



“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them,”
Ephesians 2:10.

The Divine Purpose in the Believer

Lesson Aim: To note the holy purpose of God in the life of each redeemed person.

L518. Date: May 1964. **Text:** Philippians 1:12-26. **Topic:** God: Will Of; Purposes: Of God; Works: Of Righteousness.

INTRODUCTION—God has a purpose to be worked out in the life of each believer. As a general deploys his forces in a military campaign, so God has a place for each of His children—a design for each believer's life. The entire second quarter of lessons for this year is a review of the specific personal duties of each believer. Today's study intends to stress “the holy purpose of God in the life of each redeemed person.”

God has a purpose for each life. This purpose reaches from birth to death. It is simply illustrated in the case of Jeremiah, whom God said, **“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations,”** Jeremiah 1:5. Does this mean the person who reads this has a place in God's world-purpose? Yes, indeed! Surely the realization that such a purpose exists is ample motivation to learn where it would place us. In a very real sense, the Christian does not belong to himself, but unto Him who has redeemed him.

God's purpose is being worked out in the world. In some instances it is fulfilled by blessings and in others by judgment. It is worked out in times of prosperity and in times of adversity. It is often worked out when one is not conscious that is what is happening. It is hoped this study will impress on each reader the fact that God has a purpose for his life and incline his heart

to finding and cooperating with God in its fulfillment.

EXPOSITION

I. GOD'S PURPOSE IN TROUBLES, 1:12-19.

1. That God has a purpose which can be worked out in times of trouble is evidenced in the experience of the Apostle Paul. Following is a brief outline of Paul's life up to today's lesson. He was born about A.D. 1 and converted to the Christian faith when near 36 years of age. His three missionary journeys covered A.D. 45-58. He was arrested in Jerusalem and imprisoned in Caesarea for two years, A.D. 58-60. In the winter of A.D. 60-61, he was transported to Rome by ship. He was a prisoner there for two years longer, 61-63. The Epistle to the Philippians was written in A.D. 63 after Paul had been in prison for four years. Yet, he writes the imprisonment had "fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." How?

(1) The imprisonment had given Paul time to write the "prison epistles." Up to the date of today's lesson he had written Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. Paul also underwent a second Roman imprisonment (after a release and possibly an extended missionary journey) when other epistles were written. Even a casual reading of the epistles mentioned above shows how much would have been lost if Paul had not written them. What seemed to be a handicap to him has proven to be a blessing to the entire Christian faith.

(2) The imprisonment had given Paul time to witness and win others to Jesus, Acts 28:17-31. During this time he somehow came into contact with Onesimus, a runaway slave from Colosse. Paul won him to Jesus and sent him back home to his master Philemon, bearing the epistle by that name. Besides this, Paul had opportunity to counsel with many, both Jews and Gentiles, who lived in Rome. Some of them became Christians.

(3) The imprisonment had encouraged a benevolent missionary offering from at least one church, Philippians 4:10-18. Occasion of the writing of the epistle to the Philippians was the receipt of an offering from that church which Epaphroditus had brought to Paul. Rather than writing a mere "thank you," Paul wrote an epistle which blessed the Philippians and countless Christians since then. This faithful church had sent offerings once and again to support his ministry and this act of missionary interest was God's occasion for giving another epistle to the New Testament.

(4) The imprisonment had spread the name of Christ in pagan Rome, Philippians 1:13-18. The fame of Paul soon spread and the cause of his

imprisonment was scattered. “Who is this Christ for whom Paul was in prison?” The gospel story would be recounted in response to this question. In this manner the story of Jesus was spread through the palace including the soldiers of the Praetorian Guard.

Not everyone who spoke of “the Christ whom Paul preacheth,” was in sympathy with Paul's plight. One group spoke in a derogatory manner of the Apostle. They thought by so doing they could add to the possibility of his condemnation. These were either unsaved Gentiles or Judaizers who so spoke against him. Concerning this, Paul wrote, **“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in presence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice,”** verse 18. How could Paul rejoice if Christ was preached out of contention? He must have reasoned in this manner: “The people in Rome have never heard the name of Jesus Christ. Before they can become converts they must be introduced to the work of Jesus. Therefore, even if some who are preaching Christ do not like me and hope to raise opposition to me by their preaching, I am happy for new people are being continually informed about Christ.” F. B. Meyer suggests, “When you are devoted to Christ, your very bonds will become electric chains through which the pulsations of energy shall go to others, and your very troubles will be pulpits from which you shall preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

(5) The imprisonment encouraged many faithful brethren to witness, Philippians 1:14-17. Paul stresses that “the most of the brethren” (literal translation) have taken new courage and boldly witness for Christ, even to the endangering their own lives. Example is a powerful incentive to effort, and the example of this noble man supplied them with courage. If it may seem one voice for the Gospel is being hushed in blood and tears, remember that the example of suffering will embolden many others. Perhaps this is why Christianity grows so rapidly in the midst of persecution.

Observe that those who are “much more bold to speak” are not the ordained ministers among the Roman brethren, but the laymen of the congregation there. One commentator expresses the meaning of these verses thus: “And the great majority of the brethren having come to a state of settled confidence in the Lord by reason of the fact that they have been persuaded by my bonds, are more abundantly bold, fearlessly breaking their silence and speaking the Word.” If some reader is beset by actual limitations which prohibit an active ministry for the Lord, let his very faithfulness be inspiration to others to witness instead.

(6) The imprisonment awakened other Christians to intercessory prayer, Philippians 1:19. Paul writes, “If you will pray, I know I will be delivered

from the present distress . . .” Deliverance from his troubles would be accomplished by the Philippians' prayer and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is a great soul which can look out from the gloom of the present to the joy of the future, in implicit faith that God will make things turn out right. He who is assured that he is a part of God's eternal purpose can do so.

II. GOD'S PURPOSE IN EVERY BELIEVER, 1:20-26.

1. God purposes to magnify Christ through each believer, verse 20. The Christian has one goal: “to magnify Christ.” This was Paul's great objective in living, his “earnest expectation.” This expression describes a person with head erect, his eyes centered upon a single object. It is often used of the watchman peering into the darkness on watch against the enemy which might attack by surprise. It is sometimes used of the runner who has his eye on the finish line. Wuest describes it as “the concentrated, intense hope which ignores other interests and strains forward as with outstretched head.”

Paul's resolve is that he might not be “ashamed,” this is, abashed into cowardice or compromise and put to shame by failure or disappointment. With freedom of heart there arises a frankness of speech—a boldness of utterance. Even being a prisoner because of his witness for Christ, Paul still resolved to speak boldly of Jesus.

From the thought of magnifying Christ by speech comes the idea that He will be magnified by the whole life. Therefore, whether by life or by death, “**Christ shall be magnified** (made great and conspicuous so as to receive glory and praise) **in my body.**” Whatever the outcome of his imprisonment and trial, freedom or martyr's death, Christ would be magnified: “by life or by death.”

2. God's purpose is for the good of the individual Christian, verse 21. God is no hard task master who deals with His children as if they were bond slaves. He desires for each of His children that which is best for them. Is it best for the Christian to live or to die? This is the question which Paul investigates.

How could one say, “**To me to live is Christ**”? It means Christ is the origin of our life, “**I am come that they might have life . . . more abundantly,**” John 10:10. It means Christ is the essence of our life, “**I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,**” Galatians 2:20. It means Christ is the model of our life, “**It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord,**” Matthew 10:25. It means Christ is the aim of

our life and we desire His glory. It means Christ is the solace of our life in whom we find rest, Matthew 11:28-30. It means that Christ is the reward of our life; “the one infinite gain that comes for every labour, every tear, every act of sacrifice is that Christ gives Himself, nearer, dearer, better than ever . . . Life with all its darkness and sorrow is, after all, a good thing when a man can say, “To me to live is Christ.”-F. B. “Meyer.

How could one say. **“To die is gain”**? Death is a gain when it is viewed, not as the end, but as the beginning. In death the spirit is set free from the cramped, confined conditions of mortal body and mortality is swallowed up of Life, II Corinthians 5:4. In death the Christian who has lived for Christ here passes through the veil and sees Christ in His glory. Here we walk by faith, there by sight, and we shall see His face, and His name shall be in our foreheads! When death is viewed as the beginning of the real life, as liberation, as the emancipation of life, as the presence of Christ, as the recovery of the beloved ones who have gone before, then truly “to die is gain”! This is a part of God's purpose for us!

3. God's purpose is that each Christian strengthen other Christians in service, verses 22-26. However great one's longing may be to get to heaven, it is often needful that one continue his service here. How wonderful it would be to leave for home, to break up camp, to weigh anchor, to depart on the journey to a better country. But how needful it is to remain here and serve. Paul seems to say, “To depart and be with Christ would be far better for me, but for me to remain here would be more beneficial to others. Therefore, I must choose the latter and be a servant of men for Jesus' sake.” While here on earth the believer can do good. There are downtrodden ones he can uplift, there are weaklings who want his help, there are lost ones to be saved, and for their sake he must remain as a pilot at his wheel, as the shepherd near his flock, as the sentry at his post, so long as he can help one other soul. As the Lord turned His back on the open doors of Paradise to become a man, as He left the Mount of Transfiguration to meet the doubting crowd and impotent disciples below, so His children are to deny themselves for the sake of serving others. Thus they identify themselves as the children of their Father who is in heaven.

III. GOD'S PURPOSE FOR YOU.

Every Christian who reads these words can be assured that God had a purpose in saving him. Why did God save you? Assuredly, His sole purpose was not just to keep you out of hell, just to get you to heaven, just because Jesus died for you, or just because you asked Him to save you, though all

these things were involved. The Bible gives only one ultimate reason for the salvation of any person! Ephesians 1:12 states the reason God saves us is **“That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”** This is God's purpose for you!

How will God glorify Himself through you? You can know the answer to this question. God's will in your life can be known. A young man came to his pastor with the statement, “I feel God is calling me to some special service, but I can't decide what it is.” His pastor advised, “Offer yourself to God to do anything He says and then you will know.” This is the secret. Be willing for God's will to be done in you “whether by life or by death” and you will know it.

CONCLUSION—Just as Paul could see God's holy purpose in all the vicissitudes of his life, so can every Christian who looks for it see that same holy purpose for himself. This Divine purpose cannot be attained in one's own strength, however, but only with God's help. God's purpose for His children also involves every aspect of their self, their actions, their resources. The study for next week will “magnify and exalt Christ as the believer's pattern in every area of interest and activity.” Study it with the question, “How does this relate to God's will for my life?”

QUESTIONS

1. What evidence is there that God has a purpose for each believer?
2. How can God use troubles to advance His cause?
3. What good came out of Paul's imprisonment in Rome?
4. What was Paul's one great resolve in verse 20?
5. Explain: “To me to live is Christ.”
6. Explain: “To me to die is gain.”
7. How can you discover God's will for your own life?