

God's Eternal Purpose

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1); then spoke into existence other things in the universe for the purpose of providing an environment in which to have personal fellowship with man whom he then created in his own image: "So God created man in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). Then, having enjoyed fellowship between equals in the Godhead from all eternity, God now had fellowship with Adam. He then formed a companion for Adam, making it possible for the two of them to join him in the process of forming children. As the Psalmist put it: "God sets the lonely in families" (Psalms 68:6). What a marvelous idea!

And you know, God never made another human race! Our division of people into so-called "races" does not alter the fact that God created only one human race. This race was to be composed of individuals enjoying close fellowship in their families, in friendly association with other families, and all of these individuals to be in a personal relationship with God in the family of God. What a splendid arrangement!

But God's purpose in creating man was for far more than personal relationships, as wonderful as they are. This purpose has been widely misunderstood. Some say he created man to "show forth his glory." We are to glorify God, but this wording sounds like God created man to display his glory, which seems rather selfish for a holy God, doesn't it! Others quote from the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." This too is true, but sounds a bit like selfishness on man's part.

These approaches fail to show that God imparted his nature of eternal holy love to mortal beings so they could reflect His image—for a purpose worthy of a holy God! This image, though only partially reflected now, is the basis for a personal fellowship with God, like that enjoyed within the Godhead from all eternity; so that we might fulfill his eternal purpose for our creation. So we conclude:

Man was created "in God's image" so he could share fellowship with his God of eternal, holy love, and be enabled to glorify Him by living a self-sacrificing life of love-service to others.

Throughout Old Testament history, God again and again selected a human messenger through whom to proclaim this purpose, only to have their hearers self-centeredly appropriate the message for their own group, failing to pass it on to all for whom it was intended.

Abraham was outstanding among these messengers. God chose him, saying, "I will make you into a great nation and will bless you ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2-3). And God is still keeping that promise to Abraham: "So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (Galatians 3:9)."

But Abraham's physical descendants, in claiming that this promise was only for them and those who would become one of them, ceased being the channel through which God was blessing others. By the time Jesus came, the Jews had believed for centuries that they alone were the people of God; so when God sent his Son, they slew him for challenging what they thought was their relationship with Almighty God.

Jesus made it clear, however, that his Father's original purpose was still to be realized through him, saying, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). Then, in John 17:20-21, after praying for himself, then for his Apostles in the Upper Room, he prayed:

My prayer is not for these alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

After his resurrection, Jesus again made the universality of God's purpose clear by commanding the Apostles, and us, to "go and make disciples of all nations" Matthew 28:19); "a disciple being one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another" (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition).

In spite of Jesus' example of ministering to Samaritans, Romans, and others who believed in him, without requiring them to convert to Judaism, and by disregarding this specific command, the Apostles did not "go" at first. God had to give Peter three visions on the housetop before he would go to gentiles in Caesarea (Acts 10); where he gained enough insight into God's purpose to say:

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. This is the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

—Acts 10:34-36

Then, with a possible exception or two, the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem; ministering to Jews, until forced by persecution to "go" years later. So God commissioned Paul to be his messenger to others. Following Jesus' example, Paul took a few disciples with him in his journeys; but unlike the Lord, began forming small believer fellowships. Some in these fellowships continued to attend the Synagogues and worship at the temple in Jerusalem; others, being Gentiles, could not.

These fellowships then began forming local churches; and as these churches began associating with each other, organizational alliances were formed. But, as new insights into biblical revelation started to emerge, groups of churches began separating from each other; following, partially at least, the old self-centered pattern of concluding that this new view defined who the people of God were—those who agreed with them!

Some of these insights were no doubt also due to the progressive revelation of the Holy Spirit; but human factors, not God's will, must have influenced many of them, or surely such disunity would not have resulted. These separations have continued down through the centuries, leading to the great number of "Christian" groups in this day.

Our Lord's prayer for the unity of all his followers may well have been the most important request he made from his Father for us while here on earth; yet here we are—millions strong—whether we call ourselves "Christians," "believers," or "followers," far from being one in a way that fulfills this prayer!

It is clear that our Lord did not mean organizational unity, but spiritual unity; and although it has been far too rarely realized among us, this unity occurred at Pentecost; for since then all who are "in Christ" are one with our Lord as he is one with the Father!

It also clear that this prayer was for doctrinal unity in "their [the Apostles'] message." This unity has yet to occur; but we believe it will; for the fresh insights in our article "God's Salvation Plan" show how all of us can come to a biblical, doctrinal unity, without compromising one biblically-sound element of our current traditions. We believe that this doctrinal unity will be the catalyst for fulfillment of our Lord's request "that the world may believe that you have sent me."

In spite of all the attempts by fallen angels and men to change God's purpose, starting with the fall of angels, then of man, God has not changed his mind!

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

—Revelation 7:9

This purpose has cost each person of the Godhead an incalculable price, but this was no surprise to them, for Jesus the Lamb through whom this purpose was to be accomplished "was slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13.8). It is, therefore, our solemn responsibility and marvelous privilege to share this message of God's Eternal Purpose with all we can, by every means possible! Sharing this article with everyone you can is one way to start doing this.

Yours, "in Christ,"

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