

No.13, The Fact of God's Eternal Purpose

Our studies on this subject of *The Doctrine of Man* have covered two main issues: (a) man in his state of innocence as the result of his creation in the image of God; (b) man in the state of sin due to the Fall.

The next step in the study of *The Doctrine of Man* is to consider the state of grace into which he is brought as a result of God's redeeming grace in Christ. The Scriptures present us with the final chapter with regard to the story of the human race, with some lost forever and the rest eternally saved in everlasting glory. But, in order for some to come into that state of glory it was imperative that they should have been brought first into a state of grace, which is of course what happened in their experience.

However, the starting point with regard to this state of grace is to consider God's eternal purpose to save sinners, a truth clearly revealed in the Scriptures. We have noted in recent studies dealing with the results of the Fall, the matters of man's moral & spiritual depravity and inability. A clear & Biblical understanding of those points results in the awareness that unless God saves sinners they never will be saved. But it is God who saves, Jonah 2: 9 – "*Salvation is of the Lord.*" Thus, since Scripture also reveals that the God who saves is eternal, then we conclude that He must have purposed to save sinners.

WCF ch.3, sections 3& 5 – "*By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life...Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith and good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.*"

When many speak of the salvation of sinners they will, often employ terms such "God's Plan of Salvation" and then refer to a number of points that sinners must acknowledge and obey in order to be saved -- *recognise that you are a sinner; believe that Christ died for sinners; ask God to forgive your sins; place your trust in Christ for salvation.* In themselves these points are all true, but it would not be correct to conclude that they constitute everything that is involved in "God's Plan of Salvation." They are fine with regard to evangelising the lost, but if we wish to arrive at a Biblical understanding of the plan of salvation then we need to recognise that Scripture teaches the eternal purpose of God to save sinners.

The Bible has much to say about the divine purpose that governs this world and its inhabitants, a purpose that encompasses the salvation of sinners. Note the following words from the Princeton theologian, B.B. Warfield, in his work *The Plan of Salvation* – "If we believe in a personal God, then, and much more if, being Theists, we believe in the immediate control by this personal God of the world He has made, we must believe in a plan underlying all that God does, and therefore in a plan of salvation. The only question that can arise concerns not the reality but the nature of this plan." Warfield's final words are important – highlighting the need to understand the nature of God's plan of salvation; and that will be the burden of study over the next few weeks.

However, before we look at any details of the eternal purpose of God in salvation we wish to underline the teaching of Scripture that God has an eternal purpose & that its central features are made very clear. Notice in the passage read the words of v.11 – "*According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Here is a clear Biblical statement of proof that God has an eternal purpose; and since God has revealed that such is true His people should attempt to understand it. Note the following details about the fact of God's eternal purpose:

1. **God has one eternal purpose**

The original Greek word for "purpose" may also be translated *plan* or *resolve*. The word is singular, thus the Lord has but one eternal purpose or plan. He has resolved to work according to a single eternal purpose. It is true that there are many different strands within this eternal purpose, yet God has only one.

2. **God's purpose is eternal.**

The words "eternal purpose" literally read *purpose of the ages*. The structure of this language indicates that God's purpose always stood complete in His mind. There never was a moment when God's purpose in every detail was not determined in full. Thus, God never finally arrived at a conclusion on any issue – His purpose was eternally present within His own mind.

3. **God's one and eternal purpose has Christ as its centre.**

Note that this text declares that God's purpose was "*purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" The word "purposed" is the verb *to make* or *to do*. Thus, the sense of the words is that God's eternal purpose was not made without Christ in view. Rather, the language indicates that in its entirety God's eternal purpose centres on Christ with respect to both His person and His work. See also Ephes 1: 9, 10 – v.9 refers to this same eternal purpose which is according to His own good pleasure; and v.10 reveals that He purposed to fulfil it in Christ. Therefore, God's eternal plan, that governs all His ways & works in heaven and on earth, has Christ at the beginning, the centre and the end.

4. **God's eternal purpose having Christ as its centre is directly concerned with the salvation of men.**

Proof of this point is seen in that the context is directly dealing with the matter of the salvation of sinners and shows that this salvation is according to God's eternal purpose. Our text is part of a sentence that commences in v.8 and runs right through to v.12. Note especially v.10 which essentially teaches that divine wisdom is taught to the angels of God by means of God's dealings with the Church. The words "by the church" literally read *through the church*. Thus, through God's dealings with the Church, which are gracious in nature, the wisdom of God is demonstrated. But then v.11 goes on to show that God's dealings with the church are according to His eternal purpose. The conclusion is obvious – *the Church which is a company of redeemed sinners stand along with Christ at the very centre of God's eternal purpose.* See also other Scriptures that emphasise the same fact – Rom 8: 28; Eph 1: 11; 2 Tim 1: 9.