

# God's Eternal Purpose

## Ephesians 1:7-12

Today, in the first chapter of Ephesians, we will be examining a great question with which men continually wrestle in our day, as they have all through history: The question of whether or not there is a purpose in the universe. Do the events of history make any sense? Is the record of human events -- with its concatenation of tragedy and happiness and misery and heartache and joy -- to any real effect, is it moving toward any one goal?

Or is life, as Shakespeare had Hamlet describe it, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"? There are many people today who say that is a true description. They agree with Hamlet. There are many voices saying that there is no purpose for the universe, and they are respected voices. Many historians, scientists, and others, looking at life around us, at the human story, say that no plan is evident, no purpose discernible, through all the strange mixture of history.

The French writer Andre Maurois said, "The universe is indifferent. Who created it? Why are we here upon this puny mud heap, spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea, and I am quite convinced that no one else has the least idea."

That is a common view in our world today, but this letter to the Ephesians Paul disagrees. We started a couple weeks ago to examine Paul's great doxology in Ephesians 1:3-14. This statement cuts right across the thinking of the men in Paul's day and of the leaders of thought in our day.

Remember that we found the answer to the search for personal meaning and identity in what Paul says about the work of the Father. God the Father chose us to be holy, destined us for adoption into His family, and accepted us in the beloved, Jesus Christ.

Then last week we found, in the work of the Son, the answer to the problem of sin and guilt. We have been blessed with:

### **I. A Redemptive Pardon (1:7-8a).**

We are redeemed, bought out of slavery to sin and set free by the blood of Jesus. This means we are forgiven according to the riches of God's grace.

Now we come to the problem of history, and from Verse 9 through Verse 12, in one vast and glorious statement, the apostle deals with the purpose of the universe. Listen again to verses 7-12:

**7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace**  
**8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,**  
**9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,**  
**10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might**

**gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; in Him.**

**11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,**

**12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.**

Not only has God given us a redemptive pardon in Christ, He has also given us a revealed perspective in Christ. By that I mean that we have a new perspective given to us by a revelation from God.

## **II. A Revealed Perspective (8b-10).**

### **Given in wisdom and understanding (1:8b).**

How do we receive this revelation? We receive it **in all wisdom and prudence**. These words are very interesting. **Wisdom** has to do with coming to an understanding of the eternal truths of life. The meaning of life, the existence of God, the purpose of the universe, heaven and hell, time and eternity, all have to do with **wisdom**. God gives believers a special kind of understanding of ultimate things. Believers see subjects like life and death, God and man, righteousness and sin differently than unbelievers.

On the other hand, **prudence** – some of your translations have **understanding** or **insight** – this has to do with practical understanding, dealing with the problems of every day life. In **insight** you apply the **wisdom** that you have to life. When your mind is filled with the Word of God and your life is filled with the things of God, you have a different worldview. Regardless of our educational background, God gives believers understanding that unbelievers will never know.

1 Cor.2:14-15 says "**But the natural [unsaved] man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things.**"

And God has given both of these characteristics of revelation knowledge to us in order that we may understand **the mystery of His will**.

### **Revealed in the Mystery of His Will (vv.9-10).**

And what is **the mystery of His will**? This **mystery** is not mysterious, it is not something that cannot be known. It is something that must be revealed by God. The way the New Testament writers use this term refers to something which was hidden but is now made known.

As Paul says in Colossians 1:26, this has to do with, "**the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.**" God has revealed to us that it is His desire to "**gather together in one all things in Christ.**"

Christ is at the center of all God's purposes in this universe. That is God's goal. He desires to sum up all things in Christ. This is the **mystery** that **He made known to us**. The word for **gather together** is a compound word which really means to gather everything under the headship of Christ. So you could say God's purpose in this universe is that everything be gathered together and united under Christ.

Christ is the center of God's purposes for all things. This is why Paul uses the little phrase **in Christ** so much. And it is in Jesus Christ that we find our purpose, and the true meaning of life. . God will gather all things together under the headship of Christ. He will bring all His own people and His creation under Himself. It will be a New World Order!

This is the mystery with which we have been entrusted, and for which we are responsible. In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul says that we have been made "**stewards of the mysteries of God.**" We have a responsibility to understand these mysteries and speak out about them. It's up to us to tell the message that the world desperately needs to hear: *Christ is the sum of all things. All we need is found in Him.*

Finally, we see that God has not only given us a redemptive pardon and a revealed perspective in Christ, He has also given us a rich provision in Him.

### **III. A Rich Provision (vv.11-12).**

He calls this provision **an inheritance**. And it is a rich inheritance indeed.

#### **A. We Already have an Inheritance (v.11).**

Note this phrase is in past tense "**we have obtained an inheritance.**" In the Bible, speaking of a future event in a past tense is a way of showing the certainty of it. The inheritance is already ours.

Before God created anything, He "**predestined**" every believer to receive this inheritance in Christ. In Jesus' parable of the judgment of the nations, He says, in Mat.25:34, "**Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'**"

This predetermined inheritance of all our Heavenly Father's wealth is "**according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.**" God wills and wants to give us all things!

The Bible clearly indicates that God has made generous promises to us as believers. 2 Peter 1:4 indicates that God has "**given to us exceedingly great and precious promises.**" The inheritance **we have obtained** is found in these promises. But these promises have not been given like mere human promises. Politicians will promise you many things and then not come through on their promises. God is not like that. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "**For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.**" In

other words, the promises of God are yes in Christ! God's promises never fail because Jesus never fails.

We have already seen in Ephesians 1:3 that God has blessed us with "every spiritual blessing . . . in Christ." This is why it says that **we have obtained an inheritance**. God has already given us an inheritance in Christ. He has already begun fulfilling His promises to us in Christ. We are already recipients of the rich provision of God for our lives.

Romans 8:16-17 says, "**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.**" Children of God! Heirs of God! Fellow heirs with Christ! What more could we ask for? This is the rich inheritance we have in Christ.

It is an inheritance that we have received **according to His purpose and the counsel of His will**. In other words, it is by God's choice that we have received this inheritance. And it is an inheritance that has a purpose. The purpose is **that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory**. In other words, God has given us this inheritance in order that we might be **to the praise of His glory**. God desires to make us a positive reflection of His glory and His grace. God desires to point to us and show the world what He can do in a human life. The astounding transformation of a sinner into a saint, an heir of God is God's most glorious work.

What does that mean in practical terms? Well, that means that you and I must not complain any longer about what life hands us. It is the Father who has made that choice. He has chosen to put us where we are to allow us to have the problems that we have, in order that, in the hurt and the heartache and the suffering, and in the joy and the blessing and the riches, whatever they may be, the glory of Jesus may be released in that situation.

As we make ourselves available to him moment by moment, in the shop, in the office, in the home, in the backyard, wherever we are, and as we respond with joy and love and acceptance to the situation in which we find ourselves, God is glorified. Christ receives his inheritance. He finds riches of delight and enjoyment in that. The old is torn down, and the new is built in its place, all things are brought together in Christ.

I don't fully understand that, but I know it works. I know that is the way God is working.

Is that your experience with God? Is that how He is working in your life? In not, you may not be "In Christ."