

# The Glorious Treasure

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*Tis a thing infinitely good in itself that God's glory should be known by a glorious society of created beings.*

Jonathan Edwards<sup>6</sup>

## **READ EPHESIANS 3:14-21**

### **Paul's Prayer**

After Paul is finished explaining the marvelous plan of God, he pauses to pray to God and give thanks (v. 14). As an author pondering Ephesians, I also hope that as you come to know more about what God has done, you too will learn to give thanks to God for all that he has given to us.

In praising God, he calls him the one “from whom every family ... is named” (v. 14). Everyone who has ever lived has one creator, God. Wars are fought and boundaries drawn to distinguish one race or tribe from another, but God has made them all. In truth, all humans wear just one name – creature.

Paul prays for God to bless his creatures with strength for the “inner man” (v. 16). Every human is a body, but a human is also more than the body that we see. We are also something special on the inside, made in the image of God. God works to improve that “inner man” and helps us to become the people that we should be, inside and out.

The Holy Spirit strengthens the Christian so that Christ may “dwell” in the heart (v. 17). When Paul says that Christ

“dwells” in us, he means that Christ rules in our hearts and guides our lives.

Most of us would prefer Christ to be a frequent guest, but we resist the idea of Christ coming to dwell within. A guest visits politely before leaving us alone. A guest does not rule in our home or rearrange the décor. But Christ does not come to visit; he comes to dwell. He intends to make himself at home in the fullest possible sense. He wants to rule us from within as our Lord.

We resist the invasion of Christ into our lives because we crave freedom and fear being ruled by another. But the rule of Christ in us sets us free and brings true life to the sad half-life of human existence. He makes us what we ought to be.

When Christ dwells in us, the gratefulness that we have for God and his plan only increases (v. 18). When you first become a Christian, you understand a little of what God has done, and you love him for it. As you grow in Christ, you understand even more and learn to love God even more. Like a log on the fireplace, what begins as a spark settles into a warm glow that endures. It is a lifelong adventure of growing, learning, and loving.

Paul wants us to think of what God has done for us as a precious jewel (remember this from the last lesson). It is like a gem that we can hold up to the light and admire. Every time we turn it a little, we see a different side of it and appreciate more of its beauty. Paul calls this comprehending the “breadth and length and height and depth” of God’s plan (v. 18). God’s love is multifaceted. It is constant as a gemstone, but the light it reflects in us seems to change each time we behold it.

Jesus’ love for us is the light that makes this gem shine. It is a love that “surpasses knowledge” (v. 19). The beauty of

this jewel is so obvious that even a child can recognize its value, but a wise man may study it for lifetime and never cease to learn and be amazed by it. As we learn more of God's loving plan, we are compelled to give more of ourselves to Christ. When Christ dwells in us, we are filled with the fullness of God and come to better understand his love (v. 19).

In the final two verses of the chapter, something special happens. Paul gets carried away with his own description of God's wonderful love. He cannot help himself. He must stop and praise God! What began as a letter erupts into worship.

Paul praises God for being able and willing to do for us "far more ... than all that we ask or think" (v. 20). God is not only blessing us, he is blessing us in ways that we cannot even understand. He is working to fix problems that we do not even know that we have. Before we have a need, he knows it. Before we ask for help, he already cares for us and is working to bless us. He is working in the world around us, and he is working in the person "within us" (v. 20).

God deserves all the glory that we can give him. Though all the world turns its gaze down here below to the gifts we are given, some instead look above to the Giver of all gifts. The church is the people of God, here to proclaim his great love and to glorify him in all the earth (v. 21). By continuing the work of Christ and sharing his gospel, we continue God's great plan "throughout all generations, forever and ever."

This marks the end of the first half of the letter to the Ephesians. We have learned that God has a loving plan. That plan and God's purpose has come to be completed in Jesus Christ our Lord. The church is here to carry out the work of

God in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

The rest of the letter (chapters 4-6) will be Paul telling us what we should be doing to continue this great purpose of God. How must our lives change? How must we live differently? How should we treat each other? How should we think about ourselves? What human behaviors bring God his glory best? All these questions and more are part of what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus. Answering these questions and living out these answers is how we continue to bring glory to God who has blessed us so much.

## The Purpose of Creation

So what is the meaning of this emphasis on the church bringing glory to God?

Jonathan Edwards was the first truly American theologian. He was a Puritan and renowned revivalist in the decades before the American Revolution, the era commonly known as the First Great Awakening. In his time as in many others, it was the common belief that the chief end of all creation was the happiness of man. God had – it was thought – orchestrated all things toward this goal of human flourishing. As the colonies grew, it seemed that God was working things out to the benefit of the colonists. God was clearly on “our” side of history.

Edwards came to a starkly different conclusion in his preaching and writing. He believed in the old Reformation slogan, *Soli Deo Gloria*. “Glory to God alone.” For Edwards, the purpose of creation could not consist of anything within the creation itself. The purpose of the creation rested in the eternal existence and perfection of the Creator. Edwards

called this moral perfection and excellence the glory of God, and he believed that knowing and sharing union with this glory was the end to which all things had been created. “He is every way the first and supreme, and . . . his excellency is in all respects the supreme beauty and glory, the original good, and fountain of all good.” The knowledge of God’s glory “is one of the highest, most real, and substantial parts of all created existence.” The human person could know no higher good than to know the glory of God.

If this was the purpose of man and the end of all creation, then it was certainly the purpose of the church: “Tis a thing infinitely good in itself that God’s glory should be known by a glorious society of created beings.” All other ends and all other goals were subordinated to this one goal. There might be many things the church *could* do, but only one thing the church *must* do in all its works.

In the years since then, Christians have found it no easier than in Edward’s day to accept the glory of God as their purpose. We have even found diverse ways to ignore God’s glory and focus on our own goals. In the mid-1960s, Paris Reidhead delivered a now famously scathing sermon on this theme, wherein he said rebuked both the liberal and the conservative in the church as being human-centered. “The liberal says the end of religion is to make man happy while he’s alive, and the fundamentalist says the end of religion is to make man happy when he dies.”<sup>7</sup> Neither group had managed to accept the profound assertion of Paul in our original text, that the eternal purpose of the church is above all the glory of God.

In our current era, the same debate rages on as before but under new terminology. The idea of purpose or “end” is less frequently discussed, but the topic of identity is the new

vehicle for the same concepts. Modern man wants to be free to choose for himself an identity and in that identity find happiness and contentment. But the old premises remain true. The creature must derive his identity from the Creator, just as he does his purpose. God made us in his image, not the other way around.

For the Christian and the church, we may take this line of thought one step further still. Paul has spoken of “his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your heart.” If the quest of the modern human is to look within and find true self, the Christian looks and finds his Creator at work.

We are not what we choose to be. We are what God is making of us.

## **Who Am I?**

I am a reflection of the perfection of God. Even my limitations and imperfections point to him. I cannot know myself apart from him. I have no glorious purpose apart from his glorious purpose. His glory is my purpose.

I am whoever dwells within me. Deep inside me is not some inner perfection of my own desires waiting to be set free. Within me is the God who has chosen to dwell within me.

I am slowly coming to understand what God is doing within me. I am one of God’s people, his church. In his church, I witness God at work in many lives. I am one of them, and by them, I share in the work of God in his creation.

I exist to bring God glory. His glory is my purpose, and my purpose shapes my identity. How that glory is found in

my life changes with each passing season, but that purpose and identity remain. I am his.

## Discussion Questions

1. How does the power of God working within us relate to our understanding of our purpose? What implications does this power have for our daily lives and our pursuit of fulfilling God's purposes?
2. In what ways does faith play a part in grasping the magnitude of God's glory and aligning ourselves with His purposes?
3. How does this passage influence your understanding of your own purpose and the role you play in manifesting God's glory?
4. What practical steps can one take to align themselves more closely with God's purpose and bring glory to His name, as suggested in this passage?