

The Purpose of Creation

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One of the most important themes running throughout the Bible is that God created the world with a purpose in mind. This purpose – accomplished in and through God’s Son - is to bring about a family of children who will share in the glory of God’s goodness forever. Though only progressively revealed during Old Testament times, this purpose is revealed in much greater detail in the pages of the New Testament. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians sets it forth in all of its beauty:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him [Christ] 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).

There are several interesting points that can be seen in this section of Scripture. First, it is clear that there is both a spiritual realm and a

physical realm in God’s creation. Second, God’s purpose in creation encompasses both of these realms. Third, the fact that there would be a *need* for the redemption of God’s creation – due to sin - was foreknown before God’s creation. And fourth, God’s plan to accomplish his purpose would be carried out in and through the redemptive work of his Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

These truths bring to mind one of the most difficult questions in the history of mankind. It is often called “the problem of evil” and can be posed in the form of a question: Why would a loving and all-powerful God allow evil and suffering to exist in a world that he created? Though this question has often been used by unbelievers as a “proof” against the existence of God, the writers of the Bible simply assume a created order that is set forth in basic form in the first chapters of the Old Testament - with a spiritual and physical realm ruled over by God - and then explained in much fuller detail throughout the Bible, especially in the New Testament. However, nowhere does any biblical writer ever even hint that man understands the full answer to the so-called problem of evil. Instead, throughout the Bible God’s ways are considered higher than our ways and his thoughts, higher than our thoughts. No one was God’s counselor at creation nor does God need to fully reveal his plan to his creatures. As Job stated, after going through the trials of faith that he endured,

“I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” (Job 42:1-3).

When Job, a righteous and godly man, first began to endure his almost unbearable sufferings he tried to reason things out in his own mind based on the limited perspective and understanding he had of God and of God’s

justice in the world. Despite the wisdom of much of the reasoning that took place, both Job and his friends were unaware of what was taking place in the spiritual realm; that is, Satan's accusation of Job, along with God's allowance of the testing of Job's faith. The perspective of Job and his friends was limited. Thus, when God does finally answer Job the outcome is not at all what any of the characters in the plot expected. Job was vindicated as being a righteous man, thus contradicting his friends. But, he was wrong about his *understanding* of God and God's ways.

Certainly for the Christian believer, as with Job, any attempt to understand the biblical truth about the problem of evil must begin with humility. We must first recognize that God, the Creator, is our Father and that we, his creatures, are his children. While our perspective about any topic in life is limited, God's perspective is unlimited or eternal. This implies that though we may understand truth to some degree, we as creatures will never understand it to the same degree as the God who created us.

Indeed, throughout the Bible there is a consistent and powerful presentation of the reality of evil and suffering in this world. In fact, the Bible, from among all the great literatures of the world, sets forth the most realistic understanding of the sinfulness of man, the spiritual forces of evil with which we

struggle, and the decaying and corrupted natural world in which we live. As Christian believers we should live in the full realization of this state of affairs, but we should also "walk by faith and not by sight" as we look forward to the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan. Paul's Letter to the Romans sums up this Christian point of view:

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