

The All Encompassing Plan Of God

~ Ephesians 3:1-21

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When we want to undertake a project, like beautifying our backyard or even build a garage, we don't just start working. We sit down and make a plan. Especially when it comes to building something. Maybe your summer involves something like that. You have the plans all figured out. Now it is time to start. Well when it comes to God, He has a plan. It is an eternal plan and Paul talks about this plan in Ephesians 3.

As we already know, Paul was in a Roman prison as he wrote to the Ephesians - a church which he had started. In this chapter he shares and explains some of the great revelations God had given him and of which the Ephesians and we today are beneficiaries of.

Based on our text we want to talk about "THE ALL ENCOMPASSING PLAN OF GOD."

What does it involve?

I- THE PLAN OF GOD INVOLVES THE SALVATION OF THE GENTILE (vs 1-6)

After a brief word about himself, where he calls himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ on behalf of the Gentiles - that is non Jews. (Note even though he was in a Roman prison, he calls himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ not of Rome.) He speaks of a mystery which has been made known to him. He is talking about a truth that was hidden by God in times past and was now revealed to him, namely that Gentile believers are now united to Jewish believers as equals before God. We might say that is a given. The reason Paul speaks about this is that the orthodox Jews in Paul's day considered the Gentiles dogs. Some of the Christian Jews did not have a much better attitude toward Christians who were not Jewish.

Can that happen today?

Well, yes, there are places where certain people are not welcome because of their ethnicity. Paul reminds the Ephesians that Jews, Greeks, Romans and anyone in between are one in Christ by accepting Christ as their saviour. We are fellow heirs. Praise God!

As we are gathered here this morning, we come - or our parents, or grandparents came - from all over the world, but we are united in Christ. We belong to what the Bible calls the same body. This is the mystery Paul talks about here. This was not a mystery any longer. Salvation through Jesus Christ is for all people, no matter where they come from or who they are.

That being the case . . .

II- GOD'S PLAN INVOLVES THE PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S GRACE TO EVERYONE (vs 7-13)

How is this to happen?

1. Through the apostles in the power of God (vs 7-8)

Paul, an apostle, tells us that he was made a minister of this gospel of grace to the Gentiles, though he describes himself as the very least of all saints. It is not his doing. It is the doing of the power of God. He just was an obedient servant, carrying out what God had called him to.

That continues to be our calling as well.

2. It is the calling of the church to preach and teach the Gospel to all in the manifold wisdom of God (v 10)

Paul makes specific mention of the church. It did not end with the apostles. It continues with the church. This was not known up to that point, but it became very clear that God intended this all along. To this

point and still is - Satan's plan is to eliminate Israel - God's chosen people. They have been persecuted and maligned through the ages. God's plan involves people of all nations and people groups. That being the case, Christians likewise are being targeted for persecution in many parts of the world. It is not in the open here, but we see it in what is happening in schools, in places of work, where what we call the Judeo-Christian principles are under attack. Are we to despair? No. We are in God's protection plan through His power and wisdom, you see.

3. The church's mission is made possible through God's eternal purpose in Jesus Christ by faith (vs 11, 12)

God's purpose is eternal. Oh, we long for things to change. For people to accept what God offers, that yes His Word. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the only way to salvation. We must admit that sometimes we get a little tired, but we are comforted that God is ultimately in control and He will have the last word. In the meantime we are called to do what Paul did and that is the third point . . .

III- GOD'S PLAN IS ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY (vs 14-16)

Here we are, we sometimes think "how are we to accomplish all of this?" Well, we can't, but God can. I recently said to someone "I have no words, but I can pray." We have access to the riches of His glory. That's what Paul is praying for.

1. We have access to the riches of God's glory through prayer (vs 14, 15)

Prayer is the key to access God's riches and power. It is to be a sincere prayer, trusting God by faith. Yes, prayer is the key to lay hold of God's riches. It enables us to live the true Christian life and enables as to overcome our worries and challenges of life in our own lives, in our relationships, at work and yes, in ministry as a church. It is the key to living a victorious Christian life along with regular Bible reading.

It also joins us together with other believers when we pray together. You have seen the plaque “A family that prays together stays together.” The same applies to a church. “A church that prays together stays together.” Nothing is accomplished without prayer. God wants us to depend on Him. He never expects us to do anything in our own strength.

2. We have access to the riches of God’s glory through the Holy Spirit (v.:16)

This is the central point of Paul’s prayer as he prays for the Ephesians. Verse 16 ***“that God would strengthen them through His Spirit in their inner being.”*** The power of the Holy Spirit is the enablement for Christian living and ministry. In Acts 1:18 Jesus said ***“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”***

That is our only resource. Now the power of the Spirit is given to us according to the riches of His glory. God does not give “out of His riches” but “according to His riches” which is a far greater thing. If a billionaire gives you 100 Dollars, he has given you out of his riches. If he gives you a million, he has given you according to his riches. That’s what God does. He gives you according to His riches. Yes, God wants to empower us, by filling us with His Spirit in our inner being. That’s Paul’s prayer. What does that mean? Warren Wiersbe puts it this way. “It means that our spiritual faculties are controlled by God and we are exercising them and growing in His Word. Hebrews 5:12-14. It is only when we yield to the Spirit and let Him control the inner man that we succeed in living to the glory of God.” With that comes the power of God. But we really need to give full control of our life to Him. Not only for an hour Sunday morning, but throughout the week, in our decision making, by the way we live and set our priorities. This will involve determining what comes first - screen time or God’s Word in the morning. In short, what needs to happen is our knowledge of the Holy Spirit needs to move from Head to Heart - meaning the Holy Spirit needs to be the centre of our life.

This leads us to our next point . . .

IV- GOD'S PLAN INVOLVES THE INDWELLING OF CHRIST'S LOVE IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER (vs 17-19)

When the Spirit indwells our inner being, it is Christ dwelling in us. Jesus and the Holy Spirit always work together, Paul prays ***“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith —that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”***

Paul speaks in this prayer about the massive, unchangeable fact “You (we) are thoroughly loved by God.

Verse 17, **We have been rooted in love** which pictures us a great tree whose roots have penetrated deep into the soil of God's love. To be rooted in something means we are drawing nourishment from it, our life, our food, our water, that which sustains and causes us to flourish. You see, when it comes to our Christian life, we need to be attached to the root of the love of God in Jesus which is the source of life. We are not by any means like tumble weeds tossed about by the winds of this world.

Then we are also **grounded in love**. This is like the foundation of a building. It has the meaning of pilings driven deep into the bedrock below. We are fixed to the unbreakable love of God. We are not dependent on the shifting sands of a foundation which does not hold. No, we rest upon a steady love that surrounds us, making us durable and consistent. This enables us to be givers (sharing the love of God) not just consumers. We don't say “give me, give me.” No, we give to the advancement of the Gospel by encouraging each other, helping each other and bringing others to Jesus.

The word for “love” used here is **agape**. The English word does not do justice. **Agape love** is selfless and sacrificial love. It is the way God loves the world. It is what Jesus demonstrated. Agape is always decision love. It is not conditional. We don't earn it.

Bible translators of past generations did not use the word “love” to capture the meaning of “agape.” Instead they used the word “charity.” We don’t use that word much today except to refer to those whose life and circumstances have been made what we might call “a charity case.” Or people might use it to say “I don’t need charity” when receiving what we did not earn and cannot pay back.

Yet when it comes to the love of God, we are all “charity cases.” Yet, God loves us unconditionally. It is a pure gift given to the undeserving and unlovable.

God’s love is beyond what we can humanly comprehend, so Paul prays that we ***“may have the strength to comprehend”*** or able to understand. It has the implication that we will learn and comprehend how vast and how great the love of God is. There is no such a thing as instant mature disciples of Christ.

I came across this story of the country farmer who ventured to the big city for the very first time in his life. He loaded up his car and he brought his wife and his son and they went to this big city. And all they could see were huge buildings and skyscrapers. It was just blowing their minds. He said to his wife, “You wait here in the car while me and the boy go inside, we’re going to buy one of those big city newspapers.” He parked as close as he could to this huge skyscraper and he and his son went walking in. I mean, their jaws dropped the whole time. After a few minutes they were mesmerized because they saw these two shiny, silver boxes which looked like pieces of a wall. They moved back and forth and they had never seen anything like it. So the boy said, “Dad, what is that?” And the father said, “Son, I have no idea what that is.” They had never seen an elevator. About that time an elderly man came walking up. He had his cane. He pushed the little button on the wall and the two shiny doors opened. Then it showed a little tiny room and he got in the little tiny room. Then the doors closed again and little lights flashed up above. Two minutes later the doors opened back up and a 24 year old, good looking young man came walking out. The farmer said, “Boy . . . go get your mom.”

Don't you wish it were that easy to change people's lives? You just put people in a shiny room and close the doors. A few minutes later they come out new, redeemed and transformed? Their old life is wiped away and a new life begins?

But we know, that is not how discipleship works. True lasting discipleship calls for the study of God's Word, extended times of meditation on God's Word and communion with God's Spirit through prayer. There are so many things we will learn along the way. The more we explore the Word of God, the richer our life will become.

Paul was in the process of learning as well, so he talks in his prayer about four dimensions.

1. **The length of God's love:** God's love is limitless, unwavering and steadfast. Human love has limits. God's doesn't.
2. **The depth of God's love** reaches into the darkest valley of our lives touching us with transformation power.
3. **The breadth or width of God's love** encompasses the entire world with all its pain, sin and struggles.
4. **The height of His love** - This reaches beyond the human sphere into the heavenly realms. It reaches beyond this life - literally into the eternal.

You see, God loves you so much, He wants to spend eternity with you.

Be assured, God wants us to experience Him in His fullness. That is why Jesus came into this world to bring God to us. He wants us to have daily fellowship with Him. That's the goal of His plan. The love of God which Paul talks about is what every human heart craves. Don't we all want to be swept away, to be loved in spite of ourselves, to be fully accepted, to be cherished, to matter to someone. Let me assure you, you matter to Jesus.

We want someone to watch over us, we want to experience true, selfless love, to be loved by someone who knows the truth about us, but still does not turn away from us. That is what the love of God is all about. Stay close to Him. He will always be there for you. That is "His all encompassing plan." It includes you and me. On our part we must accept, receive it. Make Jesus Saviour and Lord of your life. Yes, let Him change you. Let Him control your inner being and then share your experience with Jesus with others.