

070304
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Ephesians 1:10

Today we're going to continue with our study in the book of Ephesians. We spent last week looking at the reality of the mystery of God revealed in Christ from chapter 1 verse 9. This week I want to look at verse 10 discussing the fullness of time and the gathering together of all things into Christ.

Now remember, when Paul was writing this, he wasn't breaking it down into weekly lessons. It's one letter. It flows together as a letter, not an outline of theological topics. So, what he says today about the fullness of times and the gathering together into Christ flows right out of what we have already read.

I, of course, have to break it down bit by bit because of time. But this is one continuous thought for Paul. You might notice that by the absence of periods in never-ending sentences. Obviously, the original Greek didn't have any punctuation at all. But English translators are at a loss where to start and stop sentences in many of Paul's letters because they are often one continuous thought in His mind.

Before I get to our verses for today, let me clarify something I said last week. Last week I said that our purpose is not to come to an intellectual and theological understanding of the book of Ephesians. It is, rather, to see what Paul was seeing by the Spirit's understanding as He wrote the letter. In saying that, however, I in no way mean to detract from the fact that I believe the entire letter, and every word in it, represents truth and the infallible, preserved record of salvation as written by the Apostle Paul. In other words, I'm saying we need to see far more than words here, but I am also saying that all of the words are real, true, and inspired of God.

If that sounds like a contradiction, then you are misunderstanding me. The Bible in its entirety is God's preserved testimony and then witness of His salvation. I am quite aware of slight textual variations because of copyist error, and so-called textual criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism. I spent four years of my life listening to that nonsense from PhD's who's brains, for the most part, could see only words on a page and who's hearts saw nothing but themselves inflated in the sight of their professional colleagues. Oops, did I say that out loud?

Since I'm speaking so frankly, let me just give you my personal definition of insanity. Insanity is when a human being believes that with his own brain He can know, teach, and express the reality of God. You put a bunch of people like that in one building, and you have the religion department of most "institutes of higher learning". It's like the religious version of the WWF (World Wrestling Federation)...a bunch of carnal brains challenging and body-slammng each other trying to walk away with the adamic-mind championship belt. Ok...that's enough. I'm not trying to be mean. I just had a sudden flashback from college.

Anyway, I am not saying that what we need is to see "Paul's heart behind the letter", and not take every word seriously. No, quite the contrary. I am saying that we need to see each word as an attempt to describe something that is greater than words. We need to see Spirit and Truth, or we've only seen the words. We need to see THROUGH the window, and not look at the window...or we've seen nothing at all. That may have meant nothing to many of you. But to others, it will.

So Paul is writing a letter here to those who have, to some extent, seen by the Spirit's unveiling the reality of their salvation. And He is trying to give them something the Spirit of God can use to show them more reality. He's trying to bring them to, as Galatians 3 and Romans 10 say, "the hearing of faith".

So, picking up where we left off, and I'll just start at the beginning of verse 9

"having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation (administration) of the fullness of the time, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him."

So last week we dealt with the mystery of His will now made known according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself. I didn't get to mention last week the little phrase "which He purposed in Himself". I suppose that is a similar statement to what Paul says in Ephesians 3:9 –

"and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages **has been hidden in God** who created all things through Jesus Christ".

I think that this phrase "purposed in Himself" and this other phrase "hidden in God" probably refer to the reality that God had, in Himself, before anything was created the fullness of His predestined plan, predestined salvation, and predestined purpose. It was in His heart before He said "let there be light". It was in His heart before He made man out of the dust of the earth.

It is possible, however, that the phrase "purposed in Himself" might be a reference to the fact that what was predestined, what was foreknown, was a people who would come to dwell in Himself. In other words, a people living in Christ. You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Both of these are true realities, so its not like we have to argue about it. The only question is which was Paul referring to here. I suspect the former. But I love the reality of the latter...which He has already clearly said in verse 4 – that God's predestined purpose was the bringing of a people into Himself to share all of His life, love, nature, character, through the person of His eternal Son.

So you could see that phrase either way, and you'd still be representing truth. But on to the next verse.

10 that in the dispensation (administration) of the fullness of the time, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him."

It amazed me as I looked through some commentaries again this week, that so many who read this verse somehow miss the fact that Paul has already told us 6 times in the first 10 verse (really 8 times if you understand the words heavens and love to be the realm and relationship of being in Christ)...anyway, Paul has already told us at least 6 times that we are NOW in Christ. In other words, we are ALREADY in this time called "the fullness of time" where God has "gathered all things into Christ."

To some of you that might seem impossible to miss. Partially because the New Testament makes mention over 400 times of that very thing, partly because that was all that the Old Covenant came to proclaim, and partly because of the work of the Spirit revealing that very reality in your soul. But, nevertheless, there is much (not all, but much) scholarship out there that has this as a yet unfulfilled future event.

Friends, it is for this sort of thing that I said what I did above. Only the natural mind trying to find some natural experience for a natural body in a natural time could miss what God has done at the fullness of time. And, incidentally, that fullness of time doesn't just mean he picked the right moment. It means that it was the fullness, that is completion of time. It is, in fact, where time ceased to have relevance with regards to God. But we'll get to that.

Know that I am picking on no person or group when I attack the natural mind. I am simply making note of the mind of the flesh. Romans 8:6 says that "the mind of the flesh is death". When are we going to learn that? Well, what comes out of a mind that is death? Theology that is death. Understanding that is death. Religion that is death. Ok, I'm done.

There was a time the time of promise, and then there was the end of that time in Christ "in whom all the promises of God are yes and amen". There was the time of prophesy, and then there was the summing and fulfilling of all prophecy in the Person of Christ. There was the time of shadow, then there was the coming of the substance. All of these are simply quotations from the New Testament. I could go on. Lets go on. There was the time of expectation of glory? Then there was the glory that filled the temple. The glory of the latter house (us) becoming greater than that of the former house. There was the time of law which spoke of spirit. Then, in Christ, came the law of the spirit of Life. There was the time of the old, then, in Him, all things were made new.

Do you see what I'm getting at. The fullness of time is what Christ is. This is shown in the story of Abraham and Isaac. "Abraham, at the fullness of time you will have a son". Abraham, prior to the fullness of time creates his own son. Creates a son in the flesh, and not a son by the spirit. God appears to Abraham again and says "Abraham, at the fullness of time you will have a son" Abraham says "well, I've already got one of those". God says "yes, but its not my son. It hasn't yet been the fullness of time".

And when the fullness of time had come, God gave Abraham the son of promise, and everything that came before was put away. Ishmael was put away...and God said "he will have no share in the inheritance of Isaac, the son of promise".

Well, the fullness of time has come in Christ. And you and I live, not in the administration of the prophecy, not in the administration of the promise, not in the

administration of the promised time, the time of waiting, the time of expectation, the time of shadow. We are not under that administration where all of the prophets and fathers spoke of a new administration. A new covenant. A new dispensation. Paul is telling us that we, who are NOW in Christ, are in the administration of the fullness of time.

Can you hear what I'm saying. There is the administration of the law. Then there is the administration of the Spirit. There is the administration of Moses, then there is the administration of Christ. There is the administration of the Old, the First, the Shadow, then there is the administration of the New, the Second, the Substance. The administration where all time was fulfilled.

In fact, if you look up a couple of these words in a Greek lexicon (which is just a fancy word for a Greek dictionary) you will see some very interesting things. First of all, you will see that the word translated in the NKJV and KJV as dispensation is not really a great translation. Its better translated in the NASB as the word administration. Its not really related to time. Like, well the first dispensation was 2024 years, and this dispensation will be 3948 years. No, its speaking of an administration. In other words, and more specifically, the management, oversight, stewardship of a house. Administration – the way things are run. That is the meaning of that word.

In one age, the age that came to an end in Christ, there was one way in which God dealt with His house. One administration. The way things were run. The way God related. An administration where everything testified to Christ, both in heaven and in earth. It was the way that God dealt with his household. Now, we live in the age that was to come. The age that was prophesied about. The age that was promised. And in this age, we have come to a new administration. We have come to a new management, stewardship. In other words, things work very differently in this age, in the fullness of time.

Here we live in Christ. Here we live in the fullness of time where God has gathered up everything of the first and summed it up, comprehended it in His Son. We'll get to that shortly. But lets look at one more word first.

This word "fullness". The fullness of time. That doesn't mean, as some people translate it, at just the perfect time. He did it just in the nick of time! No that's not it at all. The nick of time for what? We were already dead in trespasses and sins. No it wasn't the nick of time, it was the fullness of time. Well, what's the difference. Here a good lexicon might help you again.

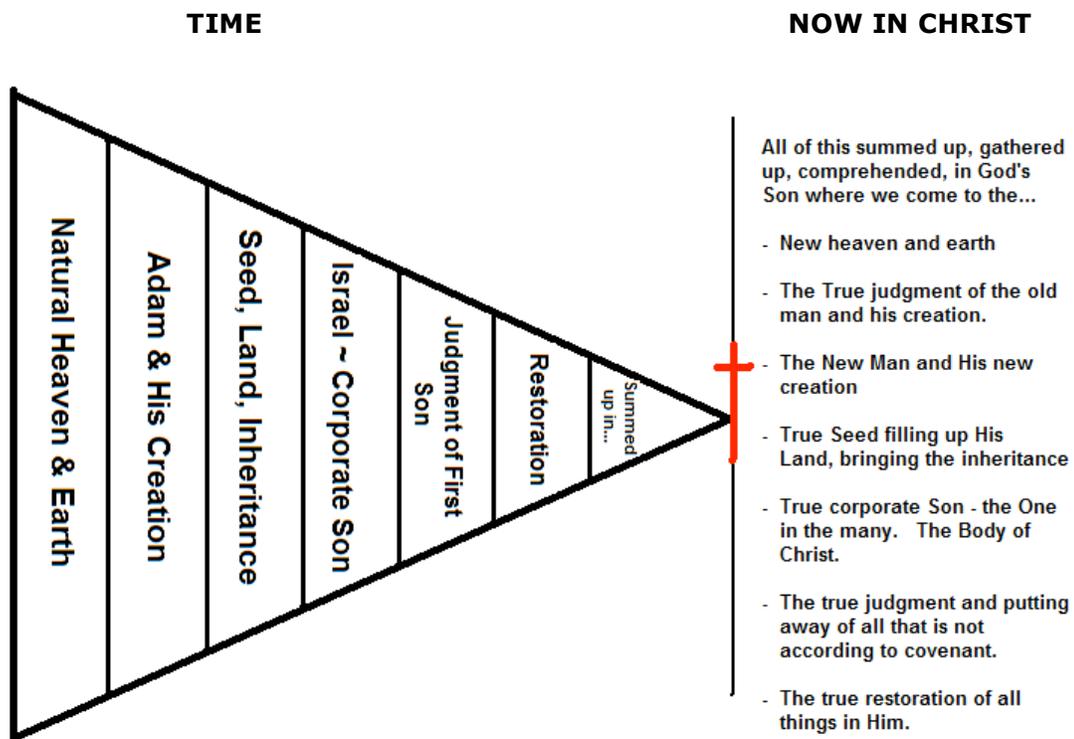
Fullness means "completion" or "consummation". Fullness of time means that time has been filled, and has served its purpose. One Greek lexicon says "it is as though there is a container that has been filled to its brim". Another says it is as though something has been completely filled – like a ship filled with freight, merchandise, sailors, oarsmen, and soldiers.

You see, when time had served its purpose, when time had become filled up with everything that was to testify of Him, then He came. Can you see what I'm saying here? Time served one purpose, time served to testify of Him who would come at the fullness, the completion of time. Time was like a container that was filled up with so many prophesies, promises, types, shadows, and testimonies, that it had served its purpose. It had prepared the way for Him to come at the fullness of time.

A pregnant woman is in labor, until the time has come. How do you know when the fullness of time has come? Is it just whenever its convenient for the family? Oh just in the knick of time to get the tax break in December? No, the fullness of time has come when the womb is full, and there is nothing more to develop except the coming forth of the actual Son.

Christ came at the fullness, the completion of time. And that is where time ceased to have significance. That is where one day became the eternal day of the Lord. That is where we come from time passed, to the Now of Christ. That is where we come from the 6 days creation to the seventh day of rest. Time was part of the natural creation of God. It was created in order to establish a testimony of salvation, and a people to be saved. And in the fullness, completion, and consummation of time all was gathered up, summed up, comprehended in just one Son.

Let me draw a diagram here that might be a bit helpful. It's a beefed up version of something Jeff Sherrill shared with us last Sunday night, for those of you that were there. For those of you listening to this, this diagram is in the notes on the website. It would be helpful to look at it.



You see, the purpose of God dealing in times past was to bring forth a real and true testimony of what is now in Christ. When time had been filled with that testimony, at the fullness, consummation, completion of time, the Son that was spoken of came. And it is in that one Son that everything is gathered up and becomes a reality for you and I who come to live in and by Him.

What this diagram is trying to demonstrate is that God was working through the ages past to continually speak more and more clearly, testify more and more accurately of this coming Life, this coming Judgment, this coming New Creation, this coming Son.

Now this diagram is BY NO MEANS complete, and possibly not even terribly accurate from God's point of view. Don't copy this down as a perfect representation of the fullness of time. Its just to give you a better idea of what I'm talking about. I do think it represents something of God's purpose for the fullness of time, regardless of how perfect or imperfect it is.

God began by testifying very generally about His salvation. He started with creating the heavens and the earth. Its almost like He started big, and then continued to condense and clarify as the testimony continues. He starts with the creation of heaven and earth, which in many ways speaks of Him in great generalities. There is Light being separated from darkness. There is chaos apart from the Spirit of God brooding over the waters. There is seed reproducing after its own kind. There is the sun, moon, and stars as signs in the heavens which govern the earth. Signs in the heavens. You can read it. There is a division between land and sea, between water and water. You can read it, I'm not going to get terribly specific today. We've done some of that before.

But then God narrows the scope a little bit further. Now we have a man to whom a creation is given. Here we have a wonderful testimony of Christ. Jason, how do you know that Adam and His creation are a type of Christ. Partly because it is so obvious. But if you don't believe that you can simply look in Romans 5:14 where Paul says "Adam was a type of Him who was to come". Or you can look in Ephesians 5 where Paul, by the Spirit, says that Adam's joining to Eve was a preordained picture of Christ and the church. Anyway, I'm not here to argue this stuff. I'm trying to make a point. God narrows the scope a bit and suddenly you have a picture of a man as the head of a creation. A man having dominion over a creation, and told to be fruitful and multiply – increasing his seed, and filling that creation.

Now, as we go along you can see that each of these become spiritual realities in Christ where they are all summed up. Each of these bump into the cross and are made new in Him. For instance, when we come to Christ we are not called "a bunch of Christians", we are called "a New Creation". When we come to Christ we are not called "an improved first man". We are "One New Man". You see, this isn't just random verbiage on Paul's part. Paul is gathering up all things and showing them to be reality in Christ. Showing them to be known and real and eternal in Christ.

Each one of these sections of this diagram encounters the cross and finds its end. And each of these sections finds its newness and reality in Christ. So in Christ we have a new heaven and a new earth. I won't go into that because I have no desire to stomp on eschatological golden calves. But in Christ, we have the first man crucified, and the soul raised up and seated with Him. In Christ, Paul says "I have been crucified to the entire world, the first creation, and it has been crucified to me". So you see the cross meets all of these types.

What happened, for instance, in the type and shadow of the first man and his creation? What was God's thought concerning it? Well, Genesis 5:6 says that "all of Adam's thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time", and God wipes out the entire thing. The man and His creation in the flood of Noah.

But that is not really my main point right now. My main point is to show that He is the fullness of what these times spoke of and that now they are gathered up in Him, comprehended, known, and real in Him. In the fullness of time, they were gathered up in Him.

Ok, moving on. Then we get into a lengthy portion of Old Testament Scripture where you cannot deny that the issue at hand has to do with these key words Seed, Land, and Inheritance. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Its all about, in one way or another, One Seed filling up one land, casting out the inhabitants of that Land, unto an inheritance that is in every way the consequence of the increase of that Seed. You can read it 489 times and you cannot deny that with the patriarchs, this is the main issue. So we have God narrowing the scope once again. Bringing His Son into view in a clearer focus.

I'm hurrying through this, but lets move on. Then what? Well, then the issue becomes not creation, not old man, not seed and land, BUT Israel – the corporate Son. The many who express and make manifest the one. "Israel is my Son, even my firstborn". Yes, now God narrows the scope even further. Now its not just the one increasing in the many. Now it is the many as the manifestation of the One. Israel, the corporate expression of God's Son, relating to Him as priest and king. How? Through the sacrifices, the offerings, the priesthood, the blood, the law, the festivals, the victories, the judgments, the kingdom. You know all of that. And if you don't, we can't really get into it right now. This is the time of Moses through the kings.

You could so easily divide this one section (and all the sections, really) down into three huge divisions. You could divide this one section that I have called "corporate Son" into death, heaven, and earth. Or death the lamb, raised with the lamb (shown through the priesthood) and manifested in the earth (through the reign of David and Solomon). We could easily show that in all of the Scriptures. Once again, on Sunday mornings we paint with broad strokes. Come to the small groups during the week to get into this or whatever in a more comprehensive way.

Then you have God dealing with that corporate son in judgment and refining because of forsaking the covenant. This happens through the Assyrian destruction of the 10 tribes, and the Babylonian captivity of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. And then the restoration unto a new Jerusalem, and a New Temple in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

I won't go into that in detail. Here is my point. God filled time past, God consummated the ages, completed the times, as if he were forming in the womb of the natural world a Son that would come forth. Each of these types and shadows and promises and prophecies are gathered up. Listen to this, THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS of types and testimonies gathered up and finding all of their reality in and as the person of Jesus Christ. The lens of God's heart getting more and more focused, more and more magnified, more and more condensed...until everything that God the Father had forever foreknown and predestined could all be seen in the ONE who came at the fullness of time.

You see God had this Son in full view before the foundation of the world. He had a people living in that Son, living by that Son, being filled with that Son, becoming the increase of that Son in His heart before He made a single blade of grass. That's the

first part of this chapter. He saw the one in whom would be the new heavens and earth, he saw the who would be the head over a new creation, He saw the one who's seed would fill a land and bring an inheritance as firstborn from among the dead, he saw the one in whom He would have a corporate Son, He saw the one who would be as a refiners fire and a fullers soap, and would restore His people to the true heavenly Jerusalem, the temple built without human hands. He saw it all before He made a single thing. He used TIME, he filled TIME with the demonstration of what was in His heart. And then, in the fullness of time, when time had been filled up with this demonstration, when it was about to burst into labor, God brought forth the one in whom all of this was summed up and gathered up, and brought us into Him through death, burial, and resurrection.

He gathered up the testimony in the heavens and in the earth. That which displayed him in the natural heavens and the natural earth. And that which testified to Him in the testimony of heavens and its reign in the earth. He gathered up that which was revealed about the heavens (in the holy of holies, in the glory cloud, and the pillar of fire, in the temple that was God's dwelling place – God's revelation of heaven). He gathered it up and summed it up in Christ.

In fact, if you'll look up that Greek word "gathered" or "summed" one of the definitions is simply the word "comprehended". I like that. Its like God had forever comprehended all of this reality in and as His Son. He displayed it in the natural heavens and earth, and then gathered it all back up into his Son where He had comprehended it in the first place. It wasn't comprehended by Moses in Christ, it wasn't comprehended by Joshua in Christ, but it has always been comprehended by God as being fulfilled and made real in the person of Christ. And that is where salvation has brought us. In Christ where all the blessings, promises, and prophecies are yes and amen.

Gal 4:4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son,

And it is in that Son that Paul is telling us that we live. It is in that Son that Paul is telling us that we are comprehended by God. And it is in the administration of that Son's house (over against the administration of Moses' house – which is the topic of Hebrews chapter 3) to which we have come in the fullness of time.

So where does that leave us now in Christ with regard to time. Well, I'm not going to tell you that time stopped on the earth. I am not ignorant of the fact that time goes on in the natural. But I will tell you that it has no relevance in Christ. In the administration of the fullness of time, we have come to the great NOW of being in Christ where everything is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The only thing that changes over time, is our comprehension, awareness, revealing of the fullness of time that we have come to in Christ. The only that changes over time is God's continual drawing and unveiling of the things that **have been** freely given. Bodies grow old, hairs turn grey, buildings get torn down. But everything in Christ is eternally fixed, secured, incorruptible, constant, perpetual, ceaseless and unbroken.

In a very real sense, in Christ we have come to an ending of time. At least its relevance to life and godliness. We have come to the great Sabbath rest. The day of the Lord.

2Co 6:2 For He says, "In an acceptable time I heard you, and in a day of salvation, I helped you;" Behold, now *is* the accepted time. Behold, now *is* the day of salvation.)