

God's Ultimate Aim

2 Corinthians 12:11-21

This is indeed a fascinating and challenging Epistle, for as we have reminded each other more than once in the course of studying it, in no other letter does Paul open his heart so completely as he does here; to reveal all that was involved to him in being a minister of the gospel. He tells us in this chapter that he almost feels he has made a fool of himself in boasting of all his experiences, *but the Corinthian Christians have forced him into it!* Instead of defending and standing by him, they had questioned the authority of his ministry. **They had challenged the authenticity of what he had to say.** They had even been questioning what right he had to speak to them as he did. Therefore, Paul says in verse 11, “You have made me act like a fool—boasting like this.^[a] You ought to be writing commendations for me, for I am not at all inferior to these “super apostles,” even though I am nothing at all.” **To prove the reality of his ministry, he reminds them that they had seen in him a demonstration of the power of God through miracles, signs, and spiritual authority.** It is interesting that the greatest evidence that Paul brought to the Corinthian church for the reality and genuineness of his life was his *patience*, and this they had seen with their own eyes.

Now he has just one last appeal to make to the church at Corinth that will succeed, perhaps, if nothing else has succeeded, in disarming their suspicion of him and winning their confidence. He says in verses 13-16, “The only thing I failed to do, which I do in the other churches, was to become a financial burden to you. Please forgive me for this wrong! Now I am coming to you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you. I don’t want what you have—I want you. After all, children don’t provide for their parents. Rather, parents provide for their children. I will gladly spend myself and all I have for you, even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me. Some of you admit I was not a burden to you. But others still think I was sneaky

and took advantage of you by trickery.” So in perhaps what is the climax of the whole principle of this tremendous letter, Paul opens his heart completely, and we see laid bare before us the *selflessness* of a man of God, which is indeed a copy, a high standard, for all of God's servants for all time.

However, we have not come to magnify Paul, but to magnify Christ. Paul is only a faint shadow of the Lord Jesus; and if these qualities are found in his life, it is only because they were found completely in the life of Jesus Christ our Lord. My concern, therefore, is that you should see these tremendous statements with which Paul bares his heart to them: “...I seek not yours, but you. . . . I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.” I trust that you will see those statements as God's goal for your life, as God's grace in your heart, as God's glory in your service.

Consider, first, God's great purpose for your life. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, “God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” The Bible teaches us in no uncertain terms that God has a definite plan and purpose for my life and yours. However, most of us keep asking what it is and searching for it. Paul said this in 2 Timothy 1:7-9, “For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind... Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

All men who will be honest with themselves are conscious of the belief that there is more to life than our time on earth. The apostle Paul writes to the Church at Ephesus that he continually prays that God will give each member of that Church an understanding of what God's great plan and purpose is. Look at Ephesians 1:16-2:7, “I have not stopped giving thanks for you,

remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^[a] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way...God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

One of the great saints of the Old Testament was King David. He realized that God’s plan and purpose for his life was far above and greater than being the King of Israel with all of its wealth, power and prestige. Listen to what he says in Psalm 8:3-8, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.”

During the time of King David, men could only see about 5,119 stars with the naked eye. When the 100-inch telescope was made operational on Mount Wilson in California, astronomers discovered that there were over 40 billion stars in the universe. When the 200-inch telescope was made operational on Mount Palomar in California,

astronomers discovered that in just the Milky Way galaxy there were over 100 billion stars. **But that was nothing, not even a drop in the bucket, because they could now see that there were at least another 100 billion galaxies, many of them larger than the Milky Way galaxy.**

The reason God created this earth was to bring you into existence and develop you to be able to fulfill the individual plan and purpose He has for your life.

Observe now God's grace in your heart. Listen to Paul's heart in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Philip Yancey wrote: "Grace comes free of charge to people who do not deserve it and I am one of those people. I think back to whom I was - resentful, wound tight with anger, a single hardened link in a long chain of 'un-grace' learned from family and church. Now, I am trying in my own small way to pipe...the tune of grace. I do so because I know, more surely than I know anything, that any pang of healing or forgiveness, or goodness, I have ever felt comes solely from the grace of God. I yearn for the church to become a nourishing culture of that grace."

When I read those words, "A nourishing culture of that grace," I thought, "isn't it sad that people often find more grace and acceptance in places other than church?" **Isn't it tragic that people regularly enter churches and then leave again never finding grace?** The sad reality is that too many churches and Christian groups are often known more for their rules and musty religious pretense than for being authentic grace-freed followers of Jesus. It is all too common for Christian to believe in God's grace but to be ungracious. **It is all too common for preachers to preach grace, but not extend it.** As believers, we claim grace and forgiveness for ourselves, but we often demand performance from others. We need to understand Christ's heart for His Church.

Listen to what we have been told in 2 Timothy 1:1 & 9, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus...Who has saved us, and called us, with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

First, the Bible says we are God’s chosen people. The Bible says, **God has set His love on us.** He set His intentions on us as His very own. **Israel was God’s single chosen people in the Old Testament.** He established a covenant with them to be His. He marked them out to be distinct and unique from every nation on the Earth. **When Jesus died and rose, He established a new covenant with a new body of people; the Church, His Body.** The Church is composed of Jews and Gentiles, from people someday from every tribe, tongue, nation and ethnic group. Every person, brought into a faith relationship with His Son. **We are God’s chosen people.** Paul is saying, like the Jewish nation was to be different from all others, holy and set apart for God’s purposes, we are God’s unique people today. Old Testament Jews failed God and broke covenant with Him. **That won’t happen with us.** But how do we know that? Because our relationship and righteousness is not based on *performance*, but on *grace*. **In the New Covenant, Jesus himself met every requirement.** And that is exactly what we have been told in 1 Corinthians 1:29-31, “That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” With that thought in mind, look at Colossians 3:12, “Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering...”

Therefore, the Bible teaches that as God’s chosen people, we are holy. We don’t earn the description of holy and acceptable. Colossians 1:20-22 tells us what the blood of Christ has done for us,

“And through him (Christ) God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.” **If we are “in Christ,” God declares you are holy!**

Finally, there is here the glory of God in your service. How does grace and glory show up in our service? Listen again to Paul’s words in Colossians 1:12-17, “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

What is Paul saying here? He is simply saying that people who know the real meaning of grace reflect grace.

Paul says in verse 5 to “Mortify...” and then he talks about the things of the flesh. But he begins verse 12 this way, “Put on, therefore, as the elect of God...” You have probably heard someone make the statement, “Old habits die hard.” **Listen, God is not just saying for us to kill them, He is saying for us to redress!** God says, by the power and truth of grace, put off those old “stuff” such as sarcasm, cutting remarks, rudeness, sour attitudes that don’t match God’s glorious grace work in your life. **And in their place, put on the qualities that are**

becoming “the elect of God.” In other words, let God’s transformation and power that has been planted *inside* show up on the *outside*.

Let me sum up tonight’s study with Paul’s words found in 2 Corinthians 9:8, “And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work.” Paul is simply saying, “It does not matter where He places me or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me. For the easiest positions, He must give grace; and in the most difficult, His grace is sufficient. So, if God places me in great perplexity, must He not give me much guidance? In positions of great difficulty, much grace? In circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? As to work, mine was never so plentiful, so responsible, or so difficult; but the weight and strain are all gone. His resources are mine, for He is mine!”

Child of God, He has saved us by His grace, He guides us by His grace, He keep us by His grace, and He will continue to give us grace for grace as we walk this life with Him.