

THE PURPOSE OF IT ALL

By

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A young man, after two years of agonizing radiation and chemotherapy, at last finds rest in death, and his mother asks, “Why?” An elderly woman, with painful arthritis and a broken hip, suffers a stroke and now lies helplessly silent; to be tube-fed until death comes. Her family asks, “Why?”

Every day thousands of young people-frustrated, discouraged, pressured and confused, with no reason for going on consider ending it all, and many of them do.

Is there a reason? Is there hope? With life so filled with its problems and pain, what is the purpose of it all?

In a poll taken among teenagers, the majority stated that their goal in life was to get rich. They had no idea how being rich would help them attain a purpose in life, because it had never dawned upon them that life has a purpose. And since their chances of actually getting rich are diminishing every day, so are their chances of accomplishing any purpose, leaving them to face the future without hope or direction and destined for failure.

Man was created with purpose. The Creator expressed it in the beginning: “Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion...” (Gen. 1:30). Adam was not made with all the attributes of God, such as being omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and immortal, but he was created with the capacity to think, to reason, to feel and to act upon his own judgment. His purpose was to be what His Creator desired him to be, to think thoughts after the mind of God and to act in harmony with Him.

That purpose has not changed, as God does not change (Mal. 3:6). God’s purpose is eternal (Eph. 3:11). When Jesus appeared, He gave to the world a demonstration of what it means to fulfill God’s purpose (2 Tim. 1:9, 10). Being “the image of the invisible God,” Jesus thought and acted in harmony with the Father’s desires. He said, “I do always the things that are pleasing to Him” (John 8:29). Jesus could have gained wealth, power and all that contributes to worldly pleasure and comfort, but none of this would have helped Him fulfill His purpose. In fact, it was His determination to please God that caused Him to resist the traditions and popular concepts of men. He said, “That which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). The religious concepts so popular with the orthodox of His day were rejected by Jesus and won for Him severe criticism and opposition.

To align oneself with this great purpose of God to have man in His own image, one has to deny the world’s purposes. He must repent — to change his purpose and direction — which sets him in opposition to the world’s normal course. It then appears to the world

that it is the Christian who is going the wrong direction. He is marked as a fanatic, an extremist, and by many even as a danger to society.

The world has always been opposed to the purpose of God. Jesus said to the apostles, “because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19).

Note how, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals the contrast between what is considered normal in the world and what is normal for those who follow Him. The world considers as misfits those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and who are pure in heart. Jesus suggests they will be reproached and persecuted for such righteousness (Matt. 5). All the same, these are the ones who will enter into life (Matt. 6:13-14).

What the world cannot accept is that man must submit to God’s purpose that only His purpose will prevail. Therefore, “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Psalm 2:2, 3). God’s purpose must be abolished, hence the determination to keep His law out of government, to deny it in the school and in the media. While the Supreme Court debated the abortion issue on the grounds of constitutionality, they refused to consider whether it is right or wrong. God’s purpose is unrecognized in the highest court, and millions of pregnant women are inclined to act as though such a purpose does not exist.

In the darkness of this milieu, where is the light of the church? Unfortunately it has not spoken in clear tones. For example, the message given to promote conversion seldom includes a clear presentation of God’s purpose to have man as an immortal creature in His own image. One may respond to an invitation through deep emotional stress, without ever having considered whether or not he desires to be remolded in the very image of God. Recently I was present at a large evangelistic rally at which the entire message was the personal experience of the speaker’s courage and faith in overcoming severe suffering and physical affliction. It was a moving story. But it wasn’t about God’s purpose, and nothing was said about what He requires or commands. Yet scores walked to the front at the invitation.

Generally the church presents a choice, not of what one is to be but of where one is to reside: go to heaven and live in bliss or go to hell and be tortured forever. Compare this with the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. “Whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have eternal life.” “He that believes on the Son has eternal life; but he that obeys not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” The alternatives offered by Jesus are life and death. Scripture holds forth the object as being godly, being transformed day by day into His image (2 Cor. 3:18), and ultimately being “like Him” in the glorious state of immortality (I John 3:2; Phil. 3:21). It is precisely because God doesn’t want the rebellious to live forever that He cast Adam and Eve from the garden, lest they “take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Gen. 3:22).

It is common procedure for a person to choose a vocation as his life’s purpose, to train for it and bring all of life into harmony with that pursuit. Then he may be told that to

“receive Christ” or to “invite Him into his heart” will bring God’s help in his career goals.

This is a case of putting the cart before the horse. What God requires is that we make is that we make His purpose our purpose. He does not promise to make a Christian farmer a successful farmer, but He promises to be with him while he becomes a successful Christian.

The idea of the sinner “inviting Christ” into his heart comes from Rev. 3:20, where Christ knocks at the door.” But it was at the door of a church, where people who were already Christians had become lukewarm. It is Jesus who invites the sinner to salvation, not the other way around. “If any man would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). The essential element of repentance is that one renounces his own agenda (or vocation) in order to follow God’s. It is the Creator’s purpose that counts, and it is that purpose that God will help man achieve.

What, then, of the suffering, heartache and hard personal problems which confront us? One may ask, “Why am I being punished? What have I done to bring this about?” Some problems we may bring on ourselves and others may result from the sin and evil in the world. ***But none of them — sickness, financial reverses, domestic conflicts — stand in the way of fulfilling God’s purpose to have us in His image.***

Peter writes that we can rejoice in our hope “though new for a little while, if need be you have been put to grief in manifold trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perishes though it is proved by fire, may be found unto: praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7). Jesus “learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8), and left us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21).

God isn’t finished. He works in the redeemed, transforming them and renewing their minds and hearts (Phil. 2:13). One day He will create again, creating a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13), and new and glorious bodies for His people.

Nothing is more important to God than the accomplishment of His purpose, to have us in His image. Whatever furthers that purpose gives Him glory. His pleasure is not in the great edifices erected for comfort and convenience of the church but in the lives that are being transformed, lives that reflect His love and holiness, people who are willing to lose life in this world in order to gain the perfect life in the next.

To be a Christian is to be willing to exchange all that is temporal and mortal for that which is eternal, which will include immortality in the image of God.

“He that loves his life loses it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (John 12:25).

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