

LESSON FIVE

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

SCRIPTURE READING

[All Sections]

- Eph. 1:9 Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself,
- Eph.1:10 Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him;
- Eph. 3:9 And to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things,
- Eph. 3:10 In order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church,
- Eph. 3:11 According to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord,

[Section 1]

- Eph.1: 4 Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love
- Eph.1: 7 In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of His grace,
- Eph. 1:8 Which He caused to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence,
- Act. 5:31 This One God has exalted to His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

[Section 2]

- Eph 3:5 Which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit,
- Col.1:26 The mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations but now has been manifested to His saints;
- Eph. 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- 2 Cor. 13:5 Test yourselves whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Or do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are disapproved?

[Section 3]

- Rom. 1:19 Because that which is known of God is manifest within them, for God manifested it to them.
- Rom. 1:20 For the invisible things of Him, both His eternal power and divine characteristics, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being perceived by the things made, so that they would be without excuse;
- Eph 3:10 In order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church,

[Section 4]

Eph. 1:9	Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself
Eph.1: 10	Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him;

OUTLINE:

- I. GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE, WILL, AND PURPOSE**
- II. GOD'S ECONOMY**
- III. THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL**
- IV. THE MYSTERY HAVING BEEN HIDDEN THROUH THE AGES**
- V. THE BIBLE EXPLAINING ALL THE MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE**
- VI. MAN BEING GOD'S VESSEL FOR CONTAINING GOD**
- VII. GOD'S ECONOMY**
- VIII. GOD'S WILL BEING GOD'S INTENTION TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT HE DESIRES FOR HIMSELF**
- IX. THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL HAVING BEEN MADE KNOWN TO US BY REVELATION**
- X. ACCRODING TO GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE**
- XI. GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE HAVING BEEN PURPOSED BY GOD**
 - A. In Himself
 - B. For an Administration

QUESTIONS

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I. GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE, WILL, AND PURPOSE

Although the divine economy is the central topic in the New Testament, it has not been touched that much among the Christians in past centuries. The matter of God's economy is greatly developed in Paul's writings. Ephesians is a book on God's eternal purpose to have the church as the Body of Christ. In such a book, Paul uses the word "economy" (1:10; 3:2, 9). In Ephesians the Apostle Paul wants to show us that the church as the Body of Christ is something of God's economy. Paul uses the word economy in relationship with other words such as good pleasure, will, and purpose (1:9, 11). God has a good pleasure which is His heart's desire. God also has a will which is according to His good pleasure... God's will came out of His desire. In Ephesians the word purpose is used as a noun and as a verb (3:11; 1:9). The purpose comes out of the will. In God's heart there was a desire, and out of this desire God made a will. According to God's will, He made a purpose.

II. GOD'S ECONOMY

Because God has a purpose, He needs an economy. The Greek word for economy is *oikonomia*. This Greek word is composed of two words—*oikos* meaning house or household and *nomos* meaning law. Economy is a "house law," a household administration. This household administration is for the carrying out of God's purpose, God's plan. God's economy is God's planned administration to carry out His eternal purpose. If you trace the root of the word economy, it goes back to a word that refers to the parceling out of food, the distributing of food as in parcels. Joseph is a good illustration of this.

His job was to distribute all the food supply of Pharaoh to feed all the hungry people (Gen. 41:56). This root word also means to distribute food to the cattle for grazing. To distribute is to dispense. In God's economy, He dispenses Himself into His people as life, as life supply, and as everything to them. God wants to dispense Himself as food to us.

The Holy Bible tells us that God is rich as food to us. The Lord Jesus declared that He was the bread

of life (John 6:48), and Paul said that he was charged to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8). Christ is life, and His riches are unsearchable. All these riches of life are to be dispensed into His believers. Paul was commissioned to be a dispenser of these riches, a steward. He was to be a steward in the same way that Joseph was a great steward to distribute the rich life supply of Pharaoh's household. In the Old Testament Joseph dispensed food to the hungry people, and in the New Testament the Apostle Paul dispensed the unsearchable riches of Christ to the believers. By this we can see what the proper denotation of the word *oikonomia* is—God's household administration to dispense the divine riches of the Triune God as life and life supply into His chosen and redeemed people.

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III. THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

Verses 3 through 14 of Ephesians chapter one are actually one long sentence. Therefore, we should not isolate any verse, clause, or phrase from the whole sentence. Verse 5 says that God has predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. The praise of the glory of God's grace spoken of in verse 6 is the issue of the sonship in verse 5. Sonship is altogether a matter of grace. God's grace makes us sons of God. The Spirit of the Son, the life of the Son, the position of the Son, the image of the Son, the completion of sonship, and the inheritance of all that God is in the sonship are all matters of grace. As we have pointed out, grace is God Himself. God Himself has come to accomplish everything for us that we may be His sons with the full sonship. With this grace God has graced us in the Beloved (v. 6).

Verse 7 reveals that God's grace has accomplished redemption for us and has applied forgiveness to us. The accomplishment of redemption began with Christ's incarnation and continued through His ascension. When He ascended to the heavens, redemption was fully accomplished. In His ascension God gave Him repentance and forgiveness to pour out through the coming of the Spirit (Acts 5:31). The coming of the Spirit refers to Christ's descension. Beginning at the time of His descension, repentance and forgiveness were brought down to earth and poured out upon God's chosen ones. As a result, we have repentance; repentance has been poured into our heart. After repentance came

forgiveness. Through the accomplishment of redemption and the application of forgiveness, we have been regenerated to become sons of God. All this is according to the riches of God's grace.

Even more of God's grace is revealed in verse 8, which says that God has caused His grace to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence. Then verse 9 says, "Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself." Verse 10 speaks of the heading up of all things in Christ, and verse 11, of the fact that we have been made an inheritance, "having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One Who operates all things according to the counsel of His will." God's abounding grace has made us God's inheritance, God's possession. Verse 14 indicates that we also shall have an inheritance. By God's grace we are made His inheritance, and by His grace He is made our inheritance. What abounding grace! Verses 3 through 14 are filled with God's well-speaking concerning us. These verses also need to be our well-speaking concerning Him.

The phrase "the praise of His glory" is found three times in this portion of the Word, in verses 6, 12, and 14. Each time it is used as a conclusion to the well-speaking of the Triune God. In verse 6 it is a conclusion of the well-speaking of God the Father; in verse 12, of the well-speaking of God the Son; and in verse 14, of the well-speaking of God the Spirit. The three uses of this phrase point to the Three of the Godhead in His well-speaking.

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IV. THE MYSTERY HAVING BEEN HIDDEN THROUGH THE AGES

God's will has a mystery, a mystery that has been hidden through the ages (3:5; Col. 1:26). The universe is a mystery. Why is there a heaven, and why does the earth exist? Why are there so many millions of items in the universe? Why is man here on earth? All these questions are mysteries and have given rise to many different philosophies. The mystery, which is the will of God, has been made known to the church through the apostles. A will is an intention, and the will of God is God's intention. God's intention is intimately related to the desire of His heart. Thus, the mystery of the universe is a matter of God's will, which is related to the desire of God's heart. We need to know the mystery, the will of God, and the desire of God's heart.

Some may say that God's will and intention is to have the church and that the church is the desire of His heart. This is correct, but we need to ask what the church is. Many Christians, including Christian teachers, do not have a clear understanding concerning the church. The church is not simply a group of people. In ourselves we are not the church; we are pitiful sinners. The only way we can become the church is for God in His Son to work Himself into our being. Most Christians today do not see the crucial and vital matter that God in His Son is working Himself into His chosen and redeemed ones. They may know about God's selection and redemption, and they may realize that they are the chosen and redeemed ones. But they do not see that the very God who has chosen and redeemed them desires, in the Person of the Son, to work Himself into them. Neither selection nor redemption is the goal. Both are steps toward the goal. God's goal is to work Himself into our being.

The New Testament proves that God is working Himself into us. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in us (Eph. 4:6; 2 Cor. 13:5; John 14:17). According to 1 John, we are in God, and God is in us (4:15). Furthermore, we abide in Him, and He abides in us (John 15:4). In Philippians 1:21 the Apostle Paul could even say, "To me to live is Christ." In Galatians 2:20 he said that he lived no longer, but that Christ lived in him. All these verses indicate that God in the Son is working Himself into us.

A proper understanding of the church also reveals the same truth. The Bible says that the church is the Body of Christ. Some Christians, however, take this not as a fact, or reality, but merely as an illustration. How terrible! The church is the Body of Christ, the Head of which is Christ Himself (Col. 1:18). Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 12:12 reveals that the Body is Christ. Thus, Christ is not only the Head, but also the Body. This indicates that God is being wrought into us who are the members of the Body. This is also proved by the illustration of the vine in John 15. In John 15:5 the Lord Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." Is not the vine in the branches? Certainly it is! This is the reason the Lord says, "Abide in Me and I in you" (John 15:4). Whatever the vine is, is in the branches. As branches of the vine and as members of the Body of Christ, whatever Christ is, is in us. This means that we have been made parts of Christ. Are not the branches of the vine parts of the vine? Yes, they are. Therefore, we must have the boldness to say, "I am a part of Christ." Because the believers are

parts of Christ, Paul could say that to him to live was Christ.

The mystery of the universe is the church, and the church is a group of people into whom God is working Himself. Eventually, the church will be fully saturated with God and will consummately become the holy city, the New Jerusalem. The church will not only be saturated with God, but also mingled with Him. This does not mean, however, that we shall become the Godhead. No, this is neither what we say nor what we mean. Nevertheless, as those who are being saturated with God and mingled with Him, we shall become the very expression of God. The New Jerusalem will be the corporate expression of God. As we have pointed out a number of times, both God on the throne (Rev. 4:3) and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:11) have the appearance of jasper. This means that the entire city has the appearance of God and is the expression of God. This is the mystery of the universe.

What a deliverance it would be for Christians if they could only see this! Many know only about being saved, being regenerated, becoming the children of God, and going to heaven some day. But the concept of being saved for the goal of going to heaven is much lower than the mystery of God's will. The mystery of God's will is to have a church constituted with those who have been saturated and mingled with God.

The mystery of the universe is that God is working Himself into us. Everything is working together for this purpose (Rom. 8:28). All things serve this goal. Everything is for God's working of Himself into our being. This is much different from merely having a happy life. You may be very happy today, but not tomorrow. You may be happy in a meeting, but when you return home, your wife or husband may give you a difficult time. The mystery of God's will is not that we are becoming happy people. Today is not the time for us to be fully happy, because the time is not yet ripe. Because many do not have the adequate vision or revelation, they do not know what is actually taking place in the church life. They think that we are simply here to have a good time. But this is not the mystery of God's will. This mystery is that God is dispensing Himself into us to produce the church for Himself. This is a mystery hidden through the ages.

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V. THE BIBLE EXPLAINING ALL THE MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE

Romans 1:19 and 20 say, "Because that which is known of God is manifest within them, for God manifested it to them. For the invisible things of Him, both His eternal power and divine characteristics, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being perceived by the things made, so that they would be without excuse." This passage presents a profound matter and speaks forth the mysteries of the universe. In our eyes heaven, earth, and man all are mysteries. When we look at heaven, earth, and ourselves, we cannot explain them. After all, what is heaven, what is earth, and what are we human beings?

VI. MAN BEING GOD'S VESSEL FOR CONTAINING GOD

There is no animal among all the creatures that has the image of God or has a spirit within. Yet there is another life that is higher than the life of man, and that is the life of God Himself. God's life is the super-class life. God created man in His own image with a purpose—God's purpose is to make man His vessel. A vessel is for containing things. For example, a cup is for containing water. Likewise, as God's vessel, man is for containing God.

VII. GOD'S ECONOMY

God had a desire, a good pleasure, according to which He made a will. Based upon His will, God made a purpose. He then made a plan to administrate His purpose, and this plan is to dispense Himself into all His chosen people. This is the economy of God. It was a mystery because it was hidden. It was never made known to anyone until the time of the apostles. In Ephesians, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Timothy, Paul tells us that God has such an economy which was a mystery but now has been made known to all of us. Now we know this mystery. We know God's economy, and we are now enjoying His dispensing. The Triune God is dispensing Himself into us to be our life and to be our life supply. He is dispensing Himself into us as our food and our drink that we may live by Him. Is this not wonderful? This is much better than religion. We do not come together just to have a kind of religious worship service. But we gather together to enjoy the dispensing of the marvelous Triune God into our being. This is God's divine dispensing. God desires to dispense Himself. In the Lord's ministry we only care for

the divine dispensing of the Triune God Himself into His chosen people.

God's economy is according to His wisdom. According to His wisdom, God created the universe with man as the center. In God's wisdom, He became a man to live on this earth for thirty-three and a half years, to die on the cross to terminate the old creation, and to resurrect from the dead to germinate the new creation for the single purpose of dispensing Himself as the Triune God into us. It is in this way that God's multifarious wisdom is made known through the church (Eph. 3:10).

We are all here under God's wisdom. What multifarious wisdom it took on God's part to prepare everything so that He could dispense Himself into us. He prepared incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and an all-inclusive redemption that He might carry out His economy to dispense Himself into you and me. This is the gospel in its fullness. The gospel is not merely to save sinners from hell to heaven. The gospel involves the Triune God passing through creation, incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, and as the life-giving Spirit dispensing Himself with all that He is, with all that He has attained and obtained, into our being. To merely save sinners from hell to heaven is too small a gospel. God's gospel is to dispense the Triune God into you and me. This is the great gospel! We all need to praise and thank the Lord for the divine dispensing of the divine Trinity into sinners to make them the sons of God.

VIII. GOD'S WILL BEING GOD'S INTENTION TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT HE DESIRES FOR HIMSELF

God's will is God's intention to accomplish what He has purposed in eternity past and what He desires for Himself for eternity future. He purposed and He desires to have the church. This is His will and intention.

IX. THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL HAVING BEEN MADE KNOWN TO US BY REVELATION

Ephesians 1:9 says that God has made known to us the mystery of His will. To make known to us the mystery of His will is one item of God's wisdom and prudence. In eternity God planned a will. This will has been hidden in Him; hence, it was a mystery. In His wisdom and prudence He

has made this hidden mystery known to us through His revelation in Christ, that is, through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. It was the pleasure of God's heart to reveal to us the mystery of His will.

X. ACCORDING TO GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE

God's good pleasure is the desire of His heart, that is, to have the church, and God's revelation of His hidden will is according to this desire of His heart. This is according to His good pleasure.

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XI. GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE HAVING BEEN PURPOSED BY GOD

A. In Himself

God's good pleasure has been purposed by God in Himself. This means that God Himself is the initiation, origination, and sphere of His eternal purpose. God has a plan, a desire, and according to His plan, He has a purpose. The existence of the universe is according to God's purpose. Heaven, earth, millions of items, and the human race are all according to God's purposed desire. Eventually, all these things will issue in God's desire. In the universe there is a desire, God's desire. Because this desire has been purposed by God, no one and nothing can overthrow it. Everything that takes place on earth is for this purpose. We, the sons of God, in whom God's grace abounds, are the focal point of His purpose, and everything is working for us. God has purposed this desire in Himself. He did not take counsel with anyone else regarding it.

B. For an Administration

God's good pleasure is what He has purposed in Himself for an administration (v. 10). The entire universe will eventually be under one administration. The Greek word rendered "administration" is *oikonomia*, from which we get the English word economy. God has purposed to have an economy. All the kingdoms in the universe—the angelic kingdom, the demonic kingdom, the human kingdom, the animal kingdom, and the plant kingdom—are for this economy, this administration, and are moving toward it. For example, today's world situation, the center of which is the Middle East, is according to the Bible. Since the reformation of

the nation of Israel in 1948 and especially since the return of Jerusalem to Israel in 1967, the Middle East has become the center of international relations. This is altogether according to the Bible, and it is a sign that the universe is moving toward God's administration. Such an administration is what God has planned and purposed according to His desire. All the kingdoms will be under this unique administration, which is to head up all things in Christ.

At present, the universe is in a state of collapse. Instead of being headed up, it is a heap. The collapse was brought about through two rebellions, Satan's rebellion and Adam's rebellion. Before the creation of the human race, God made an archangel, who later became Satan, the head of all creatures. But that archangel rebelled against God. Then God created the human race and made Adam the head of all created things. According to Genesis 1, God put all things created by Him under Adam. This indicates that Adam was the head. Adam, however, was seduced to rebel against God. Thus, by the angelic rebellion and the human rebellion, the universe collapsed into a heap. This is the reason that today's human society and creation itself are such a mess. Everywhere there is nothing but rebellion. Even the mosquitoes are rebellious against man. This illustrates the fact that the universe is filled with the fighting caused by rebellion. Nevertheless, God has purposed to bring in His administration to head up all things in Christ.

At this point, we need to ask a question: Does the body support the head or does the head uphold the body? The answer is that the head upholds the body. This is proved by the fact that if a person's head is cut off, the body falls to the ground. Hence, the body is upheld by the head. In like manner, the church life is a life of being headed up. If we truly want to have a glorious church, we must be willing to be headed up. All around us, at school, at work, and in the government, we see nothing but a state of collapse; nothing is headed up. But in the proper church life we are being headed up. This heading up in the church life is the beginning of God's heading up of all things. Under Christ and through the church, God will head up all things in the universe. This is the mystery of God's will. Ultimately, the mystery of God's will in the universe is to head up all things in Christ.