

God's Purpose for His People

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In this issue of *The Unity of the Spirit* we begin a new calendar year of 2001 and finish the sixth full year of publishing our newsletter. Since many of our readers are fairly new to our publication I have thought it a good idea to repeat past articles from time to time that are of especially abiding significance. That practice will continue with this issue as we delve into the subject of the Christian hope of the glory and immortality which will be received at Christ's second coming.

Perhaps the most significant biblical truths for Christian believers today regard our present status as God's children and our future hope of glory and immortality to come at Christ's return. These truths are the culmination of the biblical story of salvation. They set forth the framework in which both the Bible as a whole, as well as our daily lives as God's children are to be understood. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy sets forth a summary of these liberating truths of the victory over death – that is, the hope of immortality – which God purposed in Christ before the creation of the world for his children; and then, accomplished in history through Christ's death and resurrection:

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (II Tim. 1:8-10).

Let us focus on three key elements of this good news of God's purpose as revealed in the gospel message:

First, God's **purpose** for his people which was determined by God, in Christ, before the creation of

the world: This is a continual theme of scripture; it was foreshadowed in the Old Testament scriptures, accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection, and, finally, put into effect in the new covenant era through the gift of God's Spirit. Though its final fulfillment is still to come, the process of glorification has already begun in God's people through the indwelling of God's Spirit. Romans chapter 8 summarizes this purpose in its simplicity:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Rom. 8:28-30; cf. Eph. 1:3-14).

God's purpose and grace – given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time - is to bring about a family of children who are conformed to the glorious image, or likeness, of his Son. The whole Bible moves towards the final fulfillment of this purpose. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians shows this:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenlies with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Eph. 1:3-10).

Second, based on this purpose, the actual sending of God's Son for the **accomplishment** of God's plan of salvation after the period of Old Testament preparation had been fulfilled: These truths are set forth clearly in Paul's Letter to the Galatians:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman born under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, the Spirit who calls out "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (Gal. 4:4-7).

Finally, as God's children we are heirs. We have the hope of the **final fulfillment** of God's plan of salvation with the glory to come at Christ's second coming. Paul's Letter to the Romans sets this forth in beautiful detail:

The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not have we wait for it patiently (Rom. 8:16-25).

As God's children we already have the firstfruits of God's Spirit; therefore, the process of glorification has begun (II Cor. 3:18). Yet we still "groan" in our mortal bodies as we wait "in hope" for the "redemption of our bodies" and "the glorious freedom of the children of God" which we will receive at Christ's return. It is only then that we will be "clothed with immortality" (I Cor. 15:53) so that "what is mortal is swallowed up by life" (II Cor. 5:4). Then, and only then, will we be "with Christ, in glory" (Col. 3:4) and gloriously "conformed to the image of God's Son" (Rom. 8:29). The apostle John sums up this great biblical hope:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

*Dear friends, now we are the children of God, and what we shall be has not yet been made known. But we know that **when he appears, we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is (I John 3:1-2)*