

God's Eternal Purposes for Jew and Gentile Culminate in Christ

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[0 : 00] Once again, good morning. You've learned well. Before we look at God's word together, I'd like to take this opportunity, since I have! your ears to thank you for your hearts.

Thank you for your prayers. Thank you for encouragement and thank you for the support that you have extended to us. We underwent quite significant material loss, but we have gained significant spiritual profit from it all and we are grateful to God very much so.

Thank you for your prayers for Bracha. She has undergone a second post-operative checkup and she is clear.

We continue to pray. We are grateful to God for that and we are, Bracha and myself, grateful to God for you. I'm going to endeavor to not be carried away as I was in our earlier session and try to take note of my notes.

Those of you who are with us in our earlier session will have noticed that there are significant parallels between what we saw in Colossians and what we see here in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

[1 : 29] Both of these letters were written approximately at the same time and from the same location in Rome and obviously the issues were very much in Paul's mind.

But what he wrote to the Colossians has a different bend to what he writes here in his letter to the Ephesians.

God is rational. He's wise. His doings are always the product of well thought out intention.

They're never the product of a whim or a response to imposing circumstances or the product of any kind of external pressures. If they were, God would not be God.

God works to a plan.

[2 : 30] And Paul indicates this plan in the chapter that we read. There's nothing haphazard about his actions.

This is to say that the gospel is not some kind of a divine afterthought in response to man's sin. No, no. The world was made for the gospel.

Let me repeat that. The world was made for the gospel. The lamb of God was sacrificed before the foundation of the world.

In other words, the gospel was in God's mind when he commanded the light to shine out of darkness. Nor, contrary to the thinking of some, is the church any kind of an afterthought.

The church is, in fact, the gospel played out, or so it should be. It is a display of the undoing of sin's terrible consequences.

[3 : 39] In the church, mankind, united afresh, diverse and yet one, reflects something of the glory of the triune God.

Differing and yet one. Varying in personal characteristics, yet united in this one glorious divine essence.

That's why, amongst many other reasons, the church is so important. It reflects the gospel. It is to reflect something of the glory and the beauty of God himself.

The gospel of grace, rather than human merit, are in fact two sides of the same coin.

And so, the unity of the church, apart from human merit, merit personal, cultural, or ritual, or social, or anything else like that.

[4 : 47] The unity of the church is a display of the unmerited grace of God. And that is why the church is necessary for gospel preaching.

That's why all gospel preaching should issue out of the church and should return back to the church. And that is also why Paul was so insistent upon church unity.

It is also why he considered divisions in the church to be, in fact, denials of the gospel. Now, some of what I want to say to you, you might think is a response to relatively recent events.

I assure you that if they're relevant or not is one matter. If they had fits, wear it. But these words were written years ago.

And I don't mean Paul's words. I'm not quite that old. I'm referring to my own. For example, when Paul addressed Peter's separation from the Gentile Christians in Galatians, however limited that separation was, he tells them that he is not acting in accordance with the truth of the gospel.

[6 : 06] In other words, he's not living out the gospel by separating from the Gentiles. Implying that in Peter's behavior, there was in fact a nullification of the grace of God.

To the point that it raises the horrendous possibility, and I quote Paul again in Galatians chapter 2, that Christ died needlessly.

That was a focal point in Paul's apostolic ministry. It was a major theme in many of his letters, and it sheds light on much of what he wrote.

It is also a major theme in his letter to the Ephesians, the first chapter of which we have just read, and we will go through together now.

Paul begins with praise, where everything should begin. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has, not will, but has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

[7 : 18] Paul is telling us that we are richer than we imagine. Richer than we are able to imagine. Paul is telling us that God emptied heaven of all its spiritual blessings and poured them out on us in Christ.

It has everything to do with him. It is all because of him. It is all in ongoing union with him.

Every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. Now how did he do that? And then Paul spells it out in verse forward onwards. First, he chose us in him, that is, he chose us in Christ, before the creation of the world.

So once again, God is uncontingent. This was his purpose. And it was to this purpose that the world was created. And why did he choose us?

Was it that he was able to see into the midst of the future and discover that we would be holy and blameless in his sight? No, says Paul.

[8 : 35] He chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight. In other words, any measure of holiness we may have is a product of God's choosing and his working in us.

And any measure of blamelessness which we may claim we must only claim in Christ because of what God has done on our behalf in Christ and what he decided to do before the world began.

He predestined us to adoption. Predestined means predetermined our destiny.

Pre-what? Pre-everything. Pre-everything. Pre-all one can imagine. You see, once again, God is God.

He's not subject to our prayers or to our manipulation. We can't bribe him or persuade him or move him. He is the great mover of all.

[9 : 39] And he predetermined before the world began that we would be adopted.

Now, if we needed to be adopted, obviously we are not natural born children. Indeed, we are not. We are sinners.

We are unfaithful. We are traitors. We have perverted the image of God in ourselves. We have corrupted and dirtied and misused this marvelous world which he has created and turned it into a platform for the satisfaction of our lusts and the gratification of our appetites.

We are not all children of God. God is our creator. He created all of us. But we are not, naturally, his children.

And in spite of that, he predetermined our destiny before the world began, before all things, that we should be adopted.

[10 : 49] So we are no longer orphans. We are no longer fatherless. We are no longer alone in this world. There is one who loves us.

And who has embraced us. And who will care for us as a father cares for his children without reserve. Yes, we are difficult children. Aren't you?

I know I am. Yes, we don't meet his expectations. Yes, we betray his confidences.

But is God surprised by any of this? And is his love in any way disaffected by it? Does he love us less because we are not what we ought to be?

Not even what in our best moments we want to be? No, he has formally adopted us. The adoption of sons was determined before all things and therefore is not contingent upon all things, any things.

[11 : 58] And that adoption is accomplished through Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Messiah. He is our virtue. He is the grounds of our adoption.

He is the reason why God loves us. It's not that we are, forgive me for telling you the truth, so attractive in ourselves. It is because Jesus is.

And we are adopted through him in accordance with his pleasure and will. Here is God's independence, once again, of everything and anything.

It is according to, as the New American Standard Version puts it, the kind intention of his will. Why did God choose us?

Because he wanted to. Why did God want to? Heaven, I don't know. Remember the old story of the Russian officer who, having had the gospel preached to him and having come to faith, his first prayer went something like this.

[13 : 11] Lord, you're just great because if I were you and you were me, I would have never chosen you. Well, he understood something that we tend to forget.

Why he chose to love us? Through Jesus Christ. God has a right to be justified in the eyes of all the world.

He certainly has the right to be glorified. God is the only one who has the right to be selfish. Because everything exists for him.

He made all things for himself. And he has chosen for reasons that rest in the wisdom of his infinite grace. To be glorified, not by condemning us for our sins, but for saving us in spite of them.

To the praise of his glorious grace. Or as he puts it in chapter 2, verse 7. So that in the coming ages, he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

[14:36] A grace which, Paul says, he freely gave us in the one he loves. Freely. Once again, without compulsion.

We did not buy it. We did not earn it. We did not deserve it. But he gave it to us freely. And thereby taught us what love is really like.

It is not contingent. Yes, we are disappointed. And in this case, yes, we are disappointed. But this love is given freely in Jesus Christ.

The one whom he loves. Now we'll be talking later on in this evening about the one whom he loves. And so I'll forbear doing that now.

In him, we have redemption. Through his blood. The forgiveness of sins.

[15:40] In accordance with the riches of God's grace which he lavished on us. Paul is telling us that we can never sin beyond the reach of God's grace.

What is the measure of the forgiveness, that's the redemption that we have received? The measure is the riches of God's grace freely lavished on us.

How rich is God's grace? Can you measure it? Could heaven and earth contain it? The earth is the grace of God's grace. The earth is the grace of God's grace. It fills the expanse of infinitude.

That is the riches of God's grace lavished on us, poured out. Wastefully one would almost say. Lavished on us.

And then Paul says that with all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will.

[16:46] Now here again, he's talking about the mystery. As we saw in Colossians, he speaks of the mystery. And to make things simple for you, if you will turn to chapter 2, you will see that he spells out what that mystery is.

Say from beginning at verse 11 on to verse 22. Remember, he says to his correspondence, formerly, you who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, which is done in the body by human hands, remember that at that time you were separate from Messiah, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.

But now. But now in Jesus Christ, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace who has made the two groups into one and destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh the law with his commands and regulations to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.

This is the mystery. One new humanity, one out of the two. And in one body, the body of Christ, to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

[18:20] And he came and he preached peace to you who are far away and peace to those who are near. For through him, we both, Jews and Gentiles, have access to the Father by one spirit.

And consequently, good news, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but with Bracha and myself, fellow citizens with God's people, and also members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone in him.

The whole building is joined together and rises, present continuous, to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too, Gentiles, are, present continuous, being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

Do you see the importance of the church? Being built together, together, together. Prohabitation of God through the Spirit.

This is the mystery of God's will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ. Come back to chapter 1, verse 10.

[19 : 38] This purpose which he purposed before the foundation of the world in Christ, is to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment.

And what is that? To bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. That is the prophet's vision.

That is the apostle's vision. That is the biblical vision. That is God's purpose. That when time comes to its ultimate fruition, when history is brought to its fullness, all might be united, gathered up in Christ and made into one.

And therefore, the disunity, the tendency to destroy, to self-destruct, to divide and to separate, will at long last be undone.

And we will be one as God is one. You're acquainted with the biblical prophecies of the wolf and the lamb lying down together, and the ox and the lion.

[20 : 49] And they will not hurt and they will not destroy in all his holy mountain. For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

And that is when hatred, self-interest, xenophobia, racism, these will all end.

Man and wife will no longer conflict. Sisters will dwell together in peace. I brought up three of them. It's hard to believe unless it was written in God's word.

Once ravenous animals will become as tame as pets. And once poisonous reptiles will be rid of their poison. And the world will become what it was originally intended to be.

The gospel will transform all creation. And all those which are in heaven and on earth will be gathered up in Christ.

[21 : 57] Calvin puts it this way. Out of Christ all things were disordered. And through him they have been restored to order.

Formed into one body we are united to God and therefore closely connected with one another. The whole universe is to find its meaning and its purpose in Christ for whom and by whom it was created and by whom it is sustained.

Verse 11 still spelling out the outworking of this mystery of God. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity of his will.

In him we also has reference to the Jewish people. In him we who were the first to hope in a Messiah has reference to the Jewish people.

In him you also has to do with you folk here in Bremen. And Paul is telling us that God has predestined this.

[23 : 20] This is the destiny he predetermined for us together. by him who has a plan and makes everything work out in conformity with the purpose of his will, so that there is not a moment or a movement or an aspect of reality that does not serve in the hands of God for the accomplishment of this, his purpose.

Everything serves him because he is the master of all things. Everything has meaning. Everything has value. Nothing is vain. Nothing is lost. Not a tear, not a moment of suffering.

Ultimately, everything serves God's purpose because God is God over everything. Subject to none, all are subject to him.

Master of all, none are free from him. And he is never deflected from his purpose. He's never restrained from accomplishing that purpose.

He's never obstructed. He is never dependent upon anything but the counsel of his will because he is God.

[24 : 38] In order that we, verse 12, who were the first to put our hope in Messiah, might be for the praise of his glory.

And you also were included in Christ. When you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Then when you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

What is Paul talking about here? He's making reference to a specific historical event. You remember him preaching the gospel in Caesarea?

And as he is speaking, the Holy Spirit falls upon these Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. And Peter says, Who can forbid baptism to these Gentiles who have received the Holy Spirit even as we, the Jews, have received it?

And having received him, they are to be baptized. Indeed, in chapter 11, when he's challenged by his fellow apostles for going to the Gentiles and eating with them, Peter says, Well, let me tell you what happened.

[26 : 06] And when they hear that God had given the Gentiles the Holy Spirit, they say, Well then, that's a shocker.

God has granted repentance into life, even to the Gentiles. Aren't you glad? I am too. And so is Peter.

And that's what Paul is referring to here. When you believed, you were marked by him with a seal, the Holy Spirit of promise. And so, yes, we differ from one another.

But we are one together. We and you. Because the unity of the church declares the glory of God's grace by being a fellowship of grace.

A fellowship of God's grace to which people belong by virtue of his kindness rather than any other standard. We have no right to exclude from the church any whom God has brought in.

[27 : 14] In that sense, the church is not a club. We can create a club for those who want to play ping pong or golf or chess or whatever it may be.

And we set the standards. But here, God sets the standards. And you know, he chooses the very kind of people beside whom we do not want to sit.

And he places them right beside us. Because the church is meant to sanctify us. And that is how the church declares the glory of God's grace.

And it is glorious because it runs contrary to anything for which the world stands. The world stands for suppression.

For ascendancy. For competition. For bettering the other. It doesn't find satisfaction in what it seeks but in coveting what someone else has.

[28 : 19] Not in doing well but in doing better than someone else. But God's grace calls upon mankind to live differently. To live and relate to one another on the grounds of grace.

To love and to seek each other's welfare. And not to compete but in preferring one another in honor. And to receive one another on the grounds of grace.

Rather than the grounds of mercy. Paul tells us in verse 14. That the spirit given us. Shared by us all.

Jew and Gentile. Reformed and non-reformed. Baptist and Presbyterian. Shared by this one spirit.

He is a deposit. Guaranteeing our inheritance. Until the redemption of those who are God's inheritance. You see it's not only we are going to inherit from God.

[29 : 24] But God has so arranged things that he will inherit from us. What will he inherit? Glory. Praise and honor. Because of his marvelous grace. And that must be our goal.

That is why we must come to church. And the fundamental motivation of all our relationships. In the family. And in society. And in church.

To work out. Before the eyes of a watching world. The wonder of God's grace. For this reason.

Verse 15. Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus. And your love for God's people. Is that what the text says?

I hope you're following me in your Bibles. Does he say your love for God's people? There's that word again that we saw in Colossians. All of God's people.

[30 : 27] It's because of what I've heard about your love. That is so inclusive. Because it is on the grounds of grace. That I have not stopped giving thanks for you.

Remembering in you my prayers. I mean when Paul. Followed the church in Ephesus. He was excited. He couldn't stop giving God thanks for them. Why?

Because their love was based on grace. Not on merit. Of any kind. I keep asking. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The glorious Father. May give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation. So that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened.

In order that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you. Which he spelled out for us. God's ultimate purpose. The mystery. Gathering all things up into Christ.

[31 : 24] And he wants us to know this hope to which he has called us. The riches of his glorious inheritance among his holy people. Now. Living grace.

Living grace. Ain't easy. Paul knew it. And so he. Encourages us. In verse 19.

We are to know not only. The hope. And our inheritance. And God's inheritance. But also. His incomparably great power.

For us who believe. That power. Is the same as the mighty strength he exerted. When he raised Christ from the dead. And seated him at his right hand. In the heavenly realms.

Far above all rule. And authority. And power. And dominion. And every name that is invoked. Not only in the present age. But also in the one. To come. God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[32 : 26] Will enable us. To live. As we ought. To live out. This gospel of grace. In the way we do church. In the way we live in our families.

In the way we relate one to another. And that is why Paul. Pleads with him in chapter 4 onwards. Therefore. I urge you.

To live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Live out this gospel. Live out this hope. Live out this unity on the grounds of grace.

Be how? Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient. Bearing with one another in love. Bracha please hear this one. Bearing one another in love.

Make every effort to keep the unity. Of the spirit through the bond of peace. Paul will have men glorify God. By the way they relate.

[33 : 26] To one another. The kind of. Godly love that bears and forbears. That forgives and endures wrong.

That suffers shame and conquers. By grace. Grace. And that is why he. Imposes upon. The Ephesians. The duties that he does. In chapters 4 and 5. And that's where the rubber hits the road. Isn't it? How we relate to one another in church. How we relate to one another in society.

And how we relate to one another. In the context of our families. Grace. Grace isn't. Merely a truth. It is a truth to be lived.

It's not something merely to be believed. But it's to be. Obeyed. Carried out. Enacted. Exemplified.

[34 : 25] In our lives. Together. Together. The question is. To what extent do we live in accordance. With this great. Gracious.

Plan of God. To what extent do we. God forbid. Conduct ourselves. In a contrary manner. How easily do we separate.

How much do we. Value the unity of the body of Christ. Christ. One of the grounds. On which we relate. To one another. Do we.

Do we. Exemplify the grace of God. Or do we not. Let's pray. God of glory.

God of grace. God of grace. You chose us. To glorify yourself. Through our redemption. And through our.

[35 : 31] Our living out. The kindness of your grace. We praise you. We thank you. We bow before you.

And confess. Our failure to live as we ought. We admit. Our selfishness. Our narrow mindedness. Our arrogant self assertions.

And we would. Oh Lord. By your grace. And by the help of your spirit. Turn from these to you. And seek your. Ongoing work in our hearts.

So that we might. Become conformed. To the image of your son. And live out. The gospel. As we relate to one another.

We need. Your work. In our heart. Oh Lord. We long for it. Come what may.

[36 : 32] In Jesus name. Amen.