



All Things United in Christ

Ephesians 1:8-10

“He lavished upon us [the riches of his grace], in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:8-10).

The opening section of Ephesians (1:3-14) invites us to praise God the Father for the many spiritual blessings he has given us in Christ. One of these blessings is that God has told us his final plan for the world: “to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.” This gives us an aerial view of all history. Directed by God’s masterplan, all the pieces of life are moving toward a final purpose, and that final purpose will be achieved when Jesus is King over all.

In order to stir us to praise God for this, let’s unfold the meaning of this passage in three steps: (1) our fractured world, (2) God’s open secret, and (3) a future vision.

1. Our fractured world: heaven and earth divided

Paul’s mention of “things in heaven and things on earth,” reminds us of the opening words of the Bible, “in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Those two domains—the heavens and the earth—were meant to be united. God intended to dwell with humans; heaven was supposed to be on earth. But because of humans’ choice to pull away from God, there is now a great rift between the two. This is why Jesus taught us to pray, “thy kingdom come on *earth* as it is in *heaven*.”

Can you think of the many ways in which this great fracture between heaven and earth, between God and humans, causes countless other fractures on earth? Having pulled away from God, we pull toward other things—money, race, nation, sex, etc—that also divide us from each other.

Paul uses three words to refer to this social and spiritual fracturing in Ephesians 2:12, “Remember that you were at that time *separated* from Christ, *alienated* from the commonwealth of Israel and *strangers* to the covenants of promise.”

We find evidence of our world’s brokenness all around us, and even within us. This is why we should long for God to unite all things under one head, our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. God’s open secret: Jesus the uniting head

The word “mystery” means something more like an “open secret.” The “mystery of God’s will” is God’s open secret about what he wants for the world, and how he intends to accomplish it. He has published this open secret in Christ, whose death and resurrection provide a foretaste of what will happen throughout the rest of history and into the future.

Who possibly could be more worthy than Jesus to unite all things? Consider what apparent polar opposites are found within his own being. He is infinitely majestic, but humble. He is the supreme

authority, but tender. He is holy but was treated as a sinner. He was rich, but for our sake he became poor. He is the Creator, but became a creature. He is God, but became a man.

3. A future vision: heaven and earth united

In view of who Jesus is, no wonder that he is the one to unite all things! How does he do this? He does this first by removing the great cause of division—our sin—by taking it on himself, thereby bringing us to peace with God. What follows this peace with God is our wholeness in every other area of life, socially, psychologically, and physically. Peace with God is the foundation for peace in every other area of life, which will not be ultimately realized until Jesus returns.

Until then, this remains the hope that energizes us and fuels our praise to God.

Discussion

1. In what ways do you see brokenness in “things in heaven and things in earth” in our world today?
2. This passage teaches that God plans to unite all things under Christ as the head. What characteristics of Jesus do you find most compelling or comforting when considering his role in uniting heaven and earth?
3. In what ways can Jesus as the uniting head challenge our perspective on current global and personal conflicts? How might this perspective change our actions and attitudes?
4. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul writes that God “reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” Unlike Paul, of course, we are not apostles. Still, we do know the gospel of peace. In what ways, therefore, may we have a “ministry of reconciliation?”
5. Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” How does this prayer shape your understanding of your role in God's plan for unity?
6. What specific actions or changes in behavior can we commit to in order to live in the confident expectation that one day God will “unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth”?