

The Purpose of the Eons

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Ephesians 3:1-12

1 On this behalf I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you, the nations --
2 since you surely hear of the administration of the grace of God that is given to me for you,
3 for by revelation the secret is made known to me (according as I write before, in brief,
4 by which you who are reading are able to apprehend my understanding in the secret of the Christ,
5 which, in other generations, is not made known to the sons of humanity as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets): in spirit
6 the nations are to be joint enjoyers of an allotment, and a joint body, and joint partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the evangel
7 of which I became the dispenser, in accord with the gratuity of the grace of God, which is granted to me in accord with His powerful operation.
8 To me, less than the least of all saints, was granted this grace: to bring the evangel of the untraceable riches of Christ to the nations,
9 and to enlighten all as to what is the administration of the secret, which has been concealed from the eons in God, Who creates all,
10 that now may be made known to the sovereignties and the authorities among the celestials, through the ecclesia, the multifarious wisdom of God,
11 in accord with **the purpose of the eons**, which He makes in Christ Jesus, our Lord;
12 in Whom we have boldness and access with confidence, through His faith. --

Now when a word or a phrase occurs only once in the whole of the scriptures, we should take particular notice of it and also of the context of which it occurs. And such a phrase is "The purpose of the eons". This occurs only once in the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians the passage that was read to us (above), and this is very significant. What we know, do we not, that the epistles to the Ephesians is one of three letters, the others being Philipians and Colossians, letters which contain the highest revelation ever made by God to man. These letters, and Ephesians in particular, contain the greatest blessings that God has ever showered on any part of His creation. They contain details of the highest glory, rampant to God's tongue, in that He, in these letters, is seen to be head over all. And they contain secrets concerning Christ and His ecclesia, that ecclesia which is His body, and to which you and I are privileged to form a part. Now it is in this context that the phrase "The purpose of the eons" occurs.

The Purpose of the Eons

The Authorized version (KJV) has "The eternal purpose". But if this purpose were eternal, it could never come to fruition. It could never have a consummation. It could never achieve its goal. No, it is "The purpose of the Eons" or as some versions have it, "The purpose of the Ages". You can use the word age instead of eon, if you prefer, but eon, I think anyway, is to be preferred partly because it has a useful adjective, eonian, instead of the rather cumbersome, age lasting, and also because the word, age, has become associated with quite a number of unscriptural expressions, like the "stone age", the "iron age", and others. Eon is a pure word. It is an accurate translation of the Greek "aion".

Now the phrase, "The purpose of the eons", tells us quite a number of things, even without looking at its context. First of all, it is "the" purpose, not "a" purpose. There is only one purpose which can be described as "The purpose of the eons". The word "the" precludes any thoughts of a second purpose or of an opposing purpose. Secondly it is associated with, and connected to the eons, what ever they may be. We should never think of the "purpose" without thinking of the eons. And that is why a study of the eons is so important and yet it is so greatly neglected by believers in general. Thirdly, the "purpose" encompasses all the eons, however few or many there may be. Its conception is at the beginning of the eons and its fulfillment is at the consummation of the eons. And fourthly it is contained within the eons. It does not over fill them. There is no part of this purpose which is outside of the eons. It is very literally and very truly the purpose of the eons.

What then is an eon? Briefly it is a long indefinite period of time. We may have no real idea of its length, or we

may have a fairly good idea. But however indefinite its length may be, each eon has a beginning and each eon has an end. And all the eons together have both a beginning and an end. Their beginning may be in the dim and distant past, almost beyond human cant, and certainly beyond human existence; but it was there at some point defined by God. And their end may be, in the distant future, far beyond the limit of human speculation. But again, the consummation of the eons is a point well defined by God. And at exactly the right time it will come to pass. And every time the clock goes tick tock, so another second of the eons is being ticked away. And we are that much farther from the beginning and that much nearer to the consummation.

It is the epistle to the Ephesians again, which gives us a guide to the definition of an eon, when it uses the phrase, the eon of this world, in Ephesians 2 and verse 2. The Authorized version completely loses the significance of this phrase when it renders it, "the course of this world". The word which is translated "course" is our friend "aion", and the phrase is therefore "eon of this world" as the Concordant version has it. And so we have a clear link between eon and world.

Now the word "world", is the Greek "cosmos" meaning order of things, order of society. It comes through into English, but our word "cosmos" means an ordered system, or just order, as opposed to chaos. So that each eon is a period of ordered systems, and each eon, except the last, terminates in a chaos or disruption. Which brings that ordered system to an end, to be followed by a new and a different ordered system in the following eon. The last eon ends in a different way to the rest. It ends in a straight forward and peaceful and orderly handing over of a reconciled universe to God. That God may be All in all.

We have heard that each eon, except the last, ends in chaos or destruction. Compared to the length of the eon, this period of chaos or destruction is sudden and short. But the seeds that make this destruction inevitable are planted early in each eon, and are evident all down the eon. So that the culmination should really come as no surprise.

Even the millennial reign of Christ which comprises most is not all of the next eon. Even this does not eradicate the seeds of disobedience, as so many believers seem to think. Christ, though reigning in righteousness, needs to rule with a rod of iron, with an iron club, and as soon as He relinquishes His authority, and Satan is loosed for a little time, rebellion on a large scale breaks out, showing that sinful tendency's are only suppressed, and not eradicated by Messiah's rule.

The last eon of all is different from the preceding ones. For with the creation of a new heavens and a new earth it is an eon in which the seeds of righteousness are sewn from the beginning and there is nothing to mar the ending.

Revelation 21:1-5 reads: (1) And I perceived a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth pass away, and the sea is no more. (2) And I perceived the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I hear a loud voice out of the throne saying, "Lo! the tabernacle of God is with mankind, and He will be tabernacling with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them. (4) And He will be brushing away every tear from their eyes. And death will be no more, nor mourning, nor clamor, nor misery; they will be no more, for the former things passed away." (5) And He Who is sitting on the throne said, "Lo! New am I making all!" And He is saying, "Write, for these sayings are faithful and true."

Let us now ask ourselves one further question: "How many eons are there?" Again it is in the epistle to the Ephesians that we find the answer. We have already noted the phrase "The eons of this world" Ephesians 2 and verse 2. This is the eon described in Galatians 1:4 as the present wicked eon. And in 1 Timothy 6:17, and 2 Timothy 4:10, and Titus 2:12 as the current eon. So that makes one, the one in which we now live. Now in the passage that was read for us: Ephesians 3, we have in verses 9 and 10 a reference to a secret that was concealed from the eons, (plural) in God, what is now, that is in this present eon, being made known. We are not concerned at the moment to see what that secret is, but we are merely showing that as it was concealed from the eons (plural), there must have been at least 2 eons before the present one. And in the previous chapter of Ephesians, chapter 2 and verse 7 Paul speaks of eons (plural) to come when he says that in the on coming eons He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. So there must be at least 2 eons after the present one. Now, 2 before, then the present one, and 2 after make 5,

and therefore there must be at least 5 eons in all. And we can find no scripture evidence for supposing there are more than 5 eons. Indeed the scriptures record only 4 great cataclysmic calamities, to bring the first 4 eons to an end.

Shakespeare wrote, you remember: "all the world is a stage, and all the men and women merely players"; now in that he expressed a great truth, which is fully borne out by the scriptures. Although we don't suppose for one moment that Shakespeare had any real idea of the purpose of God, as we understand it. We see the purpose of God as being enacted on one vast stage, called earth, for the benefit of a grand audience of celestial witnesses, who are watching with great interest, every move, and are learning from all that is taking place.

Now, Shakespeare, if we can just use him as an illustration for a moment, because he is acknowledged to be the greatest dramatist that the world has ever known. He wrote over 30 plays in all, and each without exception is divided into 5 main acts. The excitement of the story generally increases until about the middle of the 3rd act, when there is a crisis which is a turning point in the fortunes of the characters. The drama then proceeds irrevocably to his grand finale and the end of the fifth act.

Now be it far from us to day, to lower the purpose of God to the level of an earthly drama. We are not trying to do that at all. But Shakespeare does seem to have inherited the real sense of dramatic majesty when he decided to work out his scenes in 5 great acts. But in this respect he was unknowingly copying his creator. For God Himself has divided the drama of His purpose, into 5 long acts. Which as we have seen here from eons. And who can doubt that the turning point of God's drama is in the middle of the 3rd eon, the cross of Christ. This again is something we should pick up later.

Just for the moment, let us remind ourselves again there are 5 eons. There is also something which is described in the scriptures as "before the eons", or "before eonian times", and the fact that all are to have life in the ultimate, courses into the belief that there is something which could be described as "after the eons".

"Before the eons" stretches out into the immeasurable past, and "after the eons" stretches out into the eternal future. "Before the eons", the 5 eons themselves, and "after the eons", make 7. Seven pieces in all, and seven is the number of Divine perfection.

They once described the eons as being a few sin infected moments in an otherwise unbroken continence of a sinless eternity. "A few sin infected moments in an otherwise unbroken continence of a sinless eternity". To us they are long, very long periods of time, but to God they are a few moments when contrasted with His Own endless existence. And yet these few moments, these eons that we have been talking about are of supreme importance when the whole of God's purpose is contained within them. Indeed it is true to say that the eons themselves were created in order to contain God's purpose within bounds, so that it would not spillover into the foundlessness of eternity. Hebrews tells us that God makes the eons in Christ. Here in Ephesians we have, "the purpose of the eons which He makes in Christ Jesus, our Lord".

Perhaps at this point we may ask ourselves: "What is the aim of this purpose?" Briefly and scripturally it can be expressed in just seven words, in English that is, "that God may be All in all" 1 Corinthians 15: 28. But in order for God to be All in all, He must be thoroughly understood and appreciated by all. His wisdom must be realized and acknowledged. His power must be seen and respected. His justice must be able to stand unchallenged. His love must be felt so deeply as to awaken a full response.

Paul in Colossians is anxious that the saints should grow into a realization of God. For that is what His purpose is all about. To get to know Him better, nay far more than that, to get to know Him perfectly. So let us than keep this aim in front of our eyes, this aim of God, in front of our eyes at all times. And as we know the puzzles and problems, occasioned by suffering and evil, will sort themselves out. After all God's arm bares us up that He might display His power, and Paul tells us in Romans that He locks all up in stubbornness that He might have mercy on all.

The more we examine God's word in which His purpose is revealed, the more we are drawn to a conclusion that what ever experiences creation may under go through out the eons, and whether they are of good or evil, joy or sorrows, life or death, all are in accord with His purpose of bringing all into a full and complete realization of Himself, that He may be All in all.

Now to come back to the subject of the eons, let us note this: That when Paul speaks to the eons to come it is in a celestial setting. Ephesians 2:4 reads: "God, being rich in mercy, because of His vast love with which He loves us (we also being dead to the offenses and the lusts), vivifies us together in Christ (in grace are you saved!) and rouses us together and seats us together among the celestials," . "among the celestials, in Christ Jesus, that, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus." And when Paul speaks of the eons of God hence, he is also in a celestial context. For in Ephesians 3:9 he speaks of the secret which has been concealed from the eons, in God who creates all, that now may be made known to the sovereignties and authorities among the celestials. "Among the celestials, through the ecclesia, the multifarious wisdom of God, in accord with the purpose of the eons," In nigher of these passages which refer to the eons, past and future, is there any mention the is there any mention of the earth.

Now we know, of coarse,, from other scriptures that the earth is included in the picture, especially as regards to salvation and reconciliation. But what we are now stressing is that in the special context of this passage, "the purpose of the eons," that is the book of Ephesians, we are dealing with the celestial creations of God, and the purpose of God is primarily concerned with the celestials.

It is the book of Ephesians which tells us that there are 5 eons, and the number 5 is invariably stamped on this book in many ways. It's the 5th of Paul's letters, as they appear in our versions, and there always in the same order. The phrase: "among the celestials," which is a special property of this letter, occurs 5 times. There are 5 references to the will of God, including that most comprehensive one: "Who is operating all according to His will". There are 5 clauses in the 2nd chapter describing what we once were when we were apart from God or from Christ. And 5 clauses telling us into what we have become in Christ. But undoubtedly the most striking of these 5 instances, is the fivefold use of the Greek expression: "en tois epouraniois". Which is translated in the Concordant version as: "among the celestials," but in other versions: "in heavenly places" or "in the heavenlies".

Now we prefer the Concordant rendering for two reasons, one because it is consistent in all its 5 usages, and that is more than can be said for the Authorized version, and secondly it is more in keeping with God's purpose. For "among the celestials" gives the idea of a ministry among beings have a higher order than ourselves. Rather than saying a residence in heavenly environments, which seems to be the popular idea of life after death to believers in Christ. "Among the celestials" is a beautiful translation.

Now let us go back to Genesis for a moment. The very first words of scripture reads: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth". Here we have a most comprehensive statement covering both the heavens and the earth. But the second verse reads: "and the earth was without form and void". Now we all know that that word "was" should be "became". Doctor Boulinger, for one, pointed out that the Hebrew word "pia" translated "was" is translated "became" or "become" in such passages as "man became a living soul," "the waters shall no more become a flood," and "Lots wife became a pillar of salt". In all these passages the meaning is obvious. In another passage the same word is rendered "it shall come to pass". So sometime after creation, the earth became waste and barren, which is the real meaning of the word translated, without form and void. The earth was not created a waste, but to be inhabited as Isiah tells us. It became a waste as the result of some cataclysmic judgment, which in fact brought the first eon to an end, and which we know as the disruption.

Now the point that I am making at this state, is this: "The first verse of scripture tells of the creation of the heavens and the earth, the second verse tells of the earth only. The earth became waste and barren, and by far the rest of scripture deals with the earth only, and the heavens are seen as something above the earth.

We have glimpses of celestial beings in various parts of scripture. They appeared to Abraham. They are mentioned in the book of Job. One Gabriel, brought messages to Daniel, and later to Joseph and Mary concerning the Messiah. The host appeared at the birth of Jesus. And of coarse we have vast hosts, in the book of Revelation, giving praise to God and to the Lamb. But by enlarge the scriptures are a book concerning God's dealings with humanity, in particular with one nation, Israel. Until, that is, until we've come to the book of Ephesians, and here, God, through the medium of His apostle Paul takes us straight into the heavenly realms and firmly places us among the celestials and tells us that our present and future ministry is essentially among spirit beings, in a sphere of operation infinitely higher and wider than this earth.

But look how Paul opens his Ephesian letter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who blesses us with every spiritual blessing among the celestials, in Christ, according as He chooses us in Him before the disruption of the world,," In line with this, Paul in Philippians says: "For our realm is inherent, in the heavens,,"

"Inherent", you know the cripple outside the gate of the temple, of Jerusalem, was inherently lame, from his mother's womb. He had never seen anything anything else but lame. His lameness belonged to him. Peter is described as being inherently a Jew. Peter has always been a Jew, and could never be considered to be anything else. Our realm is inherent in the heavens, it belongs there, it has never been anywhere else. From the moment that we were born, we have been lodgers on this planet. We are here now as ambassadors in a foreign country, and these bodies which we now possess, are so remote from our true status, and our true nature, as to be termed: bodies of humiliation.

Our realm is inherent in the heavens, out of which we are awaiting a Saviour also, the Lord, Jesus Christ.

[missing audio] ... in rebellious elements among them endeavor to hinder the purpose of God in this period, and their target was humanity, this new creation that God had created. But so important was this fresh creation that Satan, himself, in the guise of a serpent, addressed himself to the task of making it unworthy to provide the Saviour. And in this he succeeded, because it had never been God's intention of using humanity, to provide such a one.

The Saviour was to be the seed of the woman, not the seed of the man. And so 2 or more couple things begun to happen simultaneously. While humanity continued to demonstrate thru succeeding generations its awkward unworthiness to provide one who could be without sin, at the same time God was maintaining , thru succeeding generations of women, the form of humanity, so that the Saviour could eventually come in that form, which God had specially prepared for Him, when He created humanity.

Now end of the second eon, it is recorded of humanity, that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, and this seems to indicate the influence of spirit forces on mankind. There are some that think that the reference to sons of God, in Genesis 6:2 relate to the interference of spirit beings in the affairs of humanity. Now be that as it may, and I keep an open mind on that subject. It does seem to me to be certain, that the spirit forces of evil were dominating humanity in that eon. Especially that the wickedness of men caused God to regret that He had made man in the earth, and the method grieved Him in His heart. In using those expressions, of course, the scriptures are using figures of speech which are understandable to humans. For in the absolute sense, of course, God knew from the beginning what would happen, and the situation came as no surprise.

And so we now come into authority on the present eon, in which a measure of government is invested inhumanity, and in that, government is vested the power, under certain circumstances, for humans to take human life. A power that had previously been God's right alone, and that was demonstrated in the case of Cain after he murdered Able.

Now, human life might be taken of those who shed man's blood, and this power was increased under the law given to Moses, to cover other offenses such as: sabbath breaking, adultery, and blasphemy against God. The vesting of this power in human hands was necessary, in order to bring about the death of Christ. Although, it must be clearly said: "That Christ as the one that was without sin, could never be justly condemned."

Indeed, humanity had to be influenced and coerced by the spiritual forces of wickedness, including again Satan in person, for it to be brought to the point of crucifying the Lord of Glory. The time of the crucifixion was the hour of the jurisdiction of darkness, as Jesus told the chief priest and others who came with them (Luke 22). And that jurisdiction of darkness is defined in Colossians 1:13 as the very opposite, "of the kingdom of the Son of God's love".

And certainly humanity could not provide the Saviour, it could only provide the murders of the Lord of Glory, but all and down the years, taken out from humanity, have been those who have been given the faith and the vision to witness for God. Prophets like Moses and Elijah. Priests like Ezra and Zechariah. Kings like David and Solomon and Hezekiah. And common people, like the seven thousand that Elijah saved that had not bowed to

Baal. And now in this present day of wonderful Grace, humanity is chosen to provide an ecclesia, a complement for Christ, for a very special mission, among the celestials in the eons to come. This is something that humanity could never have expected, but it was contained in a secret in the former eons by God, and it is only now made manifest. And what is this mission? It is nothing less than to make known to the very highest among the celestials, to sovereignties and authorities among them, the multifarious wisdom of God in accord with the purpose of the eons.

Now what does this mean? It means simply this, and I'm coming to the end of my thought. It means simply this, that tho the ecclesia, the celestial hope, are to be made aware of all the ramifications of the purpose of God, especially as it concerns themselves. It means that through the ecclesia, God is about to display His Grace, among the celestials, by letting them see the kindness which He has shown us, unworthy ones as we are, in Christ Jesus. It means that it is not ours to wrestle with blood and flesh, we should never quarrel among ourselves, it means that it is ours to wrestle with the sovereignties, with the authorities, with the world might of this darkness, with the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials. For dear friends, since that early rebellion many of the celestials have been engulfed in spiritual darkness, from which it will be our privilege to lead them out.

Now the work of reconciling the universe to God will take a long time, but there is no force even among the celestials which can prevent it, for Christ our Head is accountable to the very highest power of the Deity, He is graced with a name which is above every name, for at His name, Jesus, every knee should be bowing, celestials, and terrestrials, and subterraneans, and every tongue should be acclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the Glory of God the Father.

It is in this one that our lot is cast, as we read in Ephesians 1:11. And it is this Supreme one who is given to us as head overall, that we, His complement, His body, may be the medium through which He is completing the All in all. The medium through which He will bring God's purpose to its final conclusion.

And so my purpose in speaking, my purpose in speaking to you in this strain tonight, is to remind you that your realm is inherent in the heavens, and to exalt you to be seeking that which is above, where Christ is. Be disposed to that which is above, for your life is hid together with Christ in God. As humans your useless, or almost useless, members of society. Being chosen from a group that includes not many wise, not many noble etcetera, but chiefly the poor of this world. Those that are considered to be nothing. But as members of the ecclesia, your lot was cast in Christ long before you were born. Being designated before hand according to the purpose. And the One who is operating all, that is God of course. The One who is operating all in accord to the council of His will, that you, should be for the laud of His glory, who are preexpectant in the Christ.

Paul himself, prays for you in Ephesians 1:18 that you should be perceiving "what is the expectation of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of the enjoyment of His allotment among among the saints, and what the transcendent greatness of His power for us who are believing,"

The sublime ministry of the ecclesia among the celestials, was a statement concealed from the eons in God. Paul was the one privileged to reveal it, and the responsibility of doing so made him very humble. Paul describes himself in two ways: as Saul of Tarsus, a pattern for all believers who are saved in Grace. He was the foremost of sinners. That's in Timothy. But as Paul the evangelist charged with the proclamation of the celestial glories of Christ and the grace that is bestowed upon the ecclesia, which is Christ's body, Paul was less than the least of all saints. The very thought of the glories of the service that lie before us should make us feel, like Paul. For in ourselves we are totally unworthy of such an honor.

In this ministry of the ecclesia among the celestials is largely unknown among majority of believers in Christ, who are thinking in terms of the kingdom to be setting on earth. And it would surprise many to be told that the millennial reign of Christ is not the end. For the scripture of Revelation 20 is very plain, that Satan who is being bound for a thousand years is to be loosed for a little while, and he immediately opposes God's purpose again, and mobilizes the people of earth to battle their number being as the sand of the sea. But the ultimate salvation and blessing of humanity is assured in the 5th eon, the day of God. The eon of the new heavens and the new earth, in which righteousness dwells. For then the tabernacle of God will be magnified. And it is a delightful touch to read that He will personally be brushing away every tear from their eyes. Then there will be

no more death or morning or ... or misery. If this is true of earth's inhabitants, what of the inhabitants of the heavens? Colossians 1:20 makes it quite clear that all in heaven as well as all on earth are to be reconciled to God. The peace that has been made through the blood of Christ's cross, insures this for all.

So then dear friends, let us as members of that ecclesia which is the body of Christ, touch lightly the things of this earth. Receiving them only as Christ's they were. But rather be setting our hopes and our aspirations and our expectations on things above. Realizing that totally unworthy and incompetent as we are, of ourselves, to carry forward the ministry which God has designed for us among the celestials. That He is able to do super excessively above all that we are requesting or apprehending, and that to Him will be the glory in the ecclesia and in Christ Jesus for all the generations of the eon of the eons. That is, right up to the consummation of His purpose. For the eon of the eons is the last eon of all, the glorious day of God in which righteousness will dwell.

Now dear friends, my address is finished, just add the last thought: Our realm is inherent in the heavens out of which we are awaiting a Saviour. A Saviour from our sins? No, for He came at Calvary to do that. No, Christ will be our Saviour by changing these bodies of humiliation to conform them to the body of His glory. He is the Saviour from these bodies which has been humiliating us from the day of our birth. He will change them to conform them to the body of His glory, a body of which the love of God perpetually shines.

Dear friends the coming of the Lord is near, make no mistake about that. We are assuredly seeing the evidence of the end times, which Paul mentioned to Timothy. World events are rushing to a climax, let us be evermore anticipating the day of our relief from these conditions and these problems, by concentrating our thoughts and our aspirations on that glorious ministry among the celestials, for which we are called and which from the beginning, we return.

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