

LIVING TO PURPOSE — PART 1 THE PURPOSE OF GOD

What's the point? What's the focus? What's my purpose? Why am I saved? What am I supposed to do?

It says in Acts 13:36 "*For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed.*" David served God's purpose in his generation. This is a good epitaph and therefore a good goal. We can say, "Yes, I want to serve the purpose of God in my generation!" But what *is* it?

Some want to start with "What is God's purpose for *me*?" But we must have a context in which to find and fulfil our purpose. Just as we should not interpret a verse of Scripture in the light of itself but rather in the light of the whole Bible, so we should not seek to understand the purpose of a given individual (i.e. me) in isolation, but in the light of the whole.

The context for *your* purpose in God is the purpose of the Church. And the context for the *Church* is God's overall purpose. So we have to start with God. Although it may come as a shock to many Christians, God is actually *up* to something!

God has a purpose

Reading over Ephesians 1 leaves us in no doubt that God has a purpose. And beyond that, we can immediately say four things. First, God's purpose is *set*. He's not just making His mind up from day to day. He's not responding to events and seasons and the latest bright ideas. His plans are not boredom-related. Secondly, God's purpose is *unchanging* (see Heb 6:17). Thirdly, God's purpose is *eternal*. Ephesians 3:11 speaks of "*his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" We are called in the gospel into God's eternal purpose! Fourthly, God makes everything *fit* His purpose. "*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will*" Eph 1:11.

God's purpose is in Christ

His purpose is completely centred in Christ (see Eph 1:9; 2:15; 3:11).

But what *is* God's ultimate purpose? Read and ponder Ephesians 1:9,10:

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In the Amplified Bible:

Making known to us the mystery (secret) of His will (of His plan, of His purpose). [And it is this:] In accordance with His good pleasure (His merciful intention) which He had previously purposed and set forth in Him, [He planned] for the maturity of the times and the climax of the ages to unify all things and head them up and consummate them in Christ, [both] things in heaven and things on the earth.

God's purpose is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one Head, even Christ.

His purpose includes restoration from fallenness, but it's *not* to restore us to the Garden before the Fall. His purpose was always from the beginning *in Christ*. To use the common phrase, God wants to restore us not to original *condition*, but to original *intention*.

The potter makes several pots, and puts these rough pots on the window ledge to dry. Then he builds a display cabinet. After that, he glazes and fires the pots. His intention is to place the finished pots in the display cabinet. That was always his intention from the beginning. But we think, "We've got to get these pots back on the window ledge!" We think original condition was original intention.

God's purpose in restoration is not to take you *back to Eden*, but *into Christ*.

God is working out His purpose

He's about the work of bringing together all things in heaven and on earth under one Head, even Christ. It's *not* that we're all hanging around right now, and one day in the future Jesus will come again and we all take over! In one sense, it's already been *done*. In another sense it's *being worked out right now*.

So what is it? What's the plan?

God's plan is to call a *people* to whom are given *revelation* and *assignment*; to make obedience *possible* in that people; to model His intended end-result in microcosm *in* that people and *through* that people; to reach out to others *through* that people, and add them by response *to* that people; and finally to call the whole thing to accountability.

Now the plan is in operation in and through the *Church*.

- We as the Church are a called people with *revelation* and *assignment* (see 1 Pet 2:9,10 along with Mt 28:18-20).
- Obedience is made possible. Repentance is commanded, but obedience is not yet enforced. Like the rich young ruler, it's possible to disobey God's command to "follow Me" and apparently get away with it! His *grace* makes our obedience possible (and not the other way round). God can only bless the Body with His Headship if the Body chooses to become attached. If not, the very government intended to bless will cut the other way.
- As a model, God sets up the "showcase Church", the Church functioning as it were in God's display cabinet, where the manifold wisdom of God is on view to spiritual forces and anyone who wants to look (see Eph 3:10,11).
- The reaching out is our evangelism, where people who respond in faith are not simply "reaped" but added to our number. ("*And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*" Acts 2:47 NASU)
- Finally, the curtain will fall, judgement will come, obedience will be complete, and "*the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*" Hab 2:14.

And Ephesians 1:10 will be fulfilled—"all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

God includes us in His purpose

We're not just involved in a general way, but we are specifically and individually included—"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." We're enabled by grace through faith to take our place on the central highway of history. In responding to the gospel, we've responded to God's eternal purpose!

Roy Hicks Jnr., in discussing God's eternal purpose, wrote:

Why should this make me happy? Because He will get where He is going. No heresy, no passing fancy of the church, no personal agenda will alter His course. And He has decided to include me. What is true of Him in His unswervable purpose in the larger sense is also true of Him in the personal sense. My heresy, my passing fancy, my personal agenda will not alter His course in including me in His divine purpose.

If God's eternal purpose is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one Head, even Christ, what's our part? The answer is three-fold:

1. To be under the Head ourselves
2. To be together *as a people* under one Head
3. To seek to promote the Lordship of Christ, the Kingdom of God, the Headship of Jesus so that more and more people—and more and more *of* people—would be brought together under the Head.

That's what we're about, that's what the Church is about, and that's why we're here.

Next issue, we'll continue this theme of "Living to Purpose", and look specifically at the purpose of the Church.

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Note: All Bible quotations are NIV unless otherwise stated.