

"GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE IN CHRIST"

Why did He create the heavens and the earth?

(Scriptures from NKJV)

Ephesians 3:9-11:

And to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The message before us comprises the summation of a series of some 55 messages on the general theme of our topic. These messages unfold and develop in chronological order beginning with the creation of the heavens and earth in the book of Genesis, the creation of man in the first paradise in Eden, and continue on climaxing in the new heavens and earth (the second paradise) as described in the Book of Revelation. They cover such questions as:

"Why did God create the heavens and earth?"

"Why did He ordain the fall of angels and men?"

"Why is Satan so opposed to God's eternal purpose?"

"How can a holy God justify sinful men?"

"How does God renew a person's moral character without violating their free moral agency?"

These, along with numerous other questions are answered in our journey from the first paradise to the second.

The passage in Ephesians 3:9-11 comprises a prayer on the part of the Apostle Paul for the saints in Ephesus, for God to open and enlarge their understanding into what He has revealed about Himself and His eternal purpose, which He purposed before the foundation of the world ever began. NOTE: Paul is assured that every detail which is included in that purpose shall come to pass without failure.

The average church member can listen to thousands of sermons during their lifetime, and never come to see the "big picture" involving God's working out of His eternal purpose. This is due to the hearing of different parts and elements about God's Word, they are yet left out of being able to connect all those together. This was my goal in delivering these messages.

In addition to the passage in Ephesians 3:9-11, I wish to draw your attention to several supporting texts as they relate to our theme. They are:

Matthew 18:1-4:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means

enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Revelation 21:1-5, 10, 27:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Revelation 22:3,4:

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

Notice the connection, by seeing the face of Christ, people SERVE Him.

The great goal of Biblical prophecy is the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth as seen in Revelation 21:1. This earth, groaning from the corruption of sin (Romans 8:21), will one day be destroyed (II Peter 3:10; Revelation 20:11). It will be replaced by a new heaven and earth characterized by righteousness (II Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). By righteousness is meant - "right-living" as defined by God's standards. This righteousness can only flow out of a nature perfected by the grace of humility. Perfected humility occurs when pride and dominion have been eradicated. Pride and dominion was introduced into the moral creation of God by Lucifer, also known as Satan or the Devil. When Jesus came into the world of humanity He was given a fourfold mission to destroy the works of the Devil. This mission was successful. The elements included in this mission in destroying Satan's works were:

One: To live the humble life of a sinless Servant like God required out of the first Adam. (Jesus was known at the Second Adam).

Two: To demonstrate how God can harmonize His attributes of justice and mercy in securing an elect portion of fallen man. This was to answer the question to the moral universe of "How can a just God justify guilty men?"

Three: To merit a place of honor above that of the angels for Himself and His redeemed people.

Four: To demonstrate how humility and serving others honors God's glory and secures inward peace and happiness for God's moral creatures. This also is the means of eradicating sin.

I now wish to demonstrate that God's eternal purpose or goal in creating the world is to create a sinless society composed of unfallen angels and redeemed mankind to live in such a state that there will be no envy, strife, division and jealousy. This shall be done by exalting humility as being that which makes His kingdom great. This is God's grand design, while there will be many parts involved along the way which shall achieve this.

Far too many people believe that all God is trying to do is to keep as many people out of hell as possible. That is not His end design. He had a greater design than that. Others believe that God's end design was to save the elect. That is included, but that is not His end goal. We are saved to serve and we shall serve in a sinless state, and will not be envious of each other in whatever state we are placed in heaven.

In explaining this, I have chosen to make use of a section of Jonathan Edwards' *Miscellaneous Works on Angels*. I plan to edit and rephrase some of his words, as well as to add some of mine in order for purposes of clarity. Those who read Edwards are well aware that some of his sentence structures are difficult and require they be re-read several times to grasp their meaning. So the first half of the lesson, I will be rewording Edwards and including words of my own in order to clarify his statements.

A. HUMILITY IS GREATNESS AS SEEN IN CHRIST.

The angels of heaven are a superior order of being, possessing both a more exalted nature and faculties than that of man. But yet they are assigned by God to be ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation. While they are superior beings, they are assigned to be "servants" to those who shall be heirs of salvation, that is us. Thus in some respect, they are made to be inferior to the saints in honor. In a like manner, the ministers of the gospel, such as myself, are of a higher order and office than other saints, and yet they are appointed by Christ to become ministers or "servants" to the other saints lower than they. Jesus explained this in Matthew 20:25-28. ***"But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'"*** He likewise said in Matthew 23:8-12, ***"But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."***

This principle of greatness is also seen in His words found in Mark 9:35 which says, ***"And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.'"*** This is greatly overlooked in the teaching on

salvation. It is as if when you teach salvation, it is just that you are delivered from hell and brought to heaven. But this is not a side issue. Remember Jesus said **"except you be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."** (Matthew 18:3). This is serious and not just a secondary work of grace. This is crucial to the conversion experience and entering into glory.

There is an analogy between God's ways on earth with those ways in heaven. As on earth, those who are honored the most are to be willing to serve those who are the least, so without doubt the same relationship exists among those who dwell in heaven. There, those that are the most exalted in honor and happiness, though they are above the least, yet in some respects they are the least in that they minister to others, being employed by God to minister for their good and happiness. Those sayings of Christ in Matthew 20:25 and Mark 9:35 were spoken on the occasions of the disciples manifesting an ambition to be the greatest in His kingdom, by which they meant His state of exaltation and glory. But with the man Jesus Himself, who is the very highest and most exalted of all creatures in being their head; in order to prepare Himself for that position of honor, He descended as the lowest of all, was the most abased of any, and became in some respects the least of all. Therefore, Christ directs that those who would be the greatest among His disciples, should condescend to become the servants of the rest. He enforces it by His own example. Thus we repeat His words in Matthew 20:26-28 - **"Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."** Jesus follows up on this same principle in Luke 22:26-27 - **"But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves."** Over and over again, Jesus is driving this point home, but the disciples don't get it. Even at the last supper when He was washing their feet, they don't get it. They are still arguing over who is going to be greatest in the kingdom. None in the kingdom of heaven ever descended so low as Christ did, who descended as it were into the depths of hell while on the cross. He suffered shame and wrath, and was made a curse. He went lower in these things than even any other did, and He did this as a servant, not only to God, but to men. Christ took upon Himself to minister to us in the lowest service, which He typified by the action of washing the disciples' feet.

The end design of God in thus ordering such things, is to teach and show that He is all in all, and the creature is nothing. I'm going to repeat that again. The end design of God in ordering such things, the more noble condescend to serve the least, is to teach and to show that God is all in all, and the creature is nothing, and that all exaltation and dignity belongs to God alone who will not share His glory with another. Thus those creatures that are exalted the most shall in other respects be the least and the lowest. Thus the angels, who excel in wisdom and strength, and are principalities and powers and kings of the earth, are made to be ministers to them who are much less than they. In like manner, the saints in heaven, who are the most exalted in dignity, serve other saints of lower honor and dignity.

That is a beautiful portrayal. While the angelic nature is the highest and the most exalted created nature, yet God has been pleased to put greater honor upon our inferior human nature. This He has done by causing that the Head and King of all creatures should acquire a human nature, and that the saints in that human nature in Christ, should be exalted above the angels. Those who have the most humility in this world, will continue to excel in humility in heaven. I'm going to repeat that and may you ask God to never let you forget it. Those who have the most humility in this world, will continue to excel in humility in heaven. Those who possess the greatest humility in this life shall be exalted to the greatest honor in the next, and they who are exalted to the position of greatest honor shall serve as the most humble. Do you see what that is doing? It is eradicating all jealousy. I don't know of the times that in 52 years of pastoral ministry, I have had the question come up, if some are greater in heaven than others, then what is going to keep us from envying those and what is going to keep those who are elevated higher from having a superior attitude toward those who are lower? We are explaining how that is going to work.

Edwards then summarizes his concept with these words:

Hence we may learn the sweet and perfect harmony that will reign throughout that glorious society, and how far those that are lowest will be from envying those that are highest, or the highest from despising the lowest, for the highest shall be made ministers to the happiness of the lowest, and shall be even below them in humility, and the lowest shall have the greatest love to the highest for their superior excellency, and for the greater benefit which they shall receive from their ministrations, as it is the disposition of the saints to love and honor their faithful ministers here in this world.

If you have a faithful pastor, do you not love your pastor and honor him? Are you aware that he is above you in the Lord and in his office? What makes a good pastor? It is his willingness to condescend and serve the happiness and well-being of his people. That what keeps him from getting the "big head" is that God has called him to serve, and those who are being served, love their ministers, and we love God who is superior to us, and yet God has condescended to serve us. That is greatness.

John Gerstner, who devoted much of his life to the study of Edwards, then says:

In his most comprehensive statement on the exaltation of the humble, Edwards reveals the grand, overall end of God in the creation of the world. (Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. II, p. 213).

So you look at the world out here in its natural order, the sun, moon and stars, and you look at the world of mankind, the world of angels, you see all of that - Why? You see why the secular scientists don't get it? They can look through all those telescopes and see millions and millions of miles, billions of miles into space and they don't get it, because all they are seeing does not produce humility. Only God can produce humility.

Now when and how does this sinless perfection occur? I am going to answer the question, "at what time do the saints have their sinful nature eradicated and what causes it?"

B. THE BEATIFIC VISION OF CHRIST.

The word "beatific" means to be made happy or blessed. I have the privilege of owning a rare copy of *Webster's Original Unabridged Dictionary*. Noah Webster, who was a Christian, filled his work with Bible definitions of words and concepts. He defines the word, "beatific" as follows: *"To beautify is to bless a person with the completion or perfection of heavenly enjoyment."* Why are we going to enjoy heaven so much? Oh my, the ungodly have all kinds of ideas as to why they are looking forward to heaven. There are two texts of Scripture which help to develop this theme:

John 17:24 - ***"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."*** Notice the expression in Jesus' prayer, ***"that they may behold my glory."*** Remember the text in Revelation that they shall serve Him because they shall see His face. (See Revelation 22:4).

I John 3:2,3 - ***"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."*** Compare the expression, ***"we shall be like Him for we shall see Him"*** with, ***"I desire that they may behold my glory."***

In other words, the true believer has this hope of sinless perfection to be like Christ, and that is an ongoing developing hope. Now compare the expression in I John 3:2, "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him" with Jesus prayer in John 17 "I desire that they may behold my glory." When we see the glory of Jesus Christ in its full manifestation, it is then that we shall be sinlessly purified. It is also then that we shall partake of eternal and perfect happiness, and internal peace. Our happiness is inseparably connected with the glorification of God, and the glorification of God is inseparably connected with our happiness. Only by becoming consumed with His glory shall we be enabled to be blessed and enjoy happiness forever. What a thought, that my Creator is concerned about my happiness! Out of all the worlds which He has created, all the galaxies and everything before He ever began to create, He set his love upon me!! He said, I am going to make Jim Gables happy. He is going to be in a new heaven and new earth, and he is going to be happy because he is going to love to see Me glorified.

When we talk about the beatific vision of seeing Christ, we are not talking about a vision in which our natural eyes see the invisible spirit of God's divine nature. We were just talking about seeing the perfected humanity, because that shall never take place, for God is an invisible Spirit. When it is said that Moses saw Him who was invisible, it means that his soul came to understand what God is like in His moral character, and it gave him delight. It caused him to leave the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the riches of Christ to be greater riches than the pleasures of sin in Egypt. We shall see Jesus Christ in His human nature or form. We may even see Him as Peter, James and John saw Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, but even that physical vision did not render them sinlessly perfect. Upon leaving the scene they soon returned to their consuming question of which of them was

going to be the greatest in the kingdom. No, a physical vision of Jesus will not perfect our sinful natures.

The vision I am describing is what the soul's intellectual understanding shall comprehend the moment "in the twinkling of an eye" when we leave these natural bodies and enter into the presence of Christ. It is then that we shall see the glorified Christ in His role as a perfected "Servant" who is meek and lowly. We shall see that greatness is equated with humility, that shall in turn inflame our redeemed souls with love and zeal to be the perfected "servants" of God and others, forever and ever and ever. When we comprehend that the God who created us, who is worthy of honor and glory, condescended to acquire the nature of a lower creature and suffered and died as a criminal, then we shall learn where greatness lies. When we see Jesus, our heavenly foot washer, if you please, we will grasp that greatness is not in exercising control and dominion over others, but in giving away ourselves in the service of others. After we explain a concept to someone and they do not understand it, we say, "don't you get it, or "don't you see it?" By those statements we really mean, "don't you understand it?" Jesus used this language when He spoke to Nicodemus. **"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom."** He was not talking about a physical vision, He cannot understand it. He cannot grasp the meaning of it. The **"kingdom"** is the rule of God in the hearts of men. Wherever the will of God is delighted in, there is the **"kingdom"**.

What shall Jesus say to His people when they enter into His presence? **"Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."** What makes a servant's heart joyful? It is when he is pleasing to his master. "Well done, good and faithful servant." The moment we depart from this body and enter into the presence of Christ and we see where greatness lies, that eradicates all envy, strife and jealousy. When that concept "jells" in our thinking, then we will see it. Then we will get it. Then we will see how our love of happiness and complacency is achieved. Not in trying to rule and protect our rights. Not in always being first in line, or holding the number one or two best jobs under the government of Jesus (sitting on His right or left hand). No, no, but it will come when we see the smile on Jesus' face, as He says, "Go wash feet!" This is why there will be no envy, strife and jealousy in heaven. We shall see that God has invested His glory in serving the happiness of His lower creatures. Therein is the role model of greatness. God's glory manifests itself in the creatures' well-being and our happiness is achieved only when we seek to glorify God. Then we shall enjoy Him forever! For what is the chief end of man? The first lesson in the catechism - "To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. You see how the ones who put those confessions together get that connection. We can never enjoy God when we are not glorifying Him. The more we seek to advance His glory, the more joy, happiness and inner peace it gives us, so that when we die or meet Christ in the air, at that very moment, we will "get it" for we shall see the One who created all things became a human and died like a criminal.

Why do we have all these envies, strife and divisions down here on earth, even among God's people? Even in churches. Wouldn't you think that of all places, people would get along in churches? Why is that not the case? Remember that the disciples that set under Jesus for

three years didn't get it. So it is not the problem of the teacher. I ask again, why do we have all these envies, strife and divisions down here on earth even among God's people? Because we do not yet "get it." Even in regenerate hearts, there is the desire to build our little kingdoms here on earth. Jesus taught this concept throughout His earthly ministry to His selected disciples, and yet they did not get it. In fact, they were still arguing over it at the Last Supper. Those men are no longer arguing about that now. The beatific vision of Christ has now perfected their happiness, and now they are holy.

In Revelation 5:5, 6, we have a scene in heaven, **"One of the elders said unto me, 'Do not weep, Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.'" This is a vision of Christ on the throne back in verse one of Rev. 5. "He has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.' And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb** (but John has just been told to behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, so John turns and looks and expects to see a Lion, but instead he is amazed because he sees a Lamb, and what has happened to that Lamb?) **as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth."** Notice there are two animals in this vision that represent our Lord Jesus Christ. The two animals are at each end of the spectrum of God's created order. The lion is the King (Lord) of the beasts, the one who dominates, the one who conquers. The lamb is the "servant" of the beasts, the one who is always giving away its life, the sacrificial beast.

The elders said, "Look, look at the lion," and John turns expecting to see a lion. Instead, to his amazement, he sees not a lion, but a lamb, and the lamb has had its life taken from it. What is being conveyed to us in these figures? It is teaching us that greatness comes not by dominating over others and that the way to conquer is through meekness and lowliness. He that would save his life, must lose it. Do you see what the vision is about? The way to happiness and fulfillment in life is not by dominating over others, it is by giving one's life away in a sacrificial sense to others. This is how our Lord conquers us as sinners and sets up His kingdom of grace in our inner man. This is how we shall be enabled to enjoy our God in heaven for we shall see Him as He is; the Lamb, the Servant, the One who said, **"Come unto me, for I am meek and lowly."** There is where greatness lies! Do we get it? Do you understand it? The disciples now have it, and they are no more fussing over who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom. Their sinful selfishness has been eradicated by the beatific vision of their heavenly "Foot washer." Now they are lining up to see who can be the greatest foot-washer (servant) in heaven. They are seeking to model their glorious Lord.

This vision, occurring at the instant of our departure from this life to be with the Lord, is the completion of that which was begun in regeneration. It is the Holy Spirit's final act of sanctification. What was it that caused you to come to Christ? You saw a beauty in Him that you had never seen before. That beauty is what is now drawing you on to this final destiny that will result in you being perfectly conformed to the moral likeness of Jesus Christ. **"Then we shall see Him as He is."** That is what is drawing you on. That is why you are not going back. You see a beauty that you can't let go of - I must obtain that. So

what is begun in regeneration is perfected in sanctification at the vision of Jesus Christ when the soul is ushered into His presence. This vision of Christ to the soul of man is that which ushers in sinless perfection. I repeat that, "This vision of Christ to the soul of man is that which ushers in sinless perfection." It occurs at the death of the body for some or at the changing into a glorious body for others at His coming.

But while it occurs at the death of the body, it is not the death of the body that sanctifies and produces sinless perfection. Most people think that is what does it. Death is not sanctifying. Suffering in and of itself is not sanctifying. It is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies, and He completes His work at the time when this mortal life ceases. You may say, "I have always thought that when you died and got rid of this old sinful body, you would be sinless." Ah, but sin is not a physical substance residing in our physical bodies. That was the Grecian error of thinking that sin only resided in the physical component: you get rid of the body, then you would have a perfect soul. But this is unbiblical. Are the wicked made sinlessly perfect when they die? No, death does not change them. The angels do not have physical bodies, and those who fell are still sinning today. Sin is not a substance; it is a moral principle. Holiness is a moral principle. It is the vision of Christ that sanctifies the soul, not the death of the body that occurs at the time of our completed sanctification.

Now what can we learn from this? We can learn why we feel there is something missing in our lives. Everywhere we go people are restless and searching for something that is missing. The ungodly seek to find this missing ingredient by adding some new pleasure or possession to their lives. I'm appalled at seeing some of these scenes on television when these stores open at Christmas. They have all these sales and these people like a mad mob rush in to get what? Some little old tinker toy that will be broke in a week's time and they are seeking 20% or 30% off. That is what the people in hell are experiencing. They still possess all of this lust for the things they have in this life, but they are not given one little tinker toy to satisfy it. Not one drop of water shall those in hell have. But the lust is like hundreds and hundreds of people trying to get into Walmart when the door opens. That is hell. That is misery to be cut off from God, cut off from the creation. Even the godly seek it by learning some new doctrine or by experiencing some new experience. Even we realize there is something missing that we want more. We say, "I will learn a new doctrine, I will go over here to this church and seek some new experience, and maybe that will fill this emptiness that is within. Do you know why we feel there is something missing? We feel that way because there is something missing. It is perfect blessedness and perfect happiness, and that will not come until we see Jesus. This present life is not a place for perfect peace and rest. There remains yet a rest for the people of God. We are now in the church militant. When we see Jesus, we will be in the church triumphant. Press on, don't lose sight of that glory. The more you desire it, the more you will find peace and happiness in this life and then ultimately fulfillment in the life to come. I close with this concept. God has ordained that the creature must have all of its sin eradicated before it can enter into glory. The creature must be emptied of itself before it can be completely filled with Jesus and the spirit of humility. That hasn't yet happened. It has begun. He has begun a good work in us, and bless God He is going to complete it.