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God's Eternal Purpose and the Overcomers (2)

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Colossians 1: 9 – 20

*For this reason we also, from the day we heard of your faith and love, do not cease praying and asking for you, to the end that ye may be filled with the full knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so as to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by the true knowledge of God; strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory unto all endurance and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light, who has delivered us from the authority of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love: in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins; who is image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation; because by Him were created all things, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or authorities: all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all, and all things subsist together by Him. And He is the head of the body, the assembly; who is the beginning, firstborn from among the dead, that He might have the first place in all things: for in Him all the fullness [of the Godhead] was pleased to dwell and by Him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of His cross—by Him, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens.*

Hebrews 1: 1 – 4

*God having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly to the fathers in the prophets, at the end of these days has spoken to us in the person of the Son, whom He has established heir of all*

*things, by whom also He made the worlds; who being the effulgence of His glory and the expression of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, having made by Himself the purification of sins, set Himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high, taking a place by so much better than the angels, as He inherits a name more excellent than they.*

2: 8 – 10

*But now we see not yet all things subject to Him, but we see Jesus, who was made a little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; so that by the grace of God He should taste death for everything.*

Dear heavenly Father, we gather together this day in the name of Thy beloved Son. We are here to hear what Thou have to say to us. We have read Thy words and now we ask Thy Holy Spirit to quicken Thy words to our hearts. May it please Thee to reveal Thy Son in us so we may be so attracted by Him as to surrender our life to Him and that Thou may be glorified. We ask in the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The apostle Paul was in prison in Rome. He was visited by his coworker Epaphras. And Epaphras brought him the news of the people in the church in Colossae. Now the apostle Paul himself has never been to Colossae. But he was in Ephesus for three years. But while he was in Ephesus, God used him to spread the good news around Asia Minor. All had heard the gospel in the Roman province of Asia. And Colossae was in the Roman province in Asia. Paul had never been to that place, but evidently Epaphras came to the Lord through Paul. So indirectly through Epaphras the church was raised up. It had a very good beginning because they believed in the Lord Jesus and they loved all the saints. And because of the hope, they endured all sufferings. It was as if they would have a very bright future. But unfortunately, something happened and Epaphras came to

Paul and brought the news to him. And when Paul heard of such things, he was so burdened of their conditions that he prayed unceasingly for them. Now Paul did not pray just a general prayer. He prayed with burden and he prayed especially for them. He knew what they needed and he asked God to give them what they needed. So in verse 9 he said, 'For this reason we also, from the day we heard of your faith and love, do not cease praying and asking for you, to the end that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding'. 'To the end', that is to say, that his prayer has a specific motive. What did he pray for the Colossian saints? He prayed that they 'may be filled with the full knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding'. In other words, he prayed they might be filled with the full knowledge of God's will. And God's will is nothing but God's eternal purpose. And they were to be filled in such a way that it would be in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. In other words, not only that they might know the full will of God, but they might know it with wisdom. And we know there is a difference between wisdom and knowledge. Knowledge is something that you know. But wisdom is something that you experience and you can apply. So the eternal purpose of God is to be known in all wisdom. And not only that we know about it, but we really experience it. And we find that it is applicable in our daily life. Spiritual understanding is that we may understand it in our spirit and not only something we understand it in our mind. If we understand something with our mind, it will be just theory. But if we understand it in our spirit, then we really feel it. So, dear brother and sister, God's eternal purpose is something that we must know, that we must experience and that we can apply. It is not just something that we know in our mind but it is something that we must know in our spirit. The Holy Spirit will reveal it in our spirit. Just like Paul said, 'it pleases God to reveal His Son in me'.

Now if we know God's eternal purpose in such a way, then what will happen to us? It said 'so as to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing'. It means that this knowledge will affect our

walk on earth. And that we may walk worthily of the Lord. I believe that we all desire to walk worthily of our Lord. How can we please Him in all things? This is a secret. If you really know God's eternal purpose, then you will find that it will affect your walk. It will enable you to walk worthy of the Lord in all well-pleasing. And then we will be bearing fruits in every good work. You may bear fruit not only in your life, bearing the fruit of the character of our Lord, Jesus. The fruit of the spirit which is the character of Christ will come forth in our life. We will bear fruit in our labor because all that you labor is according to God's will and growing by the true knowledge of God.

We want to grow spiritually. We often ask the question how I can grow. There are many books that tell us how to grow in the Lord. But unfortunately, I did not find any book telling us how to grow according to the eternal purpose of God. If we know God's eternal purpose, then we will grow spiritually. And we will be strengthened with all power that we may endure sufferings with joy. And we will also be giving thanks to our Father. I think we know how to murmur. If we know God's eternal purpose, then we will know how to give thanks to the Father in all things. And it will also make us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light.

When we hear about God's eternal purpose what is our reaction? I suppose our reaction is that it is very high and very deep. It is something for us to contemplate about; something that is floating in the air. It really does not touch the earth and it does not affect our life. It is a theological discussion. It is not practical. When we first mention that the theme is the eternal purpose of God, maybe that is how you think of it. It is good to talk about and to think about. But this is abstract and has nothing to do with my spiritual life. What I want to say is this: God's eternal purpose has everything to do with your eternal life and your spiritual life. Without knowing God's eternal purpose, your spiritual life will be frustrated. Your life has to come into one with God's eternal purpose. God's eternal purpose must control your whole being. Then you will find your life

meaningful. And your life will line up with God's will. Naturally it is difficult. And that is the reason why Paul had to pray. It is something that no human being can do. The Holy Spirit has to impress this in your heart. So as we go on, may we have a prayer within that the Lord will really give us the full knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

What was the trouble in the church in Colossae? They had such a good beginning. But something happened. And so far, as we understand, someone came into their midst and begin to entice them with philosophy and vain things. They were led away from Christ. They were led into something other than Christ. These Colossians believers really had a heart for God. They wanted to grow. They wanted to be spiritual. Many God's people are content to be just saved. I remember someone said that if my two legs are within the door of heaven, I am satisfied. But the Colossians saints were better. They were not only saved, but they really wanted to grow in the Lord. They wanted fullness. They were not contented to remain just as they were. Someone came in and told them there was a shortcut that they could take. Now if only you would do this and do that, if only you would believe this and believe that, then you would get into fullness. The Colossians heresy was a strange combination. It combined heathen Gnosticism and Jewish ritualism. Now these two things are opposite. If you are really occupied with gnostic, that is trying to know the universe, and if you are only involved with philosophy, then you are floating in the air. You will not touch the earth. But if you were occupied with ritualism, then it is very worldly. Everything is visible, tangible and touchable. So these two things are opposite. But strangely it is a combination. And it is not only true in those days but also true today. In other words, if you want to find fullness, believing in the Lord Jesus is not enough. You have to keep certain such dates and such festivals, and you cannot touch or eat certain things. And at the same time, you need to be initiated into a secret. You need to know how the whole universe exists and how it expresses all different degrees of animation of God. If you can grasp such knowledge and you can keep certain rituals then you

are full. That is fullness. Brothers and sisters, you find that they are led into the teachings of man and elements of the world. And they were led away from Christ.

So the apostle Paul in writing this letter to them, wanted to correct them. He tried to show them that all fullness is in Christ because all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily. And they were complete or perfect in Him. This is the purpose of God because God's eternal purpose is His Son. God has put everything He has into His Son. No one can figure out the fullness of the Godhead. God is a mystery, the greatest mystery in the universe. How full is God? How full is His love? How full is His righteousness? How full is His holiness? How full is His power? How full is His purity? How full is His wisdom? No one can figure out God. No one can figure out His fullness. And yet all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in the Son, in Christ bodily. That is to say, everything that is of God everything that God is, is all in the son. Aside from the Son God has nothing. And God has nothing to give. He put everything in His Son. If we have His Son, we have all the fullness.

I like to tell a story. Once upon a time, there was a rich man. He had lots of land, cows and sheep. He had many slaves and buildings. He had only one son. He sent his son abroad to study. While his son was abroad he suddenly got very sick. He figured he would die before his son would arrive. So he wanted to write a will. He consulted a lawyer and wrote a will. When the son arrived, he already passed away. After the funeral, the lawyer gathered the household because he wanted to read the will. The will was very simple. There was only one sentence. 'I deed all my properties to my steward but I allow my son to choose one thing among all'. When the son heard that, his face fell. How could he give everything to my steward and allowed me to choose only one thing? If I choose the house, I lost the field. If I choose the ox, I lost the sheep. Something was terribly wrong. Then the lawyer whispered into his ear. His face shone. He said 'I respect my father. So I will honor his will. I will choose one among his many properties. I choose the

steward'. Was not that wise? He got everything. His father was afraid he had so much he could not list everything. He was afraid his son might lose something. But the steward controlled everything. So the son got everything.

Now our heavenly father is something like this. He loves us so much. So He put everything in His Son and then he said choose My Son. If you have My Son, you have everything. All the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies have been given to us in Christ Jesus. So it is God's will that we behold the Son; that we choose the Son. It is His will that we kept with the Son and not to be led away from Christ. And that is Colossians.

So let us have a closer look at the Son. Colossians 1:15 said 'who is image of the invisible God'. Our God is invisible because He is a spirit. We cannot see Him. But it does not mean because He is invisible therefore we cannot see Him. There is a way to see the invisible. There is a way that the invisible become visible. God Himself is invisible. But His Son is the image of the invisible God. Image in the scripture means representation and manifestation. Our Lord Jesus is the perfect representation and complete manifestation of the invisible God. In John 1, it said '*no one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared Him*'. Nobody has seen God, and yet the one who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him to us. Through our Lord Jesus we know our Father. In John 14, during the last evening when our Lord had his last discourse with his disciples, Phillip asked Him, 'Lord, show us the Father and it suffices us'. And how our Lord Jesus grieved. He said, 'you have been so long with me and you still ask to see the Father? Do you not know seeing me is seeing the Father? Do you not know I am in the Father and the Father is in Me'? So far as to the relationship with the Father is concerned, our Lord is the exact image of the invisible God. Image is a derived likeness. Image is not a likeness that you put on. That will be superficial. Image is a derived likeness; that is, a likeness that comes from within. Therefore, image has all the essence of the Father. It is not

something from the outside. It is derived. So it is the same. And the image in the original also means a copy. Just like the image of a king on a coin. You remember one day the Pharisees came and the Lord asked whose image that was. It was the image of Caesar. So the Lord said 'give the things of Caesar to Caesar and the things of God to God'. Now that was image. In other words, it was just like the king. Our Lord is the perfect representation and manifestation of God. In the Old Testament, you find the patriarchs, the prophets and the kings and the priests. In a very small way, they represented and manifested something of God. But the Son is the full representation and manifestation of the Father. He is God. He is one with God. He subsists in the form of God. And He is equal to God which is something not to be grasped at. This is our Lord. So we need to see our Lord as such. He is God. And everything of God is in Him. How much we need to worship Him. How much we need to come to Him in all things and find our all in Him.

As to His relationship with creation, He is the firstborn of all creation. This verse has caused lots of problems. It is William Barkley who said this. Barkley was a liberal. He said this verse in English caused lots of problems because one may think that Christ is the first created. But he said, in Hebrews and in Greek, it is not so. In Hebrews, it has very little to do with time; it is a title of honor. And he quoted Exodus 4:22. It is the title of the Messiah. And he also quoted Psalms 89:27. And he said firstborn is priority. And Bishop Lightford said firstborn has two meanings: priority and sovereignty. You know brothers and sisters, ordinarily when we said he is the firstborn, we think in term of time. So when we said firstborn of all creation we would think he was created first. But firstborn has a very special meaning. It does not mean he is born in time. It means he is superior and he has sovereignty. In Exodus 4:22 God sent Moses to Pharaoh and told him that 'Israel is My son and My firstborn, let My people go'. So far as time is concerned, Israel is not the first nation formed on earth. Edom had kingdom and kings before Israel became a kingdom. And of course, Egypt and Babylon were ahead of Israel. Israel at that time was not a

nation yet. But God said 'Israel is My son, My firstborn'. It pleased God to choose Israel and put it in a superior position. And Psalm 89 is a messianic song and of course it refers to David. And David symbolized Christ the messiah. And God said 'you are My son, My first-born son'; the highest of the nations. Brothers and sisters, again you see David was not the first king in Israel. Saul was the first king. And David was a later king than many kings in the world. But God made him the firstborn; firstborn among the kings of the nations. So it means priority and sovereignty. So far as to the relationship of our Lord to creation is concerned, He is not created. He created all things. And if you read on, it is very clear because He is before all things. So He does not belong to them. So what does the firstborn of all creations means? It is being explained as all things were created in Him. When the translators translated Greek into English, they said 'because by Him were created all things'. The word 'by' in Hebrew means 'in'. But it did not make sense to the translators. How can the creation 'be created in Christ'? The universe is so big. How can it be created in Him? So they used 'by'. Actually, it is in Him because He is the designer, the architect of all things. You can see the personality of an architect expressed in the building he designed and built. If it is a good building, then it is a living building because it expresses the character of the architect. The building is in the mind of the architect and of course his mind is controlled by his character. If he is a very artistic person, he will design a very artistic building because the building comes out of him and is conceived in him. It expresses his personality. If the architect is a practical one, then he will design one that is very practical. So you find all things, things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible are created in Him. The angels are invisible. Men are visible. Some things are invisible. Some things are visible whether they are principalities, authorities or power or dominion. They all express His character. They all reflect His glory. That is the reason why when you look at the universe, you can see the deity and wisdom of God. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork. Everything is

created in Him. And of course, you and me too. Not only created in Him but also by Him. He is the engineer. He is not only the architect who designs; he is also the engineer who built. When God created the universe as we found in the Old Testament, He was the engineer. He Himself created all these. All these were created by Him and outside of Him nothing was created. And also all these were created for Him. That is He is the owner of all things. In other words, He is the heir of all things. All the creation was created for Him. He is the goal of creation. He is before all things and all things subsist in Him. All things have their beginnings in Him and all things have their continuation in Him. He holds all things together by the word of His power. The universe is not chaotic because our Lord Jesus holds all these together. What a Christ He is. This is His relationship with creation.

Not only is Christ the beginning, the continuation and the end of creation, but so far as the new creation is concerned, He is the head of the body which is the church. The church is a new creation and it is created in Him. The church is His body. He is the head. Everything of the church comes out from Him and everything in the church is under Him and everything in the church is to grow up in Him. The head is the seat of power and authority. The head is the center of unity. The head is the center of control and supply. The head is everything to the body. Brothers and sisters, and that is His relationship with the church. Do not try to make it upside down. Put the body up and head down. Head is always at the top and the body is always under that. We need to hold fast to the head. If we hold fast to the head, all the members of the body will be united together and will minister one to another. He is the beginning. The church has its beginning in Christ because of His death and resurrection. Our Lord Jesus is the head of the universe because He is the creator. Our Lord Jesus is the head of the church because He loves the church and gave Himself for the church.

He is the firstborn from among the dead. In the Old Testament and New Testament times we have records of people whom He raised from the dead. So how can He be the firstborn from among the dead because time wise He was not the first one to be raised from the dead? But He is the firstborn from among the dead. Why? It is because in His resurrection, He was the first one to be resurrected. He entered into death, robbed death of its power and He came out in resurrection. He was buried in His physical, crucified, mutilated body, a weak mortal body but when He rose from the dead, He is immortal and He is spiritual. Brothers and sisters, He is the firstborn from among the dead. Christ rose first and then those who believe in Him will have their resurrection after Him. He is the firstborn. Not only was He the first one who really resurrected but because of His resurrection, we also can be raised from the dead. So far as new creation is concerned, He is everything. To God He is everything. To the old creation He is everything. To the new creation He is everything. God wants Him to have the first place in all things. First place in the scripture does not mean He is first and you are second. It means He is the first, the last and all in between. He is all and in all. This is God's purpose. God put Himself all in the Son and He made his Son all to everything. Brothers and sisters, this is our Lord. How we need to submit ourselves completely to Him. Do not try to find anything outside of Him. But find your all in Him. The church is the body, the fullness of Him who fills all and in all. And the same thing is true now to each individual. So in the Colossians, you found Paul said I want to present every one of you perfect and in Christ; that in everything you will find your all in Christ because this is the will of God.

Then you will find that He reconciled all things to Himself. Brothers and sisters, God's eternal purpose is purposed before the foundation of the world. And His will/purpose never changes. He may change His way of doing things. That is why in the Old Testament you find that God repented. On the other hand you find in the bible that said you will think how God can repent

because God is not a man. And yet in places you find God repented. He never repents of His purpose. He can repent of His ways and means of doing things. You find that God's purpose is set; that His son should have the first place in all things. Everything will find its meaning in His Son and everything will reflect the glory of His Son. But that purpose has been challenged.

In the first world, the highest of God's creation were the angels and among the angels there was one archangel whose name is Lucifer, the brilliant star. Very possibly, he was the masterpiece of God's creation at that time. Ezekiel 28 is a prophecy. God used the king of Tyre as a kind of type. So it was a description of the angel because the description that followed did not fit any human. He was created almost perfect. God gave him power, gifts, and position. He was an anointed cherub that covered God's throne. And he was supposed to lead all the angels in worship. When he was created, he was perfect. But gradually something happened to him. In Isaiah 14:12 -15 you find this angel began to think of himself instead of fixing his eyes upon God. You know, the cherubs over the mercy seat set their eyes upon the mercy seat. But this archangel began to turn to notice himself and a pride began to rise in him. 'I want to be equal with God. I am not contented to be under God'. As a matter of fact, he wanted to take the place of God's Son. And then you find unrighteousness in his doing. He challenged God's eternal purpose and because of this, he was punished. He was cast down from heaven. And one third of the angels followed him. And the dominion that God gave them to rule came into ruins.

God is jealous for His Son. Anyone who challenges God's eternal purpose, God will not allow it. And that is probably the reason why the earth that we inhabited was once covered with water and darkness. We do not know how long this continued on. But God's purpose cannot be defeated. What he decided He will complete.

And we came to Genesis 1. In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. But somehow the earth entered into ruins and emptiness. Today we believe it was because of the rebellion of the

archangel. The archangel turned himself into Satan, the adversary of God. But God's purpose cannot be defeated. So He used six days to prepare the ruinous earth to make it habitable. And on the sixth day He created man. He created man according to His image and after His likeness.

When He created man He has something in mind. It is related to His eternal purpose. It is as if Satan has delayed God's eternal purpose. How will God redeem His eternal purpose? Here is the wisdom of God. He would create man a little inferior than the angels and He would use the inferior to defeat the superior. For God to defeat Satan is nothing. But God will use man, inferior to the angels to defeat the challenge. That is the glory of God. So He created man and He gave this earth to man that man will subdue it and bring it back to the feet of the Lord. But unfortunately, man rebelled. Our forefather ate the forbidden fruit. They would rather choose to develop themselves to be independent of God. They wanted to take the place of God's Son. But thank God, even though the man He created failed, He will still use man to redeem the situation. So He sent His beloved Son to this world. The word became flesh, tabernacled among men, full of grace and truth. He declared the Father to man. How much the Son loved us and at last He offered Himself as a sacrifice. Through the blood on the cross, He reconciled all things back to His fullness. The work of reconciliation was done by Christ and Christ alone. It is not God reconciled to us. It is we who are reconciled to God. And the offended God is the one who provided the means of reconciliation. That is the love of God; even gave His only Son for us. Not only for us but for all. And because of the blood on the cross, all things are being reconciled back to God. And this reconciliation brought all things back to God's original purpose. All things will be subjected to Christ. And Christ will be the first place. But Hebrews tells us that we have not seen all things subjected to Him. But we see Jesus who was made a little inferior to angels suffered. And because of what He had done, He will lead many sons into glory. He as the son of man, as the second man, and those who were redeemed by Him began to take up His character and they are the

overcomers in the church. And eventually he will bring all things back into fullness. Today the whole creation is groaning because they are under corruption and emptiness. It is not something they want. It is man who put them into such conditions. But one day there will be the manifestation of the Son of God. Christ the firstborn will lead many sons into glory. The whole universe will be restituted and all things will be under Christ's feet. God's purpose will be fulfilled; fulfilled in Christ and we find our fulfillment in Christ.

Our heavenly Father, we bow before Thee, recognizing Thy love, recognizing that Thy purpose will not be defeated. We pray that by Thy grace, we may be part of this purpose and that Christ may be all and in all because He is worthy. We ask in Thy precious name, amen.