

Sermon 6, God's Cosmic Master Plan, Ephesians 1:9-10

Proposition: Because God's formerly hidden master plan to sum up everything under Christ's headship has now been revealed, we ought to submit to Christ right now!

- I. Its Disclosure, v. 9a
 - A. Its Erstwhile Hiddenness
 - B. Its Revelation in Time
- II. Its Root, v. 9b
 - A. God's Will
 - B. God's Good Pleasure
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 - A. To Administer the Days of Fulfillment
 - B. To Put Everything under One Head(ing)
 - 1. Things in Heaven
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I know that many of you love a good mystery. Some of you, of course, are or were professional detectives. Others of you simply watch detectives on TV. But when Paul uses the word "mystery," as he does in our passage this morning, he is not referring to the kind of thing Dame Agatha Christie wrote. For him, a mystery is some truth about God and His works that was once hidden but has now been revealed. A mystery for St. Paul is not something we have to figure out, but rather something God has now told us. The mystery which he describes for us this morning "transcends mere metaphysics," as one commentator put it. Indeed, this mystery refers to God's plan for the entire cosmos. So do you want to know what God has planned? Come into the library with me, as it were, and I will explain the whole thing — who's going to do what when. Indeed, in this morning's sermon we will see God's formerly hidden master plan to sum up everything under one Head(ing) in Christ — the disclosure of that plan, the root of that plan, and the content of that plan. And we will then see that because everything is being summed up under the one heading of the Messiah, you and I ought to submit to His headship right now!

I. Its Disclosure, v. 9a

We saw last time God's rich grace, which He gave to us with full insight as to the consequences of doing so. Another thing that grace has done for us is to give us a revelation regarding the mystery of God's will. As I mentioned, "mystery" in the sense that Paul uses the word is not

something the Sherlock Holmes would be called in to “solve.” A mystery, in biblical usage, has two major components.

A. Its Erstwhile Hiddenness

The first is that it was hidden at one time. The “mystery of God’s will” is thus not a puzzle for humans to try to solve based on particular clues, but rather a truth about God that at one time He didn’t tell us. How do we know this? Because in 3:5, Paul tells us that a mystery is something that God at one time had not yet revealed but has now made known.

What was God’s plan for the whole world? The OT never described it in sharp, crystalline terms. You can read Genesis to Malachi, and despite some passages in Isaiah and Zechariah, you simply won’t read anything that clearly describes this world’s final destiny in the same detail that the book of Revelation does.

B. Its Revelation in Time

Yet now, Paul says, this mystery has been revealed. We know what God’s will with respect to all things, things in heaven and things on earth, ultimately is.

So? What’s the significance of God’s having made known to us the mystery of His will? Simply this, brothers and sisters: God cares about you and values your intelligent participation in His plan. He told you what the plan was not only to impress you, and not only to comfort you, but also because you get to participate. As Jesus said, “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (Joh 15:15 NKJ). You are a friend of God if you are in Christ by faith, and as such He has told what He’s doing. God calls you servant, God calls you child — and God calls you *friend*. Can you take in mentally the depth of the glorious truth that God is willing to make you His friend?

Now, how is it that we are expected to participate in the plan? Paul doesn’t get into it directly here. But we will talk about it more when we have examined the content of God’s plan.

II. Its Root, v. 9b

First, though, we need to see the root of God’s plan. The once-hidden mystery of God’s will is now revealed. What is the root of the revelation of God’s plan (and thus the root of God’s plan)?

A. God’s Will

The first root of it is God’s will. What is the will? It is the faculty of choice whereby a person selects a particular object, goal, or action. God has a will, and it is by that will that He has chosen to effect this particular cosmic plan.

B. God’s Good Pleasure

God’s will also reflects His good pleasure. We saw in v. 5 how God’s will delights in goodness. In fact, He delights in goodness so much that He is unable to direct His will to anything but goodness; we can also flip it around, therefore, and say that anything to which God’s will is directed is by definition good. Everything that it pleases God to do is a good thing, because God is good and it is not possible for a good God to do an evil action (and remain good).

Are you like God in this? Is your will so firmly attached to the good that we can be sure that whatever you choose and whatever you decide, it is good? Unfortunately, we all know that such is not the case. Our wills are not firmly and unshakably directed toward the good. What can we do about that? Only stay close to God, learning from His good will and good pleasure.

Brothers and sisters, God's plan for the universe is rooted in His good pleasure. In that plan, bad things happen, things that are painful to us and those we love. And when that happens, your faith in this clause of Scripture will be tested. God planned according to His good pleasure, and yet my child is dead! God planned according to His good pleasure, and yet my mother has cancer! How will you respond at that moment? Will you say "God's pleasure is not good. God, you're a bad God!"? Or will you say, "God's master plan is good, and it is founded in His good pleasure. Even though I'm half-blind with agony as I suffer in this wicked world, I will not give up my conviction that God's pleasure is good pleasure"?

It was according to God's good pleasure that all of the spiritual blessings we've seen so far were dispensed. It was according to His good pleasure that we have been elected by the Father. It is according to His good pleasure that we have been redeemed by the Son. It is according to His good pleasure that we have been sealed by the Spirit.

That's how good God's good pleasure is. Believe it, Christian. And when God's providence is bitter toward you, keep believing it. God's good pleasure is *good*.

C. God's Internal Purpose

The final aspect of the root of this cosmic plan which Paul wants to highlight for us is the reality that God purposed it in Himself. It was an internal purpose — not one forced on Him from outside. God wasn't pressured into this corner by necessity. Here's why this is important: The plan is to put everything under one head(ing), the head(ing) "Christ". Yet this was God's purpose *in Himself*. It was not a purpose thrust on Him by the wild, uncontrolled rebellion of certain aspects of His creation. God's plan to reduce everything to unity under the headship of Christ was not His reactive response to something outside Himself, viz. to the uncontrolled chaos and disunity of a creation marred by sin. No. God's plan predated that. God's plan was His purpose, based on His good pleasure and His internal disposition, to sum up everything in unity in Christ.

That's how deeply and really in charge God was. Do you want to know what moved His will? Paul says, "I'll tell you. It was God's good pleasure that moved His will. He did this because He delights in goodness. If you're looking for anything deeper than that, it was purely internal. It all ultimately boils down to what He purposed in Himself, and that's it. No more, no less."

This is what we in Reformed Presbyterian circles refer to as "the sovereignty of God." This is what we exalt as the core doctrine of our Reformed type of Christianity. We are enthralled and enamored by this vision of a God who is always proactive, who is always in charge, who is always working everything out just the way He wanted it so that He can overflow with grace for our redemption. That, I submit to you, is the God Paul portrays for us here in Ephesians 1, and

that the entire Bible shows us. That is the God who shed His blood for us in Jesus Christ, and that is the God who has shown grace to us in His Beloved Son.

Can you worship that God? Can you love Him and serve Him all of your days? This is not the Arminian God, wringing His hands over the stubbornness of His creatures. This is not the open theist god, who is just as surprised by the day's headlines as you are. This is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, *non des philosophes et des savants* (as Pascal so beautifully put it).

III. Its Content, v. 10

But having said that the plan is beautiful, that the plan is admirable, that the plan is absolutely divine — what is the plan?

A. To Administer the Days of Fulfillment

First of all, Paul tells us that the plan is to “administer the days of fulfillment” (as the Holman Christian Standard Bible translates it). Actually, that translation flips around the wording; Paul wrote “to administer the fulfillment of times.” But I think the HCSB is correct. God’s plan was indeed to run the present age, the age of fulfillment that dawned with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has a particular plan to administer this age, and it is plan that will take this entire age to fulfill.

This mystery was hidden for a long time. God kept this to Himself, the apostle says, and has only now revealed what was His internal purpose all along. It was a purpose to administer the days of fulfillment. God has a plan for how He will run this time after the resurrection and before the Second Coming.

B. To Put Everything under One Head(ing)

That plan can be summed up in a single word, Paul says — *anakephalaiosis*. That is the word rhetoricians used to describe gathering together all their points into a summary statement at the end of the speech. In Christ, God is summing up in oneness all things. The word “head” (*kephale*) is noticeable in Paul’s long word, but more in the sense of “heading” in a document than “head”. Hence my typographical trick of using “Head(ing)” throughout this sermon. God is putting everything under one head(ing) in Christ. What does that mean? Obviously, it is a metaphorical usage of the rhetorical term. To put everything under one heading in Christ means putting everything under His dominion, restoring order under His rule. This is the same truth expressed in Philippians by saying that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, or in Psalm 110 and Psalm 8 by saying that all things will be subdued under His feet.

1. Things in Heaven

Now, what things? Paul says that things in Heaven will be subjected to Christ. Does this mean that demons and finally impenitent human beings will be subjected to Jesus Christ? Not in the sense of saving union with Christ, such as redeemed humans enjoy (as we talked about last week). Rather, they will be forced to submit to His total authority, even if they do so grudgingly and merely outwardly with no real submission in their hearts. But regardless, every created thing will be forced to come into the order which Christ is bringing to the cosmos. Some will take their appointed place in Hell, not because they want to but because it is their appointed place and

Christ is bringing the unity of order (not necessarily the unity of loving union) to His entire creation.

2. Things on Earth

The same is true of things on the Earth. Human beings of all kinds will be forced to submit to the Lordship of Christ. His enemies will be made His footstool. That is all part of God's plan for how to administer the times of fulfillment, the time after the ascension when Christ is seated on His right hand. All people will be forced, one way or another, to submit to the dominion of Jesus Christ. This, incidentally, is why the open theist and Arminian positions are, in the final analysis, so utterly silly. Anyone who begins with the premise "God is a gentleman who won't force His way on a poor human being" has no place for "As I live, saith the LORD, every knee will bow and every tongue will swear allegiance." The gentlemanly God of Arminianism would never say such a thing. The Arminian God cannot and would not plan to administer the fullness of times by putting everything under Christ's feet. Such a thought would be anathema to Him. But it is the exact plan, purposed in Himself, that the Biblical God conceived in eternity past.

Brothers and sisters, God's plan is to reduce everything to unity under the headship of Christ. That has been His plan from the beginning, but it has only in this New Covenant era been revealed in such clarity and focus. God's plan is to bring all things to the unity of order under the headship of Jesus Christ. Again, we ought to bow ourselves in awe before this God. This is the challenge He has set Himself: to let the universe go into sin and disorder, and then to restore it all to Himself while playing by the rules. He has no plan to simply invoke sovereign power to say "Be ordered." He will indeed respect the rules He has written and the natures He has built. The ultimate proof of that is the death of His own Son to save sinners. God's plan doesn't merely involve sovereign prerogative; it involves suffering and dying as a creature at the hands of creatures. But for all that, it is an absolutely certain plan to gather together everything under the heading of Christ.

And that leads me to your part in this plan. I said at the beginning of the sermon that this plan has been revealed to us for our comfort, and so it has. We know that God is working all of it to our good. It has been revealed to impress us — true enough. God wants us to adore and worship Him with awe-inspired love and affection. But above and beyond those things, it has been revealed to us to enable us to participate.

How do we participate in this plan? We participate by submitting to Christ right now. He is the one to whom the Father has given charge over and responsibility for every created thing, to order them and to establish with judgment and justice. Our role in this is to bow *now*, rather than to wait until we are forced to do so. Our role is to submit *now*. When you pray for God's Kingdom to come, you are praying that Christ would succeed in bringing everything to order under His headship. And so your call and mine this day is to submit to Christ's rule in our own lives. That's why the church exists. We are here to make disciples, Jesus said — and a disciple is one who obeys everything that Christ commanded. So our role in the plan is obedience and teaching others to obey.

Do the people who know you see you obeying Jesus Christ? And do you do your best to disciple them by teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded? Brothers and sisters, God's plan is to bring everything together under the headship of Christ. You will submit to Him. The only question is whether you will do so voluntarily and joyfully. So I beg you — submit to Jesus Christ. If you already know Him, consider this a motive to work harder to submit to Him. If you don't know Him, then I beg you to submit to Him now. You will be forced to submit someday whether you like it or not. So turn now; submit now; and find the blessing which comes to everyone who takes refuge in Him. Amen.