

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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Christ: God's Purpose Revealed

By Brian R. Kenyon

Of all the verses in Ephesians, perhaps none summarize the purpose of God in Christ more than Ephesians 3:10-13. These verses deal with the declaration of God's purpose in Christ as it relates to both the spirit world and the physical world. Let us consider some encouraging truths from these verses that will help us better appreciate God's plan and motivate us to live for Him.

Christ: The Purpose of God Revealed Through the Church

Paul wrote,

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, ¹¹According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:10-11)

Consider God's "manifold wisdom" (Eph. 3:10). The word "manifold" basically means many sided. This word is "poetic in origin," and refers to an "intricately embroidered pattern of 'many coloured cloaks' or the manifold hues of 'a garland of flowers'" (O'Brien 245). God's wisdom thus consists of a vast spectrum of angles, which can be known only through the unfolding of his eternal plan (cf. Eph. 1:3-14).

God's "manifold wisdom" is made known to the spirit world (Eph. 3:10a). The "principalities and powers [rulers and authorities, NAS] in heavenly places" (cf. 1:21; 6:12; Col. 2:15 cf. Rom. 8:38) is a reference to the spirit world. "Principalities" (from ἀρχή, arche) and "powers" (from ἐξουσία, exousia) are cosmic spiritual powers thought to "control the movements of the heavenly bodies . . . thus to control the destinies of mortals" (Bruce 171). Generally,

these spiritual powers could include the entire realm of spirit beings (good and evil), but the focus here is upon the evil spiritual forces.

God's eternal plan has a dimension other than its dealings with humans. This dimension "takes in a nonhuman, cosmically oriented realm of angelic and demonic intelligences" (Martin 43). These spiritual forces are said to receive the evidence of Christ's victory which will ultimately lead to their submission (cf. Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 2:15). The vindication of Christ's Lordship at the resurrection (cf. Eph. 1:19-21; Rom. 1:4) "brought an end to the malign regime of these spirits and their tyranny over human life in the shape of fate and astrological fear." (Martin 43). The church must still war against these spiritual powers (Eph. 6:10-13 cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-5), but the strength of these powers is no match for the resurrected Christ and his church (Eph. 6:10-20; Rom. 8:31-39; Col. 2:15; Jas. 4:7; Rev. 20:1-15). The repercussion of Christ's work in the purpose of God is felt not only in this world, but throughout the spiritual world!

God's manifold wisdom is made known through the church (Eph. 3:10b). The Greek behind the translation "by the church" is found only here in the Greek text. The word "by" [through, ASV, NAS] (διὰ, dia) indicates instrumentality. Thus, the church is the means by which the "manifold wisdom of God" is made known to the "principalities and powers." While it is true that the practice and verbal proclamation of the Gospel by her members is one way that God's wisdom is made known "through the church" (cf. Eph. 1:13; 6:19-20; 1 Cor. 1:17; Gal. 1:6), much more is involved. The church is a continuing revelation of God's wisdom. By its very

existence, the church is the “theater of God’s works...God’s display, picture window, legal ‘proof’ (2:7), lighthouse (5:8)” (Barth 364), not only for the benefit of this world, but also as a tangible reminder to the evil spiritual powers that their authority “has been decisively broken and that all things are to be subject to Christ” (O’Brien 247).

How does the church’s very existence make known God’s “manifold wisdom”? First, the church was established and is ruled by the Christ, who is God in flesh (Mt. 1:23; Jn. 1:14), whose existence is and was eternal (Jn. 1:1-3; Rev. 1:8), and whose incarnation was predicated on the precise free-will maneuvering of human history which began shortly after the sixth day of creation (cf. Gen. 3:15).

Second, The church is composed of people from all cultural and racial backgrounds, including those who once despised each other (i.e., Jews and Gentiles) (Eph. 2:12-22; 3:6) and those who were once submissive to the “power of darkness” (Col. 1:13; Eph. 2:1-5).

Third, the church is composed of people living by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 10:38), knowing what they believe (Rom. 10:17; 1 Thes. 5:21), and fearless in their approach to the Almighty (Eph. 3:11; Heb. 4:16; 10:19).

Fourth, the wisdom of God, through the church, has “shown itself to be varied beyond measure and in a way which surpasses all previous knowledge thereof” (Seesemann 485). Although the earthly ministry of Christ was a personification of God’s wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24), the church, which is inseparable from Christ, is the entity through which God chose to make known the many facets of his wisdom. Thus, one who rejects the importance of the church of Christ rejects the wisdom of God (cf. Rom. 1:22-32).

Fifth, when the church fails to live up to the plan God has decreed for her from the “foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4), she betrays her inherent purpose (cf. Jn. 17:20-21). The local church cannot fulfill her part in making known the “manifold wisdom of God” when she tolerates sin and division (cf. 1 Cor. 1-4). Individual Chris-

tians cannot fulfill their roles in the church, making known the “manifold wisdom of God,” when they do not live distinctive lives for Christ. By failing to do what is right (Mt. 5:13-16; Jas. 1:27), and by doing that which is contrary to God’s will such as having fellowship either with the “unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11) or with those who “abideth not in the doctrine of Christ” (2 Jn. 9-11). Such cannot make known the “manifold wisdom of God”!

What Christ and His church accomplished was proposed from eternity (Eph. 3:11). “Eternal purpose” lets us know that all phases of the church have been planned from eternity and accomplished through Christ (cf. Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:3-6; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2). What God has done (and is doing) through the church is far greater than anything with which human purposes can be compared (cf. Job 38-41). The three names in which the eternal purpose was accomplished—“Christ Jesus...Lord”—emphasize every aspect of God’s plan in Christ: His preparation for coming (“Christ,” or Messiah), His incarnate life (“Jesus”), and His absolute authority (“Lord”)!

Christ: The Purpose of God As Motivation for Living

The thoughts now shift from that which involves the church “in heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10-11) to that which involves the church here and now, as she sojourns in this world. “In whom,” a key phrase in Ephesians, indicates that only through union with Christ are these blessings appropriated (cf. Eph. 1:3-14).

First, those in Christ have access to God with confidence. Paul wrote, “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Eph. 3:12). The idea is not merely that the way is open so that one may enter when ready, but rather there is the idea of “a bringing to”—the thought of an “introducer” inviting and encouraging entrance (Morris 97). Note the vocabulary. “Boldness” refers to “courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness, especially in the presence of persons of high rank” (Bauer 630). “Access” refers to “freedom or right to enter” (Newman 152). Elsewhere, the two Greek nouns appear separately in parallel statements (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; Heb. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35; 1 Jn. 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14). Ephesians 3:12 is the only place the two words are found together. The whole expression signifies “the boldness of confident access,” or “the boldness to enter confidently” (O’Brien 250). “By [through, ASV] the faith of him” describes the reason why Christians have the boldness to confidently enter the presence of God. Possible meanings for the expression, “the faith of him.” It may focus on the faithfulness of Christ to the Father’s will (i.e., “through

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his [Christ's] faithfulness" cf. O'Brien 249). It likely refers to the Christian's faith in Christ (cf. the way Paul uses "faith" in Eph. 1:15; 2:8; 3:17; 6:16, 23). In either case, however, the Christian can have the boldness to confidently enter the presence of God based not upon his or her own standing but upon the work of Christ (cf. Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-22).


Second, those in Christ must not become discouraged. "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory" (Eph. 3:13). A conclusion is now drawn from what has been said concerning the church's effect upon the cosmic powers (Eph. 3:10), the "eternal purpose" of God being accomplished (Eph. 3:11), and the boldness all Christians have to confidently enter God's presence (Eph. 3:12).

Because there is no object of the verbal expression "faint not [do not lose heart, NJK]" in Greek, various suggestions have been made as to whom Paul fears is in danger of losing heart (himself or the Ephesians). Given the context of Ephesians as well as the attitude of Paul toward suffering, the view that Paul is asking the Ephesians not to "faint" at his sufferings is best supported. "Faint [lose heart, NJK, NAS]" means "to become good for nothing, to grow faint, and hence to become discouraged" (Wood 48). Paul does not want the Ephesians to lose heart at his "tribulations."

Persecution was a known part of Paul's ministry (Acts 9:16; 1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 11:23-33; 12:9-10; 13:4; Gal. 6:17 cf. "the prisoner of Jesus Christ," Eph. 3:1), yet compared to Christ, he was far behind and sought to "fill up" what he lacked (Col. 1:24). To the Ephesians, Paul's arrest and imprisonment might have appeared to have thwarted the gospel and their involvement in it, but Paul informs them that his sufferings are "for you [on your behalf, NAS]" and they are "your glory." Although this latter expression has been taken several ways, it is best to understand "glory" in the usual sense of the "state of being in the next life...participation in the radiance or glory" (Bauer 203). Earlier references in Ephesians denote God's glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14, 17), but this is a glory in which Christians participate, both now (Eph. 1:18) and ultimately on the last day and forever thereafter (Eph. 2:7 cf. Col. 1:27; 3:4; 2 Thes. 2:14).

There is an inherent relationship between suffering and glory (2 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 8:17-18; 1 Pet. 2:20-21). Paul elsewhere speaks of his suffering leading to salvation and eternal life for others (2 Cor. 1:6; 4:8-12 cf. 2 Tim. 2:10), which is the sense here. In Ephesians "suffering is the prelude to glory, except that in this case the suffering is Paul's while the glory will be his readers" (O'Brien 251).

Conclusion

Because Christ is the purpose of God, the following truths are evident: (1) Christians have no reason to dwell in discouragement (Eph. 3:13); (2) Christians have boldness to enter confidently into the presence of God (Eph. 3:12); (3) Christians know that all of this is according to the deliberate planning and execution of God from eternity, throughout human history, culminating in Christ (Eph. 3:11); and (4) Christians realize that the "manifold wisdom of God" is disclosed to the spirit world (and to the physical world cf. Eph. 3:9) through the establishment and continuation of the church of Christ (Eph. 3:10). Are we faithful Christians? Are we doing our part in Christ, fulfilling the purpose of God? 

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Thanks, JMS!

In our May meeting, Jackie Stearsman informed the board that he and Joyce have made the decision to "leave the State of Florida." July's Harvester will have more to say about him, but for now we want to say THANK YOU, Jackie, for your love of God and His word and for your years of service in training preachers! May God bless you and Joyce!