

Having a central focus

The personal discovery of God's eternal purpose is vital in the life of every Christian. The reason why many believers have no sense of direction in their walk with the Lord is simply because of a lack of understanding concerning God's eternal purpose. This deficiency also accounts for the lack of motivation in a believer's life to overcome sin, the flesh, the world, and the Devil. Indeed, without the revelation of God's eternal purpose, even redemption, prayer, Bible study, the gifts, evangelism, church practices, and many other aspects of the Christian life are disconnected and lack a clear focus.

The Christian life represented in the New Testament is not made up of so many isolated "truths" or "experiences," having no central focus or ultimate goal. Thus, it is necessary for us to discover what the central focus is, so that we could enter into the identical revelation of the Apostles. This revelation has a unique burden and a central focus which is identified in the New Testament as *God's eternal purpose*.

A bird's-eye view in Romans 8

In the New Testament, Romans 8 reveals God's eternal purpose in a clear and concise way. This chapter gives us a bird's-eye view of God's ultimate goal in the universe. In Romans 8:28-29, we

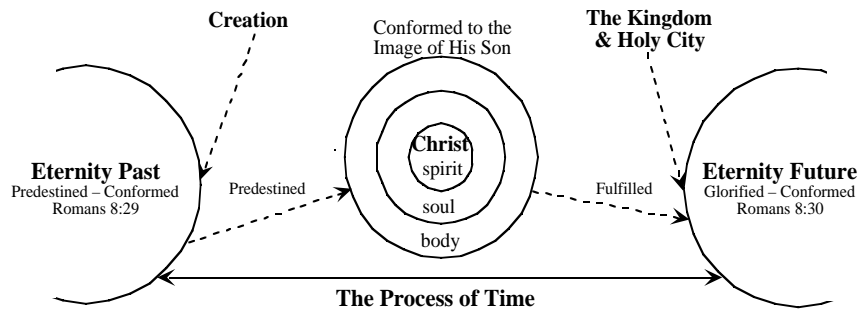
discover exactly what this goal is: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to

His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." Thus, God's goal is revealed to be *many brothers conformed to the image of God's Son*.

We also see something of God's goal and purpose in Romans 8:15 which declares that we have received *a spirit of sonship*, and in Romans 8:23 it says, "even we ourselves groan in ourselves, eagerly expecting sonship." These two verses on sonship, together with verse 29, show us that God's eternal purpose centers on man being conformed to the image of His Son, or, in other words, man being in the experience and reality of sonship. Redemption is for this. Salvation is for this. All

God's Eternal Purpose

— In Romans 8 —



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our various experiences in our Christian life are for this. All the teachings and doctrines in the Bible are for this. Indeed, everything is for this one unique purpose unveiled to us in Romans chapter eight — full conformity to His Son.

The experience of the Spirit and the expectation of creation

There are four matters in Romans 8 related to the working out of God's purpose. These matters help us to see how this entire chapter centers on the practical fulfillment of God's purpose. First, in Romans 8:1-17 we see that **the experience of the Spirit** is directly linked to God's goal of conformity to the image of His Son. Paul gives a detailed description of the experience of the Spirit and unveils the fact that this experience in our daily life has one thing in view — sonship. Walking according to spirit (8:4), minding the things of the Spirit (8:5), by the Spirit putting to death the practices of the body (8:13), being led by the Spirit (8:14), and receiving the witness of the Spirit in our spirit (8:15-16) are all experiences to make us sons of God who are fully conformed to Christ.

Second, in Romans 8:18-25 we see another basic matter related to God's goal of conforming us to the image of His Son, and that is **the expectation of creation**. In these verses, all creation is personified by Paul as expecting and waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. Thus, creation itself, according to its original purpose, has an expectancy related to the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

It is enlightening to see how the experience of the Spirit and the expectancy of creation in Romans 8 are interrelated. Both are moving in the same direction, toward the fulfillment of God's goal to conform us to Christ. Actually, the context in which Paul speaks of the experience of the Spirit is the expectancy of creation. This means that the more God's people are living by the Spirit and experiencing the Spirit in a genuine way, the more creation itself knows it is nearly ready to be delivered from its own bondage (Rom. 8:20-22). Creation is eagerly waiting for one thing — the manifestation of the sons of God, who will be in

full conformity to His Son's image.

The Apostle Peter makes a similar statement in 2 Peter 3:11-12. He indicates that by our experiences of the Lord, which are expressed by the phrases "holy conducts" and "godlinesses," we are expediting and hastening the coming of the day of God. "Holy conducts and godlinesses," both occurring in the plural number in Greek, are special terms Peter uses to describe the daily living of God's redeemed people who are saturated with the Spirit and conformed to the image of His Son. As they live out and express this image in so many practical ways by "holy conducts and godlinesses," the coming of the day of God is actually speeded up. This is the identical truth Paul presents in Romans 8 when he connects the experience of the Spirit in the life of the believer with the expectancy of creation.

According to Romans 8:20 the creation was made subject to vanity. In other words, human existence on this earth apart from God's eternal purpose of being conformed to the image of His Son is nothing but vanity. All creation came into being for one primary reason — that you and I would be conformed to God's Firstborn Son in order that He might have a corporate expression of many brothers in the church (Rom. 8:29 & Heb. 2:12). If our lives are out of harmony with this purpose, then our living and existence is just vanity and futility. Not only is creation subject to vanity, but we also are subject to an empty existence. Thus, we must realize in our experience God's *revealed* purpose for man in the universe.

When we are being led by the Spirit of God in our daily life and by the Spirit are putting to death the independent practices of the body, not only creation itself (Rom. 8:22), but we ourselves also (Rom. 8:23) groan and travail with the sense of God's eternal purpose of bringing us into complete conformity to the image of His Son.

The intercession of the Spirit and our daily environments

The third matter related to the working out of God's eternal purpose is found in Romans 8:26-27. Here we find that **the intercession of the Spirit**

also has one specific goal — that all the saints would be conformed to the image of His Son. Thus, along with the experience of the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-17) and the expectancy of creation (Rom. 8:18-25), there is the intercession of the Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27).

God's goal of conforming all the saints to Christ is realized and comes to pass, by and through the intercession of the Spirit. The intercession in Romans 8 is unique because it has one burden — sonship for you and me. The intercession of the Spirit has in view that we would grow in the Lord's life to full maturity until we are revealed as God's many sons with the very image and expression of His Firstborn Son. This kind of intercession is unlike many of the prayers uttered in other places in the Bible related more to receiving answers about various details and matters.

The intercession of the Spirit in Romans 8:26-27 is exclusively for the fulfillment of Romans 8:29 — our conformity to God's Son. Verses 26 and 27 say, "The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." The will of God is defined in verse 29 which speaks of God's eternal purpose to conform us to the image of His Son. Thus, the will of God and God's eternal purpose are both the same — conformity!

This brings us to the fourth basic matter related to God's eternal purpose. This matter, found in Romans 8:28-39, is related to **our daily environments and problems** all working together for the one unique goal of conformity. We must see how the intercession of the Spirit and our various environments and problems are interrelated. Indeed, our environments, which are the "all things" in Romans 8:28, are specifically arranged under God's sovereignty as a result of the Spirit's intercession mentioned in the previous verses. This intercession is identified as being "for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26-27). Moreover, the answer to this kind of prayer turns out to be the "all things" in a believer's life and environment. The "all things" are intended to work together for good (Rom. 8:28), and the "good" is

clearly revealed and defined in Romans 8:29 as being "conformed to the image of His Son."

The fulfillment of God's eternal purpose in our lives requires a particular intercession having the nature of "groanings which cannot be uttered." This intercession cannot be uttered because it is specifically related to God's sovereign arrangement in our environment. When we come to this matter of being conformed to His image, often we do not know how to accurately pray for ourselves. Paul even goes so far as to say, "For we do not know (the) what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26). In the original Greek language, the grammatical construction of this verse includes the definite article before the word "what," so it can be literally translated "*the* what."¹ Paul intends us to understand that in our weakness we do not know *the specific things* or "*the what*" in our environment that is necessary to turn us to the Lord, that is, the things that would cause us to experientially enter into the reality of God's eternal purpose.

When God searches our hearts (Rom. 8:27a), He surely knows the real need in our lives; consequently, He Himself comes in with the Spirit's intercession in the form of groanings which cannot be uttered, and these groanings accurately pray for us *according to God*, that is, according to God's eternal purpose. Although this intercession passes through us with unutterable groanings, nevertheless it is the most accurate part of our prayers because it has in view God's one unique goal — that we would be conformed to the image of His Son. The intercession of the Spirit is specifically designed under God's sovereignty to arrange our environmental circumstances according to God. Thus, they are intended to lead us into a Spirit-taught knowing and realization (Rom. 5:3; James 1:2-3) that "all things work together for good." This good in our experience is unmistakably the

¹"The weakness spoken of here is the inability of the saint to know what to pray for. We do know what the general objects of prayer are. But we do not know what the specific, detailed objects of prayer in any given emergency or situation are. The definite article is used before the word 'what.' Paul says, 'We do not know the what we should pray for, the particular what.'" Wuest, Kenneth S., *Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament, Romans*, Vol. I, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973, p.141.

good according to God's eternal view of good — conformity to His Son's image!

Having such a vision of God's eternal purpose in our lives causes us to see that our environment is not only under the sovereign hand of God, but even more it is a direct answer to prayer. The "all things" in our daily environment, including our spouse, our children, our financial problems, our physical ailments, our reactions to various trials, are surely not accidents or happenstance. When we are those loving God and knowing that we are called according to His purpose, our attitude about our whole life is radically changed.

No longer can we remain in a depressed frame of mind over the things that take place in our life. Whether we are bothered about ourselves or about our environment, once we realize that God's purpose is Christ being formed in us (Gal. 4:19), *everything* is then evaluated from a divine perspective. Even the negative things are brought into focus. Paul lists in Romans 8:35-39 the specific kinds of negative things that are part of the "all things" mentioned in Romans 8:28: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, killed all day long, accounted as sheep for the slaughter, death, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, and any other creature. All these are factors and opportunities for us to be more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). Knowing this brings God's perspective into our daily life and gives us the ability to properly interpret why God allows the particular environments in our lives.

Being more than a conqueror means we have positively accepted God's own purpose over our lives to conform us to Christ. Thus, we are allowing our environments to so press us into Christ that we are in the reality of His eternal purpose being fulfilled in us.

This vital revelation

It is crucial in our Christian life to make the discovery of this vital revelation found in Romans 8. That is, *God has an eternal purpose, and that purpose is to conform us to the image of His Son!* Our experience of the Spirit is for this. The entire

creation is longing for this. The intercession of the Spirit is for this. Indeed, all of our environments are sovereignly arranged for this.

Without this vital revelation, some of the typical symptoms that will surface in our lives include doubting God's goodness toward us, always complaining about our circumstances, being reactionary and angry with our spouses for not changing, feeling unhappy with the kind of boss we have, being constantly worried about our finances, or pitying ourselves because we didn't get a break in life. These kinds of murmurings and reasonings are characteristic of those who are blind to God's eternal purpose being worked out in their lives. However, once the Lord opens our eyes to see what He desires and what He is doing over us in the light of Romans 8:29, we can turn our moods, our reactions, our anxieties, our temptations, our failures, and our pressures into experiences of loving God. Loving Him through all kinds of circumstances, as Paul indicates in Romans 8:28, 35, 37, and 39, keeps us in the practical fulfillment of His eternal purpose. We're loving Him (Rom. 8:28) by contacting the realm of the Spirit and crying "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15-16). This crying produces in us a consciousness that we are children of God under a process that reaches from eternity past (Rom. 8:29) to eternity future (Rom. 8:17, 30) and is now being worked out in the details of our daily life (Rom. 8:28). By this wonderful and divinely arranged process we are being conformed to the image of God's Son.

— Bill Freeman

the Christian

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