
Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)

We Are More Than “Okay” (Part 2c)

Ephesians 1:9-12

9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

While I read for you verses 9-12, our specific text this morning is found simply in verse 10, ***with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.***

It is my prayer to impress upon you the stunning wonder of this one verse before us. In many respects, there is simply no other verse like it in all of Scripture concerning the matter it addresses. We are living in a time of fast and radical change in our culture and in morality. Believers find themselves in the midst of a cultural revolution that seeks to diminish and dismiss the biblical moorings of our society. We are, in effect, living in an Isaiah 5 world where the powers at be ***“call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter...[those]...who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!” (Isaiah 5:20-21).*** And perhaps, like the faithful during the time of Isaiah, we might ask, “What is God up to?”

And let me comment on this cultural revolution in which we have been plunged. There is a progression in the de-Christianizing of a culture and we see it right before our eyes. First, there is the intentional marginalizing and removing of the Bible from the public arena. This is what has been taking place intensely in both the culture and in the church for the past 30 years or so. Once the authority of the Bible has been marginalized and minimalized, the next step is to reverse morality – to call good evil and evil good; and so sins like that of homosexuality are part of this new morality, to be seen as “love” not as sin. This is followed by a third step, the preaching of a new tolerance; that all people, if they indeed are loving and compassionate people, must be accepting of the new morality. This is followed by a fourth step, the militant display of intolerance for anyone who does not capitulate to demands of the new morality. And so we find Christian businesses under attack for standing firm on the old morality; being called bigoted, homophobic and archaic in their thinking. This is followed by a fifth and final step; the outright persecution of those who dare to question the validity of the cultural revolution.

As I preach to you today, the Church finds herself on the edge of that fourth step about ready to transition into the fifth – facing the intolerance of those who preach tolerance to this new morality. And so, the persecution of the Church in the United States is ready to begin. And so we ask, what is God up to?

Job essentially asked this question in the midst of his trials. To be sure, Abraham and Sarah, as they were trying to figure out God's promise of an heir even in their old age considered such a question. No doubt, the children of Israel asked such a question as they were in harsh bondage under Pharaoh. And even the early church, as they endured the persecution of Paul, and later, the fiery trials thrust upon them by Rome surely asked the question, “What is God up to?” I would also suspect that each one of us here this morning have looked at some trial or

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circumstance in our lives; maybe good, maybe bad, and wondered in our spirits, "What is God up to?"

I submit to you that in the text before us is the very heart of God with respect to His intention concerning the Church and her experience of His grace. Before us is the very mind of God, His plan, the very matter to which God has, from the beginning of time, and even before time, with which He has concerned Himself. And just what is this grand, eternal plan of God? What is God up to? It is stated so plainly, so clearly by Paul in verse 10; namely that God would have all things, even the things we are currently experiencing, glorify the Lord Jesus Christ - ***with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.***

From this verse we learn that all things have been decreed by God to find their fulfillment, their very terminating point, in Christ. We see that all things are to be centered on Christ. The "administration" of God – the divine economy in which every living creature, every rock, every tree, every creeping crawling thing, every star in the heavens finds its place; every event and every moment is, by God's design, eventually to point to Christ. Like a magnifying glass taking multiple rays of the sun to focus all their brilliance and heat on one spot; so too are all things being moved to this one great terminating goal – to find their end in the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. And why should this be? Why is Christ to be such a focal point for all creation? Because, beloved, it is in Christ and Christ alone that God the Father can be known. As the Apostle John so aptly declared in John 1:18, ***"No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."***

My words are inadequate to express the depths and wonder of this supremely profound declaration of God's eternal purpose of grace in Christ toward us in the Church. I have found that the more one actually considers and meditates on this one truth; that all things are going to find their purpose and goal in Christ, the more one simply responds to God with jaw-dropping awe – that God could and does move everything; whether good or bad; whether seemingly pleasing or discouraging to us; to exalt His Son Jesus Christ. Every skinned knee; every broken bone; every tragic accident; every life-taking disease; every joy at the arrival of a new baby; every advance at work; every good and perfect thing; every conversion to Christ and even every rejection of Christ – it is all orchestrated by God who is bringing this grand cantata to its resounding climax – to reveal the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This morning, at best, all I am able to do is to provide you a sketch, the briefest of outlines by which to show you the infinite wisdom and insight of the mystery of God – the experiencing of the grace of God in saving us through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ on the cross, so that we might be to the praise and glory of His grace. The key to Ephesians 1:10 then is nothing short of a reminder; a reminder that all that God has done in the past; and all that God is doing in the present; and all that God is ever yet to do, is to move all things toward one great purpose - ***that is, the summing up of all things in Christ....***

As we have noted in our study of Ephesians 1, we are constantly being presented with great doctrines (or teachings) of the Scriptures. We have already seen divine election (4); divine predestination (5); divine adoption (5); divine grace (6); divine redemption (7); divine forgiveness (7); and divine illumination (8-9). Verse 10 does not disappoint us as it reveals to us what we will call the divine economy (10). As we consider verse 10 and see what God is up to, I wish to give

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you a definition; a description, and a destination of this divine economy and then consider what kind of impact this knowledge is to have in our daily lives.

I. The divine economy – a definition

with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

Paul begins revealing to us the blessing of God's divine economy (see v. 3) by first giving us a definition. God's divine economy is something that can be seen, it can be viewed, and it is defined here as **"an administration."** The KJV calls it "a dispensation." I have chosen to call it an economy and let me tell you why. The word "economy" is actually found in our text, translated here as **"administration"** the Greek word is *"oikonomia"* – from which we get our word "economy." The word *"oikonomia"* is made up of two words, *"oikos"* meaning "house" and *"nomos"* meaning "law or order." Putting the two words together, *"oikonomia"* – gives us the "law or order of the household" – "the management of a home." This "administration" is God's "stewardship." It is God's own management over His creation. It is His oversight of all that belongs to Him.

In Ephesians 3:2 Paul would use this same word, *"oikonomia"* in reference to the grace God had given him to be a minister of the gospel. We read, **"if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you..."** This is what it means to be called into the ministry – it is to be a manager and dispenser of the grace of God.

Coming back to Ephesians 1:10, the word **"administration"** speaks of all that the Triune God is doing in the world to accomplish His will in time. We might call this God's providence – His working through all things to accomplish His predetermined will. And peeking ahead to the end of our verse for a moment, we find that this **"administration"** – this economy and management of God extends to all things in both the heavens and in the earth. We are under God's universal care and management. And so, we can rightly ask the question, "What is God up to?" because He is the sovereign One; He is in charge and in control.

And in this economy, God the Father has seen fit to place all authority and power in His Son, our Redeemer and the true King of Kings. God the Father did this, according to Ephesians 1:20-22, ***when He raised [Jesus] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church...***

This is God's economy; we are living in the midst of it and we are to know that regardless of what we see in the culture; regardless of how dark, evil, sinister, anti-Christian, even as hopeless at times things seem; we are yet under the stewardship and management of our Lord Jesus Christ. All power in heaven and in earth has been given to the God-man, our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. And the goal of this **"administration"** is for the Lord Jesus to bring about the eternal purpose God in saving out of this fallen, sin-cursed, hell-destined world, those divinely chosen, predestinated, adopted, graced, redeemed, forgiven, and spiritually illuminated people **"to the praise of the glory of His grace."** This is the meaning of the word **"administration"** in our text. We are to **"view"** – to see and to know that God has everything under His control. What a blessing it is; to know that whatever may come to pass in this life, God is managing it all for our good and His glory. Next we see Paul give us a more focused description of this **"administration."**

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II. The divine economy – a description

with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

Paul further describes this **“administration”** saying that it is ***suitable to the fullness of the times***. What does this mean? One rule of Bible interpretation is to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Sometimes we have words that are used multiple times in the Bible, allowing us to get a clear picture of how a word is to be understood. Other times we only have a word used a few times. This phrase, ***“the fullness of the times”*** is only used one other time in the New Testament. Let us look at Galatians 4:4-5 where we find a similar statement; ***“4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”***

In the Galatians text something about this phrase, ***“the fullness of the time”*** is clear – it began with the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ – at His incarnation, when God became man, born of the Virgin Mary. Now, looking back at Ephesians 1:10, using this same phraseology, Paul is making something else clear, that while we know the ***“fullness of the time”*** began at the birth of Christ, it covers a time period up until another great event takes place, what Paul describes as ***“the summing up of all things in Christ..”*** – something that has not taken place yet. Therefore, we can rightly conclude that ***“the fullness of the times”*** began with the first advent of Christ, continues now in this current age of grace, what we might call the gospel or church age, and that it will culminate, terminate, and accomplish its goal at the second advent of Christ where He will be exalted and known by all as the great King with every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that Jesus is Lord to the glory and praise of God the Father (Philippians 2:11).

Turn with me to Romans 11:25-29 where we see again that one of the goals of this current ***“administration”*** – or economy of God is to secure the salvation of His people. We read, ***25 For I do not want you, brethren, [the Church] to be uninformed of this mystery — so that you [the Church] will not be wise in your own estimation — that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.” 27 “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.” 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they [Israel] are enemies for your sake [the Church], but from the standpoint of God's choice they [Israel] are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.***

Under Christ's stewardship, Christ is gathering to Himself people from every tongue, every tribe and every nation to be the recipients of God's grace. Christ is accomplishing all the will and purpose of God in providence, and all this will culminate in the complete salvation of all God's elect with the final gathering together of all things in Christ. Such an event was so wondrous and so glorious in Paul's mind that he broke out in a doxological hymn at the end of Romans. Look at Romans 11:33-36, ***33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.***

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This is Paul's description of what God is up to. The great hand of providence, which revealed itself most gloriously with the first coming of Christ, has been working and moving all things to a most wondrous goal. This brings us to our third point, the destination or goal of God's economy.

III. The divine economy – a destination

with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

No one likes to play a game where there are little or no rules and in which the goal of the game is unknown. If we as believers were told that we were saved, but we did not know what we were saved from; or if we were told that we were saved, but being saved could easily result in trials, hostilities and persecution, but there was no hope of restitution or life, what would be the point? But God has told us and continually shows us what we were saved from as well as giving up a living hope, that one day we will experience the fullness of God, the wonder of Heaven where His Son and our Lord Jesus Christ dwells.

Our text tells us what the goal of God is. Interestingly enough, the goal of God is not simply our salvation, ***“to the praise of the glory of His grace”*** – but is also that everything that takes place finds its purpose in the person of Christ. While we tend to think of our salvation finding its fullness in Christ, which is indeed true, the punishment and termination of sin “in Christ” is also in view here.

One of the ideas behind this phrase, ***the summing up of all things in Christ***, is that of ***“gathering together again.”*** We could translate this verse, ***“that is, the reuniting, the restoring, the gathering together again of all things in Christ.”*** This is very telling as it reminds us that there was a time when all things were indeed “one” – united under the will and Word of God. In the beginning, all the angels of God were one; but they were divided by the attempted coop of Satan. In the beginning, Adam and Eve were one with God, yet sin divided the creatures from their Creator. In the beginning, all creation was one with Christ the Creator. Oh the devastating effects of sin, not only on humanity, but upon all creation!

It is “sin” – our willful missing the mark of God's word and ways that separates not only man from God, but also man from man. Humanity was created to be one; but then sin entered into the world through Adam and ever since that moment, humanity has been divided. We are not only divided from God, but we divide ourselves by race, by face and by place. The more we try to unite fallen humanity through laws, treaties, and even through cries of compassion, the more we actually divide ourselves.

After the Fall, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Soon after the Flood, mankind was scattered over the face of the earth and since that time, divisions and scatterings have constantly multiplied. There has yet to be a culture, a society, a civilization that has ever stopped, or even slowed the divisions.

With the election of Barak Obama, many people were hoping that the United States' first black president would bring about the end of “racial” tensions. And yet, truth be told, there is more racial division in the United States today than ever in our life time. The goal of “racial harmony” is good. It would be a blessing for humanity to live together as one harmonious race! The problem is that such a goal is not attainable by human effort. To seek peace and goodwill among men without the Prince of Peace is like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall. I do not saying we

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ought not to seek peace with all men, for Romans 12:18 command us, ***“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”*** But the truth is, until Jesus returns, a full and comprehensive peace and oneness among humanity is unattainable. All of human history and experience verifies this fact. However, our text tells us that part of God's plan, the goal of His administration, is the summing up, the gathering together again of all things in Christ. It will happen! This is part of the reason for the Millennial Kingdom – the thousand year reign of Christ on the earth, to gather together again under Christ, the Second Adam, what the First Adam divided.

This phrase ***“the summing up of all things”*** is comprehensive in its meaning. At its root, “summing up” speaks of “recapitulation,” or “summarization.” For example, sometimes in preaching I will summarize a message by going over the main points of it. It can also speak of a mathematical sum, the total of things added up together. Thinking of it mathematically, the summing up of all things in Christ would speak of all the blessing and promises of God; all the types, shadows and sacrifices of the Law; all the prophecies of the Old Testament; and even all the revelation of God in Holy Scriptures as adding up to, being summed up in Christ, who is all in all!

The ***“summing up of all things”*** could also mean *“reduced to one.”* How does this apply? According to God's divine economy, when all is said and done, when everything that was to happen has happened, then it will be said and known that ***“Christ is All, in all!”*** Everything shall be reduced to this – that Christ is everything, so that He might come to have first place in everything! Can it really work like this? Well, let's see...

- ✓ What is grace, but Christ?
- ✓ What is redemption, but Christ?
- ✓ What is wisdom and salvation, but Christ? (1 Corinthians 1:30)
- ✓ What is heaven, but Christ?
- ✓ What is the Church, but Christ?
- ✓ What is the glory of God, but Christ?
- ✓ What is the will of God, but Christ?
- ✓ What is the visible image of God, but Christ? — (Colossians 2:9-10)

Listen to how Paul links all of this to Christ in Colossians 2:9-10 where we read, ***9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority...”*** Paul's declaration in Ephesians 1:10 of all things being summed up in Christ primarily speaks of God's gathering together of all of His elect in Christ. The fact is, our God according to the abounding wisdom and insight of His grace, has scattered His elect across the face of all the earth as an expression of His wrath against sin, so that He might, in a display of His great mercy, gather them all together as one in Christ, for the express purpose of being to the eternal praise and glory of His own great name. This truth of God scattering His people because of sin so that He can gather them again to His glory is found throughout the Scriptures.

In Deuteronomy 30:3, after telling Israel they will rebel, disobey and be displaced because of their sin against God, then we read, ***“then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and***

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have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you." We see it in the New Testament as well.

Let us look at John 11:49-52. Here, the Jews are concerned about what people believing in Jesus might mean to the Jewish nation. We read, **"49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." 51 Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."** This is *the summing up of all things in Christ.*

When Jesus died on the cross for the sins of His people, it was all part of this **"fullness of the times"** as God doing what was necessary to gather together all His elect as one in Christ. God the Father was reconciling the world of His elect to Himself in Christ, no longer imputing their trespasses against us, but rather imputing all our sin, charging all of our sin to His own beloved Son who was made sin for us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Here is how the Scripture declares this in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, **17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

As Jesus died on the cross, it was so that all of God's elect would be brought together again before His holy law and justice under one Head, the Lord Jesus. All of the sins of God's chosen were gathered together in Christ, were placed upon Christ, to be punished in Christ to the full satisfaction of God's justice, and then put away by Christ, in whom **we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7).**

This is what Christ is summing up; but it will have its ultimate goal when our blessed Savior comes again in glory. And what will He do when He comes again? Among many things, we are told that Jesus will gather His own together in resurrection glory. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1 Paul calls this, **"our gathering together to Him."** Think about that beloved! Let these five words flood your hearts with joy... **"our gathering together to Him"** What a fellowship; what a gathering; what a summing up that will be!

And when will this gathering take place? When Christ returns; when "the fullness of the times" has come to an end. And just as our Lord Jesus ascended to heaven in the clouds; He will return again in the clouds of heaven. Visibly, in His gloriously resurrected body, Jesus will return and gather His people. Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Here we read about this gathering of God's people, **13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord,**

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will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

This is the summing up of the saints in Christ. And notice something there in verse 18, something very practical. We are to be speaking about and encouraging one another with these words; that Christ is going to sum up all things to Himself. This 1 Thessalonians passage as well as our Ephesians 1 text speaks specifically of the summing up, the gathering together of the saints in salvation; but the end of Ephesians 1:10 reminds us that this summing up of all things is not limited to our salvation. Everything that has been divided and alienated from God, whether things in heaven or things in earth, will find their fulfillment in Christ.

So then, we have a definition of God's administration – it is His economy, His management of all things to accomplish His purposes in Christ. We have a description of God's economy, that it is in accordance with God's time. We saw that it began with Christ's birth, includes the preaching of the gospel in the Church age and will end with the return of Christ. At the return of Christ, we will see the destination or goal of all things as Christ rewards His own, punishes the wicked, and restores to unity all that sin had divided.

Let us encourage one another with such words. Let us not shrink away in shame at the coming of our Lord Jesus; but let us be busy with our Father's business. Let us be at work, filling our minds with the Word of God so that the Word of Christ may richly dwell within us. Let us be prayerful, casting all our anxieties on Him knowing He cares for us. Let us be bold and intention, making disciples (followers/learners) of Jesus, teaching other to follow the commands and ways of Jesus. Who are you meeting with? Who are you encouraging regularly in the things of the Lord? You see, whatever else God may be up to...I know that this is one thing He is up to...reaching the lost with the good news that Jesus saves through the words and lives of His people. Let us be that people to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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Our Standing With God Because of the Son
April 12, 2015***