

Purpose for Living

By

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The nurse came into the waiting room to announce that the young man was dead, and his widow looked up at me and sounded one word, “Why?” Cynically she turned away, never waiting for the answer.

Most people believe that somewhere in the gummed-up works of pulsating, weary, hungering flesh that we call humanity, there must be PURPOSE.

Youth ask, “What is life? What am I here for?” and failing to find the answer in the educational system, they seek it in experiences with drugs, drink and sex. Older folks, after a lifetime of seeking and sweating, despair and grow cynical, spending their last years slowly sighing and dying. Gifted men sacrifice their lives for money or power then in their declining years discover that their efforts have brought them neither joy nor hope. They pass out of the picture without the satisfaction of knowing WHY they were born.

Is there a purpose? If there is wouldn't it be the greatest of folly to live out one's life only to miss the reason for life, and thus to have lived in vain?

The Bible speaks of God's “eternal purpose.” It would be hard to conceive of a God who did things to no purpose. It would be harder to imagine that God has a purpose but refused to reveal what it is!

The fact is, God does have a purpose, and has revealed it. To begin with, God said, “let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion...” This, then, was the original purpose; that man should exist in God's image; that is, that man should live and think and act like His Creator. As long as man reflected that image — as long as he thought God's thoughts and acted in concert with God's design — he fulfilled the purpose of the Creator in making him, and no problems existed. But the very day that man chose to think and act in opposition to the Creator, and thus reject the image-concept, he ceased to fulfill the purpose. On that day he began to die (Gen. 1:26, 2:17).

Jesus is said to be “the image of the invisible God.” This means more than the fact that He was divine. It means that He did everything according to God's desires. He said, “I do always the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:29). This is exactly what God expected of Adam. The difference is that after being tempted by the Devil, Adam gave up the pursuit of pleasing God in order to please himself. Jesus was also tempted — “in all points tempted like as we are” — but never once did he choose to follow some course that displeased God.

Adam's excuse was, “The woman whom you gave to be with me...” and Eve's excuse was, “The serpent beguiled me...” (Gen. 3:12–13). But there is no excuse for choosing that which is contrary to God's design. Man was to reflect God's image and have dominion over all else on the earth. Instead, he had surrendered that dominion to Satan, and deliberately chosen a course in opposition to God. Jesus, on the other hand, never allowed any influence but the Father's. He always obeyed God, lived without sin, and did this in the face of the bitterest opposition from the Jews.

One reason for this opposition was in the fact that He continually broke the “traditions” which men had substituted for God’s will. The same problem still exists. One may follow religious traditions and yet never even come close to the purpose of God. One has to decide whether he wants to satisfy God’s purpose or man’s, and when he rejects the revered idols of men he must be prepared to face men’s bitter opposition.

It is common practice for a person to choose a vocation as his life’s purpose, then choose a religion as a means of helping him attain the purpose. He devotes all his energy and life to the vocation, and makes his “faith” merely another tool in building toward the chosen purpose.

Obviously he has the whole thing backwards! To go along pursuing one’s chosen vocation, however worthwhile it may be, with no respect to the ultimate and declared purpose of the Creator to reflect His image is bound to result in doing a good many things that are opposed to Him. The idea that we can make up our own code, then try to live up to it and expect this to impress God so that He will immortalize us in the next world is just a pipe dream! **It is GOD’S purpose that God is interested in!** It is just this thing of man making up his own “image” and trying to live by it that got Adam into trouble and brought him death. It will do the same thing for any man, for in judgment he will reap eternal death as the reward for rejecting God’s purpose. Why should God give eternal life to a person who demonstrates for forty or fifty or more years that he doesn’t want to fulfill God’s idea of what life ought to be?

The purpose for all men is the same: the image of God. Whatever vocation one chooses must be one that doesn’t get in the way of this purpose!

Of course we all admit to failure when it comes to total fulfillment; that is, perfectly reflecting His image. As far as I know, Jesus, is the only One Who succeeded perfectly. But it is not the total completion of that purpose in this world that God asks of us, but only that we embrace that purpose. Our purpose must be to fulfill God’s purpose. Hence we read: “Seek the things that are above where Christ is...”; “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus...”; “and everyone that has this hope...purifies himself, even as he is pure.” We won’t BE LIKE HIM until He comes again, but what we are talking about is purpose, the fact that our purpose must be the same as God’s, that we should be like Him.

This is what is meant by “repentance.” One is pursuing his own goal, seeking to please himself or, like Adam, following the Devil’s advice. Then he hears of God’s purpose, and the glorious goal of actually being the eternal creature in God’s image. He changes his mind, and starts on the pursuit of God’s purpose. That’s repentance.

That is the basis of baptism. The penalty for sin (pursuing the wrong purpose) is death. So we are baptized into Christ’s death (Rom. 6:3). The penalty for our sin is then charged to Christ, who literally died for us, and then we are able to rise from the Baptism to live a new life, with a new purpose — God’s purpose.

This is the reason for the world’s opposition to true faith. Jesus said, “because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19). Refusing to support the multitude of pursuits that are championed by unbelievers, we are marked as fanatics and extremists. To the world we are “out of it.” Indeed, our purpose IS out of this world, for our hope is in a new world “wherein dwells righteousness.” It is tragic that so many church members never can make up their minds whether they want to pursue the purpose of God, or the purpose of the world. They

vacillate forever in between the two. Needless to say, they will lose out in the end, for God makes it clear that He wants no fence-straddlers. “You cannot serve God and mammon.”

This is the reason for prayer. We ask God to help us because we are trying to do what God wants us to do. Surely we ought to know better than to ask God to help us pursue a course that is the opposite of the one He set for us!

This is the reason for the church. We have a common purpose, and naturally want to share it for our own encouragement as well as to encourage the other fellow. We need all the help we can get in fulfilling that purpose, so we need the teaching received in the church. And since we must spend much of the time out in the world where this purpose is virtually unknown, we have the communion each week, teaching us of the supreme sacrifice Christ paid in meeting our death penalty, in order that this purpose may be fulfilled in eternity.

In raising Jesus from death and making Him immortal, the Bible says that God was manifesting to man His eternal purpose (II Tim. 1:9–10). Today Jesus is the image of God. He is “alive forevermore.” This is just what God seeks for every person, that He might finally raise him from death, give him immortality, and have him live in His image forever.

This express purpose of God stands in diametric opposition to the popular view of the purpose of religion. This popular view holds that religion is to be bent to the ever-changing attitudes and desires of men. Men choose their purpose and find a “faith” that suits it. The modern socialist movement which is designed to conform all mankind to a common denominator is strongly supported by the “religious world” to the abandonment of the purpose of God. Churches which fall in step with this movement have ceased to pursue the purpose of God and therefore are operating in opposition to Christ and not under His direction.

Of course not all can pursue the same occupation, but all CAN pursue the same purpose. It is the ONE thing that all CAN do, for there is nothing in the world that can stand in the way of it. One doesn’t have to be wealthy, nor in perfect health, nor of high I.Q., nor live in an particular place, be of any particular race, nor have any outstanding talent. Neither sickness, poverty, accident, opposition, persecution...nothing, not even the devil himself, can keep one from choosing God’s purpose and pursuing it all one’s life. “We know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called ACCORDNG TO HIS PURPOSE” (Rom. 8:28).

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