

No.14. The Focus of God's Eternal Purpose

In our last study we progressed into the next branch of this on *The Doctrine of Man*, namely the state of grace into which men are brought as a result of God's merciful intervention in their lives.

As was noted in the previous study, the starting point in any consideration of the "state of grace" is that of the truth of God's eternal purpose to save sinners. Repeatedly throughout the Scriptures there is presented to us the truth of *God's Eternal Purpose*, the reminder that according to it alone men are saved from their sin.

In the first study on this matter of God's eternal purpose with respect to salvation we noted the words of Eph 3: 11 – "According to the eternal purpose which He hath purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." From these words we noted the following thoughts:

1. God has one purpose
2. God's purpose is eternal
3. God's one & eternal purpose has Christ as its centre
4. God's eternal purpose having Christ as its centre is directly concerned with the salvation of men

This last point brings us to see that in the eternal purpose of God for the salvation of men, it was decreed that Christ's work for sinners was purposed by God from all eternity. Note the following Scriptures:

Luke 22: 22 – "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined." Christ speaks of going to the cross, but makes it clear that it was within the divine decree. The words "as it was determined" refer to the determinate counsel and purpose of God. Christ's death was appointed from all eternity.

Acts 2: 23 – "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." Again the reference is to Christ's death; and it is inescapably obvious that Christ was ordained to die. The terms "determinate counsel" and then "foreknowledge" are employed here under a certain grammatical construction that means that the two terms are synonymous. Thus, God's foreknowledge is His determinate counsel. Indeed, the original word for *foreknowledge* is sometimes translated "foreordained" – see 1 Peter 1: 20 where it is again used of Christ's appointment to be the Lamb of God and is translated *foreordained*.

Thus, it is exceedingly clear that in the eternal purpose of God with regard to the salvation of men, Christ and His atoning death were at the heart & centre of it all. But it is just as clear that those who are saved from their sins are also at the very heart of God's eternal purpose. In other words, the focus of God's eternal purpose is on Christ and a people – the people of God who will eternally inhabit glory. In God's eternal purpose, Christ is not seen without this people nor are they seen without Him. They are seen together always as Scripture reveals.

Romans 8: 29-30 – note three facts here:

**1. In His eternal plan God foreknew certain people.**

See v.29 – Paul speak of a people whom God "did foreknow." This word *foreknow* is the same word in the original as is used of Christ in the verses noted above – Acts 2: 23 & 1 Pet 1: 20. It is used also in 1 Pet 1: 2 where it is joined to the word *elect*, which signifies having been chosen. Thus it is "chosen according to the foreordination of God the Father." In Rom 8 the same union of terms is in view: v.29 – "foreknow" i.e. *foreordain*, and v.34 speaking of the same people Paul refers to them as "God's elect."

This verb "foreknow" signifies God setting His heart upon these people. Linguists teach that in Scripture the Hebrew & Greek words for the verb *to know* signify *to know intimately, to set one's affections upon, & to have special loving regard for*. Thus, in Rom 8: 29 this is the sense of the verb *foreknow* rather than mere knowledge beforehand. The idea would be that of fore-loving.

Hence, the verb does not signify either what many will allege – i.e. that God chose sinners because He foresaw some spiritual quality in them. Not only does Rom 8: 29 not teach such a notion, rather the very opposite, but other Scriptures also refute this erroneous idea. See Rom 9: 11 – note these particular words: "the purpose of God according to election...not of works but of Him that willeth." The point is that God's purpose in choosing sinners to salvation is "not of works" which effectively means that it is of grace. Eph 1: 4 – states that sinners were chosen in Christ in eternity that they "should be holy" not because He saw that *they would be holy*, which would be the case if faith or any spiritual quality was foreseen in them.

**2. In His eternal plan God predestined the conformity of these people to Christ's image.**

Consider this verb *predestinate*. It is a compound of two words in the original text: *pro* which means "beforehand"; and *horizo* (which gives us the English word *horizon*) meaning "to set a boundary"; hence, *to mark out or to determine* – Luke 22: 22 again where it is translated *determined*. Thus, bringing the two parts of the word together it means *to determine beforehand*. God pre-determined that the people that He fore-loved would be fully conformed to the likeness of Christ. This is essentially what is meant in Eph 1: 4 – God chose a people in Christ with the view that they "should be holy" i.e. that they would be like Christ. See also 2 Thess 2: 13 – again this verse underlines the truth that from all eternity God had determined a course of salvation for a people He had chosen that would result in their deliverance from sin and death.

**3. Note also that what God purposed in eternity He executes in time.**

In the original text there is a very intimate grammatical construction in v.30 between the two verbs *predestinate* and *called*. Thus there is an inseparable connection between God's plan to save sinners and His execution of that plan. The Lord is the Author of the plan and the Executioner of it also. The predestination is the blueprint as it were; and the calling is the outworking of that blueprint.

Thus, in conclusion when Scripture speaks of God's eternal purpose, it includes Christ and His redemptive work on the cross and the election & predestination of sinners to salvation through that redemptive work.