.20). The good work that God can accomplish through our lives should not be confined to the limits of our own resources, capacity and imagination. We can expect great things from God as we attempt great things for him. In John 14:12, Jesus promised that those who believe in him will be able to do greater works than those the disciples had witnessed during his earthly ministry.

Paul ends his prayer in verse 21 giving all the glory to God. The acid test of whether our work will survive the test of fire (I Cor. 3:12-15) is the question: 'Who gets the glory?' Whatever we may accomplish for God's Kingdom, all glory and honour belongs to God and should be given back to him.

Paul's letter does not end here. The practical applications of these great truths are found in Chapters 4-6. As we live by the truths of Chapters 1-3, and pursue God's eternal purpose as a natural part of our daily walk, our lives will be like the Integral Mission Wheel, rolling through the smooth or rugged surfaces of the earth, and Christ alone is

magnified as he rules the different areas of our lives. One cannot see any division in the different areas of the wheel. These areas blend as an integrated whole and the centre of the wheel stands out as the unifying factor of every area. Let us pursue God's eternal purpose and fulfil our Integral Mission as we allow our King and Saviour to occupy his rightful place in our lives, the throne.

¹ John MacArthur. *Ephesians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Manila: Christ for Greater Manila, 1989, p.9

² Melba Maggay. *Integral mission, what's it all about?* Quezon City: Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture, 2007, p 15

³ MacArthur. *Ephesians*, p. 9, 60

⁴ Melba Maggay. *Transforming Society*. Quezon City: Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture, 2004, p 29

⁵ Robert Boyd Munger. *My heart, Christ's home*. Downer Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1986, p.1