

The Purpose of God

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The Danger of Coming Short

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It is of immense help, in contemplating the manifold activities and energies of God, to be able to gather everything into one inclusive, comprehensive, and concrete issue. The Bible, from Genesis to the Revelation, covers a wide range and includes a vast amount of matter, but it has one all-governing and conclusive objective. The purpose of God is one, and only one. It is always referred to in the singular; "*Called according to His purpose*" (Rom. 8:28); "*According to the purpose...*" (Eph. 1:11); "*...According to the eternal purpose*" (Eph. 3:11); "*According to His purpose and grace*" (2 Tim. 1:9). It is not a variety or number of things; it is just one.

And what is the one, single, comprehensive purpose? The answer is Christ! "His Son, Jesus Christ." And when we ask further, What about His Son? The answer is, to have Him fill all things and to have all things in Him. That this is so is made clear in the definite statements of Scripture; "*In Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible... all things have been created through Him, and unto Him...*" "*For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fullness dwell.*" (Col. 1:16, 19) "*Whom He appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He made the worlds (ages)*" (Heb. 1:2).

So, then, in the counsels of God, all things must head up in Christ. God's occupation is with bringing Christ in, and bringing into Christ. If we would be "*God's fellow-workers,*" this must be our single-eyed aim and business. This defines precisely the purpose of the Church.

The presence of the Church in this world is, firstly, to be a corporate expression of Christ here. The very designation "*The Body of Christ*" means Christ corporately present. The Church is not an institution, organization, society, or religious fraternity. It is, - in God's intention, the embodiment of His Son in a continuation of His life and work on this earth. In the next place, after the being of the Church, is its work. This is just one thing, and by the one result alone its work stands or falls. This work is to make for an increase of Christ in this world, and this is to be accomplished along two lines; namely, by evangelism and building up.

Evangelism is the bringing of Christ initially into lives. Every new instance of Christ coming into a life is an additional measure of Christ in the creation, making a new creation. It is of the utmost importance that there should be no stopping short at mere mental agreement, or emotional expression, or just an outward act of acceptance, but that Christ by His Spirit should really have taken up residence within. But our object is not to deal with evangelism, but to point out its object, which is to bring in Christ and to bring into Christ.

The other purpose of the Church is building up. In the most familiar versions of the New Testament the word in this connection is "*edification.*" But "*building up*" is much better. The Church is to "*build itself up.*" We are to "*build one another up.*" Spiritual gifts and ministries are all meant for "*building up.*" What is this "*building up?*" It is the increase of Christ. The New Testament repeatedly refers to "*babes in Christ*" and "*full-grown men*" in Christ; and there is a constant urge to "*go on to full growth.*" Thus, by extensification and intensification, by increase outwardly and inwardly, it is Christ gaining an ever-increasing place. We repeat, by numerous ways and means God is governed by this one all-dominating objective - His Son.

But there is a point which needs very much to be emphasized and kept in view. These two things, evangelism and building up, are not two separate things; they must be kept together. If they are separated, or if either is given a greater place than the other an unbalanced condition will arise, and this will defeat God's full end. If evangelism is given a place greater than building up, or to the exclusion of the other, the result will be a great number of spiritual babes who remain such, no matter how long they live. There will then exist a preponderating number of Christians who are like those referred to by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews - "*When by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles... and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food*" (Heb. 5:12). By this and what immediately follows, the Apostle makes it quite clear that God can never be satisfied with just having so many, however many, "converts," born-again babes, but His end demands that these shall come to the spiritual position where they can take all that He has to give of spiritual strong meat, and have spiritual senses exercised, being "experienced in the word" and of spiritual intelligence. All this means what Paul called "*the measure of Christ,*" and the end in view - "*unto the measure... of the fullness of Christ.*"

If, on the other hand, building up is given a place out of all proportion to evangelism, we shall have another malformation. There will arise an ultra-spirituality that is divorced from what is practical. Truth will, sooner or later, take the place of Life. The mental will rule out the truly spiritual. The worst outcome will be that those involved will be found to have got into a false position which will not stand up to the tests of real life, the expression of Christ, among the people and conditions of this world. For the real proof

of spiritual life is in its ability to express Christ in love, forbearance, patience, meekness, and self-forgetfulness, in an unsympathetic, un-understanding, and unappreciative world. This does not mean that there should be a limiting of either evangelism or building up, but it does mean that there must be a close relationship between the two.

This is very strikingly manifested in the fact that the Apostles of the New Testament combined these two ministries in such fullness. They evangelized mightily; but what an immense building up ministry they fulfilled also! They brought Christ in almost everywhere they went, but they brought Him in in ever-increasing fullness wherever they had been. The point is the combination of the two. In the matter of ministry gifts to the Church, the Evangelist and the Pastor and Teacher are complementary ministries.

All this is surely very patent. But where are we now? We do not hesitate to say that the relationship between these two things has not by any means been preserved in equal proportions. The fact is that there is a preponderance of Christians who are, after many years, spiritual babes, sadly immature; without understanding in spiritual things; without capacity (and without appetite) for "*strong meat*." The result is that the impact and effect of Christ in this world is not at all commensurate with either the time that Christianity has been here, or the number of Christians on the earth. A few strong, healthy, and "experienced" people of God will count for a very great deal more than a vast number of Christians whose maturity is unduly delayed. There is therefore much to be done by way of removing this ill-balanced state and bringing the Lord's children to the state and position which should be theirs "*by reason of the time*."

This means that there is a real need and demand for a ministry of "*the fullness of Christ*" to the Christians of our time. The world's need is preeminently Christ in greater fullness, and this can only be in and by the Church, His chosen vehicle. But, we repeat, all such ministry must not stop with itself. It must result in stronger, richer, fuller evangelism. That is to say, the Christians must come through it to the position of having more of Christ to show and impart. This then is what is our sense of calling - "*for the perfecting of the saints unto (that they may do) the work of ministering;*" the word "*perfecting*" meaning *making complete or full*.

To sum up, God's end is the bringing in of His Son to fullness. This is the object and nature of the Church's being and work. The method is twofold: evangelism and building up. These two must be kept in close relationship as complementary, and the balance must be preserved in equality. This balance has not been preserved, and there are very many Christians whose spiritual maturity and capacity is very unduly delayed. There is therefore an altogether inadequate registration, impact, and effectiveness as to Christ, considering how long Christianity has been here and how many Christians there are. The need then is for a ministry by which Christians can be helped to the position that is God's desire and intention for them. Such a ministry must not end in people becoming interested in and taken up with teaching as something in itself, but rather in a richer and

fuller representation of Christ to and among the peoples of this world. It is a misapprehension of truth if it results in less concern for the increase of Christ by the salvation of sinners and the mutual spiritual helpfulness of the saved. Truth should never turn us in on ourselves, but should make us conscious of being under a great debt to others.

Then we must realize that there are certain things which are basic to full spiritual development. One of these is the essential organic oneness of all who are "*in Christ*." No individual, or number of individuals, as such, can attain unto the full stature of Christ; that is only possible for "*the whole Body*." Any kind of division amongst Christians is a violation of Christ ("*Is Christ divided?*" - 1 Cor. 1:13), and that must be contrary to the Holy Spirit, by whose work alone can we attain unto full growth. Therefore believers must abandon schismatic and divisive ground and occupy only the ground of Christ. In the beginning the Church was constituted by the acceptance of the absolute Lordship and Headship of Christ, and not just His Saviourhood. "*We preach Christ Jesus as Lord*." The Saviourhood was largely for men's good, but the Lordship was mainly for His place. This issue was the occasion of all the trouble.

This then is the ministry to which we feel the Lord has called us. Through deep and drastic ways He has formed it. We have not assumed it, and we can only give what He has given. We have sought much and always to be saved from mere theory, and we feel that in this the Lord has been faithful; but it has been costly.

And now, brethren, how can we gather up what we feel as our burden? Perhaps in no better way than in the Apostle's words: "*Teaching every man, and admonishing every man, that we may present every man perfect (full grown) in Christ.*"

The Danger of Coming Short

"Lest any one of you should seem to have come short" (Hebrews 4:1)

For those who, like the New Testament writers, have a real burden and sense of responsibility for the spiritual life of God's people, one of the most heart-breaking things is the way in which so many who gave promise of going right on with the Lord are caught in some side-track and turn to something other or less than He meant for them. Not necessarily to sin or to the world, but to something which, while it brings them a great deal of gratification for a time, eventually proves to be a diversion resulting in arrested spiritual growth, and they are found in a backwater, a cul-de-sac, occupied with an alternative to *"the whole counsel of God."* Their "new discovery," or "light," or "guidance," as they speak of it, by reason of the let-up of some tension, solution to some problems, promise of release into self-realization, and escape from pressure, when the novelty and glamour have worn off is found to have been "deceitful waters," producing Jericho's fruits which fall before they are ripe.

The pathway of God's eternal purpose is strewn with such tragedies. The Bible, in both its Testaments, records the sad story of many who have missed the way, turned aside, and - to use the language and fear of Paul - not attained *"unto the prize of the high calling."* The New Testament is predominantly occupied with warnings, admonitions, exhortations and entreaties, because of this possibility, and with the tragic contingency as the ever-lurking peril and threat.

There is a pathway from eternity to eternity marked out in the Divine councils which is beset by numerous and various perils, ever waiting for the feet of the saints; always with a view to turning them aside, tripping them up, impeding their progress, or frustrating their intended destiny in the full thought of God.

The little word *"lest,"* with its sevenfold context in the Letter to the Hebrews, links on with some of the most terrible things in spiritual experience, and compasses a long history. It is not our intention to trace that history or attempt the impossible task of enumerating its many-sided context. What we shall do is, firstly, enunciate a general principle of safety, and then instance the peril in one or two connections.

The Principle of Safety

Whenever we are being faced with some new and different course, some fresh proposition or position, there is one all-governing question that we should ask, and which we should take ample time to ponder and pray over seriously. That question is - Does this thing before me stand in direct line with the full purpose of God, as revealed - not in a fragment - but in the fullness of His Word? God has left us in no doubt that He has a clearly defined purpose in view as the ultimate object of all His dealings. He has also made it abundantly clear what that purpose is. Further, it is distinctly shown that

believers are "*called according to his purpose,*" and that they are to "*make their calling and election sure.*" One who was an aged and advanced believer, and a greatly used servant of God, said - toward the end of his course - that his great concern was that he "*might apprehend that for which he had been apprehended by Christ Jesus.*"

It is the business and duty of every true Christian to study so as to be quite clear as to what that "*Eternal Purpose*" is. Having done so, *everything* that arises to engage us must be brought to the judgment bar of that purpose, and interrogated in its light. God will not cut across our path, or give us particular light at any fork in the road, if we have not been diligent in this quest, or faithful to the light given. It just will not do to allow ourselves to be influenced by questions of comparative right or wrong, good or bad, permissibility, desirability, expediency, or policy. Nor must ambition, soul-gratification, enlarged prospects "for the Lord," wider acceptance in Christianity, or any such thing, color our judgment or affect our decision. Advantage and cost are ruled out here as deciding factors. One question, and one alone, will decide tragedy or glory: Does this that is before me stand directly in line with the full purpose of God? When the end is reached, the full story told, the sum taken, how much that is bound up with this will be stripped off, as having no real substance with what is Christ, and therefore fail to be carried over into the eternal? What will the River carry away, and what will emerge on the other side? This was the big question that Paul put to the Corinthians.

In all the generations of this dispensation God is at work, seeking to secure a maximum of *eternal* value in accordance with His *eternal* purpose in His elect. His discipline is to sift out the chaff, the merely perishable, and store up the imperishable. When He has secured - *in heaven* - an adequate and commensurate measure of that which is His Son out of all these generations, the terminus of the age will be brought about, the world purged by fire, and that accumulated eternal value be brought in with the elect, to be the governing character of "*the ages of the ages.*" Because so much hangs upon this issue, the course of the *Purpose* is beset by every means and effort for its frustration.

The peril or snare will be cunningly and ingeniously adapted to the "prey." What would capture some would make no appeal to others. The most spiritual will be presented with what *appears to be* most spiritual. Our particular temperament will be our peculiar danger. We shall have to, ever and always, be governed by principle, and not by feelings, preferences, arguments, or natural appeal. Intellectual palliatives, emotional ecstasies, activity-gratifications must be suspected or challenged. The one question must be paramount - Where does this lead? Does it essentially and intrinsically relate to the one supreme purpose of God?

Having enunciated the principle of safety, we proceed to touch upon the nature of the peril. Firstly, and in general, there is the ever-present snare of -

Mixture of Truth and Error

It does not require a great deal of intelligence in order to recognize that, throughout the history of God's work, the master-stroke of the great perverter has been confusion. God is not the God of confusion, but of order. Satan is the god of confusion. To get order out of chaos, God said: "*Let there be light.*" To get chaos out of order, Satan says, "Let there be confusion." His it is to confuse issues and elements. To do this, he must - as the word suggests - fuse (or try to fuse) elements which are constitutionally different and do not belong to each other. Thus there is a constitutional contradiction and inconsistency. It is only when his master-method runs amok that we have utter and unmitigated wickedness. His main work is deception by mixture.

It is just here that the place, meaning, and sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the life of the child of God has its meaning and importance. He is "*The Spirit of Truth.*" He alone knows where truth ends and falsehood begins. Only as we truly "*walk in the Spirit*" shall we know the truth and be made free from error. A walk in the Spirit demands a "*circumcised heart,*" a heart in which the severance has been made between flesh and spirit, Christ and self.

There has never been a heresy that has not had in it sufficient truth to deceive very good people. Likewise, there has never been anything wholly of God but the strategy of the Evil One has been to fasten on to it some implication, insinuation, interpretation, or suggestion that would make it questionable or "dangerous." He even did this with the Lord Jesus Himself. He did it with Paul all through his life. Let a demon-possessed girl in Philippi sponsor the preaching of Paul and Silas, and it is damned and discredited.

So, we come to this. A good thing can be made its own enemy, by being either confused, or taken out of its true meaning. Take, for instance, the doctrine of -

"Predestination" - "Foreordination" - "Election."

Before we go on to illustrate our main object in this particular connection, one or two things must be said with emphasis. Firstly, let it be understood that we have no question as to whether "predestination" is a true scriptural doctrine. When we speak of perils and side-tracks we do not include this doctrine in them essentially. *Rightly interpreted and understood*, the doctrine of election is of very great importance and value. *Wrongly interpreted and related*, because it is so great, there are few things more calculated to create confusion and spiritual arrest. Secondly, in what we say we do not claim to have any new revelation or special authority. Indeed, we only put forward our thought as a suggestion and in the form of a question. There may be more in it than that, but, whether we are wrong or right, we are determined to pursue the note of warning, because we have no small experience of many people of God being brought into limitation and division by this very thing. The thing itself may be right, but it must not be *everything*. If it is made that, then it can defeat its own purpose.

There has been more recently a considerable revival of what is called "Reformed Doctrine" (or "Theology"); that is, the teaching of the Reformers. Foremost (or almost so) among these is that which is especially associated with the name of Calvin. Indeed, it has become generally known as "Calvinism." It is the doctrine of predestination. There are very few subjects which have resulted in more controversy, divided teachers and followers, and led to greater confusion and perplexity.

We are not taking up the controversy on one side or the other, but we do suggest, by way of question, that one consideration may not have been given sufficient place. It may have escaped the eye of the exponents, or, if it has been facing them, they may have refused it adequate attention. The fact is that this matter of predestination has issued in very strong controversy, and not a little resentment or bitterness, for one reason. The reason is that it has been so much - if not entirely - related to, and confined to, salvation. Is it not possible that predestination, and its kindred terms, has nothing more to do with salvation than a relative connection? Supposing that it was taken out of that association, in its main conception, and put into relationship with Divine *Purpose* - i.e. Predestination to a Divine Purpose, the Purpose being the governing everything? Supposing, further, that salvation and purpose are, respectively, the way and the end, but that the purpose is much more than salvation, so that it is possible to have salvation but miss the full purpose? Would not this solve many problems and explain much of the teaching of the Bible?

Look at several contexts in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, where the words "*predestinated*," "*foreordained*," "*elect*" are definitely used.

1. This matter is almost, if not entirely, related to Christians after they have become such. All the instruction, exhortations, warnings, provisional "ifs," and so on, are directed, not toward *salvation* or its conservation, but toward *purpose*, and that at the end or hereafter. It is all focused upon "*making the calling and election sure*." It is bound to an all-governing statement: "*foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son*."
2. Then note how closely this is connected with the Church as a corporate Body, and only to individuals as related to that Body. It is the Church that explains and answers election. Indeed, the designation "*elect*" is a collective-singular word; that is, the individuals are looked upon as one corporate entity - "*The Elect*." "*Chosen in Christ*" relates to *the Church*. If we discern the particular *function* and vocation of the Church in the coming ages as governmental and administrative, implying the supreme place with Christ and His throne, and therefore implying that there will be other categories and ranks in the eternal Kingdom, we get beyond redemption and salvation to their full meaning. It is *the purpose* that gives meaning to election. Believers are "*the called according to his purpose*" (Rom. 8:28).
3. The New Testament is very largely built upon the possibility of a great loss, even after justification by faith. Paul himself was deeply concerned about this "*prize of the on-high*

calling,” and that he might apprehend that for which he had been apprehended. Was he fearful of losing his salvation? Or was it what he called *“the prize?”*

4. Lest anyone should introduce here the argument of grace and works, let us hasten to point out that in Ephesians, where “predestination” and the Church are most fully mentioned, and exhortations, urgings, and *“walking worthy of the calling”* are so characteristic, grace is mentioned no fewer than twelve times. Grace is far more wonderful in relation to the immense and glorious Purpose than it is in basic salvation. Works and merit do not come into it. The greater the glory - the greater the grace.

In the Old Testament, which is the book of foreshadowings of heavenly things in earthly matters, we read of the *“portion of the firstborn”* in families. Israel was the firstborn in the family of nations. Their vocation was to be related to the nations, a sign and covenant to the peoples. For that, not merely for their own salvation, they were an elect nation. To them was given the portion of the firstborn, particularly in connection with the purpose. This they despised and lost by reason of pride, exclusiveness, and self-centeredness.

The Church is *“the church of the firstborn ones, whose names are written **in heaven**”* (Heb. 12:23). It is not earthly, but heavenly. To the Church belongs the peculiar *“calling,”* position, and vocation of an eternal and heavenly sort. This is what is called *“partnership in a heavenly calling,”* and *“the on high calling of God in Christ Jesus”* (Heb. 3:1; Phil. 3:14).

To the Church as such, and in relation to her function in the ages to come, belongs the election; but to allow election to set aside perseverance (Phil. 3:12-15, etc.) is to make nonsense of all that teaching and admonition that is represented by such words as: *“Give... diligence to make your calling and election sure,”* or *“Walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called”* (2 Pet. 1:10, Eph. 4:1).

There is a salvation which is *“so as by fire,”* with the inheritance lost. There is a reigning with Christ with which a big provisional *“if”* is connected.

We know only too well that the great and complicated subject of predestination cannot be solved or dismissed by a simple formula, but we have no doubt that election is governed by inheritance, to which salvation is relative and but the beginning. True, salvation is essential to the inheritance, but the inheritance is more than salvation - it is *“The Purpose”* itself.

For want of space we must break off here. We may take up this governing issue in relation to other “perils” later. In the meantime let us re-emphasize that the thing that matters is that no “truth,” “doctrine,” theory or teaching, whether it be good or doubtful, must ever be allowed to become either an end in itself, or a sidetrack. It must never be taken out of the essential context of God's full purpose.

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