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Purpose Over Plan

Part 1: According to the Counsel of His Will

The story of Apostle Paul is one of the most uplifting and amazing accounts that we, as followers of Christ, have on hand. I personally cannot wait to meet him in Heaven and though I'm sure the line to speak with him is pretty long, I plan to wait in it. Treasured most of all, are his letters included in our Scriptures. It's truly impossible to rank them in order of importance because they are all equally excellent, giving us a treasure trove of theology and knowledge of how to live this life for Christ. The best we can do is rank them as personal favorites. The book of Romans is probably the best theological work known to man, but that doesn't keep some from loving, say, 1st or 2nd Thessalonians as the one that speaks most to them.

For me, I love the book of Ephesians. It is not an understatement to say that some of the verses in this letter literally changed my life, the way I view God, and the way I view myself. So, while Romans may be the greatest theological work we have (and I am very excited to preach through it for the rest of the year) I think the letter to the church in Ephesus has some of the most profound statements in all of Christendom, especially for the purpose of our conversation regarding God's will.

Paul begins the letter with a burst of praise saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ," (Ephesians 1:3 ESV) and as he proceeds he uses a few terms that I think are

important to bring out. First, Paul makes a distinction between God's purpose and God's will. Think of these terms as two sides of the same coin. They work hand in hand, but, nonetheless, they are two different sides and two different hands. Paul highlights this in verse 5, saying our adoption into God's family is according to the purpose of His *will* and, then again, in verse 9, He has made known the mystery of His *will*, according to His *purpose* (we will discuss this in detail in the next article). Finally, in verse 11 our predestination and inheritance is according to the *purpose* of God, which is worked out in accordance with the counsel of His *will*. So you see, purpose and will are distinct but go hand in hand.

The Greek words used here for purpose and will are fascinating. The Greek word for "purpose" is *eudokia* and it has the flavor of good will or good pleasure. I remember a sermon from a Pastor from England describing this word and saying, "because He jolly well wants to". That is the heart behind God's purpose for you and I, because He jolly well wants to. Why does God, the one who created and runs the entire universe give so much as an inkling to us? Let alone the fact that God has a purpose for you and I...because He jolly well wants to!

The word for will is *thelēma* and it means bent, resolve, design, sovereign pleasure.

Understanding the definition of these terms helps us to see that it is better to think of God's purpose for us, over the idea and question of God's will for us!

God's purpose for us, since before the foundation of the world, has always been for us to be "In Christ"; that is the foundation of the whole. God's will for every believer is to be "In Christ". Just as Jesus said in John 14:20, "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you," (ESV). How is that possible? If you are like me, you may need an analogy to help make sense of it all.

Think of a fish!

Stick with me here, I know that sounds odd. A fish needs the water to survive. Not only is the fish in/surrounded by the water but the water is also inside the fish, that is literally how it breathes. The water flows through its little lungs and gills, it is filled with water while also being immersed in the water. The same is actually true with us and oxygen. We are surrounded by oxygen, while also having our lungs filled with it and it flows through our blood feeding our various muscles and systems.

This is what is meant when Paul says we are “In Christ”. We are immersed in the presence of the Trinity. In Christ, God lives in our hearts through the Holy Spirit and we are surrounded by that same power and presence in the world. Now, that is not to say that we agree with the mystic hokum claiming that “everything is God”. Not even close. But as Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,” (ESV).

So we are “In Christ”, that is the foundation of God’s will for all peoples and especially for believers. Right off the bat, we see that from the beginning, “God’s Will” is not really something we need to or can figure out. Put simply, we are drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit and, in faith and repentance, we are then “In Christ”; that is God’s will for us. This is reinforced in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and 5:18,

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification...” (1 Thessalonians 4:3, ESV).

“give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,”
(1 Thessalonians 5:18, ESV).

Purpose over Plan!

So what is the nature of this purpose for being “In Christ”? Paul lists a few things in verses 4 & 5. He writes, “...He chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of His will,” (Ephesians 1:4&5, ESV). Outside of being “In Christ”,

we have no chance or hope of being holy or blameless. Our sin makes us wicked and guilty. So, then, God's purpose for us in Christ is that our sins may be washed away by the blood of Christ, so that we can stand before God holy and blameless. In His massive love for us, He adopts us as sons and daughters into His family. Keep in mind, all of this was worked out before the foundation of the world in conformity with His sovereign design and because He jolly well wants it that way!

So our purpose is to be holy and blameless and adopted into God's family as sons and daughters, is there anything else?

Well, I think we need to explore (and we will) the holy and blameless portion for a time, but yes, there is more to God's purpose for us. In the very next chapter, Paul says we were saved from our sins by grace for good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. See, this is where the "life blueprint plan" that most of us search for comes in to play. But, it is not an exact blueprint to be followed but instead, a purpose God has set forth in the way that He created each of us. Keep in mind too, that all of this is for His glory and the expansion of His kingdom, not our own.

Now, I realize that I am setting all of us up here! There are a number of facets to this whole idea of will and purpose that still need fleshed out, and, with a bit of patience, they certainly will be in future newsletters. For now, let us end with a review of everything above:

- God's *will* is His sovereign design and that goes hand in hand with His *purpose* because "He jolly well wants to"
- God's will for us as believers is to come to faith in Jesus and thus be "In Christ"
- In Christ, God has purposed us to be holy and blameless before Him
- In Christ, we are adopted as sons and daughters
- We are saved by grace for good works, which God prepared for us