



**"What exactly does Paul mean when he describes God's plan for the fullness of time as being, 'to unite all things in him (Christ,) things in heaven and things on earth.'" Is this unity of heavenly and earthly 'things' only finally consummated at Christ's second coming?"**

I am assuming that these questions have arisen from a study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians and, in particular, from chapter 1 verse 10, which, in the 'Authorised Version', reads: **"That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him..."**

As you might expect, different versions offer different renderings of the verse. For example, the 'Revised Standard Version' differs in two respects:

1. It speaks of **'the fullness of time'**, rather than **'times'**.
2. It tells us that God's purpose is to **'unite all things in him'**, rather than, to **'gather together in one all things in Christ.'**

### **'Times', - not 'time'**

Two of the Greek words for *'time'* that occur quite frequently in our New Testament are *'chronos'* and *'kairos'*, and it is important to understand the difference between them.

The word *'chronos'* describes *'a succession of moments'*, one moment following another. It is the word from which we derive the word *'chronometer'*, and *'chronometers'*, as you know, are very accurate – (and usually very expensive) – keepers of time, or *'time-pieces'*, as their owners prefer to call them.

The other word, *'kairos'*, is the word for *'season'*, *'age'* or *'period'*. It denotes a *'dispensation'* – a period of time during which God dealt with men in a particular way. This is the word used in this verse, where we read of *'the fullness of the times'*, and it is a most significant word, as I hope we shall be able to see.

Paul tells us that even before either the world or time existed, God, who exists outside of time and is omniscient, had formed a *'purpose'* – an *'intention'*. Fore-knowing what would happen in the world and fore-seeing the entry of sin into the world, man's disobedience, sin's destructive effect on the entire creation, and the need for redemption and restoration, God planned to make salvation and restoration possible, and after a succession - *not* of *'moments'*, but of *'ages'*, *'dispensations'* or *'periods of time'*, He decided that His plan should become effective, and the disharmony and chaos caused by the violation of His law, should be healed, through the coming of the Messiah, the Christ.

This is what Paul means when, in Gal. 4:4, he tells us that, **"When the time had fully come, God sent forth His son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, so that we might receive the adoption of sons"**. Notice the opening phrase, *'when the time had fully come'*. Here the word *'time'* is the other word - *'chronos'*. It means *'when the right moment arrived'*.

Here again, Paul is stating that, at the precise and proper *instant* in human history, God's own Son came into the world and the 'plan' that He had 'purposed' became a reality.

### **The 'Uniting' of all things.**

The words I underlined earlier – (*'unite'* and 'gather *together*') – also need to be understood aright, because it is possible to read too much into them. They are the rendering of just one word in the Greek N.T. – the word '*anakephalaiosasthai*', which literally means, '*to bring to a conclusion*'. (Break it up as: '*ana kephalaio sasthai*').

This means, that the time arrived when God determined that the purpose He had conceived and the plan He had prepared, should become effective – be brought to a conclusion and should progress towards fulfilment. In the Old Testament scriptures God's redemptive intention was first *revealed in promise*, in Gen. 3:15, after the first human sin, and later *announced in prophecy* when He spoke through such men as Isaiah, in passages too numerous to be listed here.

The plan began to be realized when Jesus was born, and when Jesus died on the cross as God's own Lamb, rising from the dead after three days, the grounds for mankind's redemption were laid and the offer of salvation could be made. That purpose is still being worked out, as the Gospel of salvation through Christ is preached and souls are '**delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son**' (Col. 1:13)

### **"The whole creation groans"**

But we must also remember that God's 'purpose' extends beyond the salvation of Mankind, because sin affected and continues to affect, the whole of creation, (Rom.8:22), and will only be fully consummated when sin and its effects are eradicated and all things and everyone come to willing submission to the sovereignty of God Himself.

As the result of His 'obedience unto death', God exalted the Lord Jesus, (Phil.2: 9-11) and gave to Him the Name at which every knee on earth and in Heaven must eventually bow. But, as Heb. 10: 12-13 teaches, He now sits at the right hand of the Father, awaiting the time when '*his enemies be made his footstool*'. This will occur when the present Christian Dispensation ends and the day of Grace comes to a close.

1st Cor. 15:24-28, (which should be read again, although I am sure these verses are familiar to most of us), make it clear that the restoration of God's sovereignty over all things has yet to be seen. Only after the resurrection of the dead at Christ's return, when the '*last enemy*' will have been destroyed, will the Lord Jesus, who is reigning at this present time, hand over the kingdom to the Father, so that He Himself, will be 'all in all'.

The words of John, in 1st John 3:2, should be a great encouragement and inspiration to us. **"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure".**

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