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GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MAN

A Brief Look at Man's Purpose

It is good for us to pause occasionally to consider our ultimate purpose in life. We are not asking now what men may say, but what the Bible teaches. God makes it clear that man exists for the glory of his Creator (Isa. 43:7; Rom. 11:36). That is why Paul tells us that in all things we must seek to make known the glory that belongs to God (1 Cor. 10:31). Therefore, too, the Third Commandment requires that we use the name of God, which includes all that reveals God, in order to make known God's glory. For that reason also we pray, "Hallowed by Thy Name," that all of God's revelation might be used to that end. And that is why throughout Scripture there is such emphasis on glorifying God.

The Image of God in Man

According to the Scriptures man has been created in the image of God. Let us see what the Bible means by the image of God in man, in order that we may try to see how this is related to man's purpose of glorifying God.

The Bible speaks of the image of God in two respects: as lost in the Fall and in need of restoration, and as still present in all men after the Fall. It is the former that I would like to consider here.

In Ephesians 4:24 we see that the restoration of God's image in man involves his recreation in true righteousness and holiness. The redeemed man is made just toward his neighbor and pious toward God. In other words, God conforms the Christian to His law (though not

perfectly in this life), so that the Christian loves God with his whole being and his neighbor as himself. In restoring His image in His elect, God causes a change in heart and life toward both God and man.

When in Colossians 3:10 Paul speaks of the renewal in knowledge of the image of God, he means more than just an understanding of right and wrong and the ability, by God's grace, to choose between them. The word "knowledge" that he uses here means a thorough and broad knowledge. It is also a discerning and true knowledge, in distinction from inaccurate or or false knowledge. As we examine Paul's use of this term in Romans 1:28, we see that acknowledging God in all things is contrasted with a godless state of mind (cf. vs. 21-27), in which people refuse to acknowledge the Creator. It is also distinguished from a godless knowledge in which men refuse to see God's revelation of Himself in the creation, and in which, in fact, they refuse to acknowledge God as God. It must be our goal to know God and His revelation as nearly perfectly as we can, and thus Paul speaks of such full knowledge as something to which Christians look forward in the life to come (1 Cor. 13:12). In Ephesians 4:13 Paul includes in faith and knowledge all the elements of that state of mind which is directed toward Christ. Such knowledge includes love for God, and the personal experience of His fellowship. Charles Hodge speaks of it as "that knowledge of God in which eternal life essentially consists" (Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, 1:17). In Galatians 4:9 it is by this knowledge of God that the Christian is distinguished from the non-

Christian. This certainly shows that Paul does not mean merely intellectual knowledge. In I John 4:7,8 we see that without love there is no knowledge of God, and that he who knows God at the same time loves Him. The word "knowledge" as Paul uses it in Colossians 3:10 may not be too narrowly restricted: it includes not only intellectual activity, but also love for God.

When we remember that our whole purpose is to make known God's glory to men, we begin to see more clearly what "knowledge" means in Colossians 3:10. We are made in such a way that we have the capacity to receive and respond to God's revelation of Himself, both in Scripture and in creation. Restoration of God's image in this respect restores knowledge of God according to His revelation and provides for the proper response to that revelation: with our whole being—heart, soul, mind, and strength.

The image of God is restored in the regenerate man in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. This includes the attitude and purpose of the heart and the direction of life, and involves all our activity and its results. The restored image of God in man includes all the spiritual change in us that follows regeneration. The spiritual knowledge that God requires of us is knowledge of God and His glory in accordance with His revelation. The redeemed must express that knowledge in all of life.

The restoration of God's image in man is in keeping with man's purpose. God redeemed man that he might acknowledge God's glory, praising God, and that he might seek to make known that glory of God to others, that they also may acknowledge it and praise God.

The Place of the Proclamation of the Gospel in Man's Purpose

When we speak of seeing and responding to the glory of God, our thoughts turn to the proclamation of the Gospel, which is given in the Bible. God reveals Himself and His glory clearly in the Bible; and the regenerate man can, by God's grace, understand the clear revelation in the Scriptures, though not perfectly. Our sin-darkened minds cannot, however, apart from Scripture, understand the

revelation of God in creation. Therefore, we must proclaim the Gospel, the good news of the Christ who saves and illumines the reborn man. Jesus, when He prepared to ascend to heaven, made it clear to His disciples that they were to do this (Mt. 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8).

The Place of Creation in Man's Purpose

Genesis 1:28, sometimes referred to as "the cultural mandate," also sets forth a command for man. Let us see how this fits in with the above.

We should note, first of all, that the immediately preceding verses in Genesis 1 tell us that God created man in His own image. The dominion of man over the earth is a result of his being created in the image of God. God made man so that he could see God's glory and respond to it in praise, and so God placed man in the world and commanded him to have dominion over the world. As we look at verse 28, we see that man is to fill the earth with creatures made in God's image who are capable of seeing and responding to God's glory. We see further that man is to subdue the creation and rule over it. In this, too, man must make known the glory of God, which He reveals. Two aspects of this activity come to mind immediately. Man must rule over the creation so that he will have a proper setting for his purpose of seeing and showing forth God's glory. He needs a suitable arena for his work. In the second place, since the creation itself is revelatory of God, man must make known that revelation of God as fully and clearly as possible.

Although man is placed on earth so that he may see and respond to the revelation of God's glory, man is not to do this without concern for what is good and pleasant for himself. That man's purpose must be wholly directed toward God cannot be denied, for that is what the Bible teaches. But the Scriptures also make it clear that precisely that interest and activity, and only that, can give happiness to man. By God's grace, man's nature is such that he finds true joy for himself in glorifying God.