

The Big Picture View Of Life by Mark Jarvinen

³*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.*

⁴*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he¹ predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to 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.*

¹¹*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (**Ephesians 1:3-14**).*

I'm sure you'll all agree that very little can be accomplished in life without a plan. You wouldn't go into **business**, for example, without formulating a plan. **Contractors** who follow their blueprints generally build nicer homes than those who don't. Military **battles** are won when troops move according to planned objectives. You hear football **quarterbacks** in their post-game interviews attributing their success to following the game plan. Flexibility and spontaneity have their place, but usually from within the big picture of a plan.

Look at the world of nature! The intricacies and complexities of life don't just happen. Those who hold to evolution as their view of life origins are asking us to believe that the world as we know it happened by random chance. A lot of very smart and sincere people happen to believe in evolution as an indisputable fact. Yet one must question where the pattern for that evolution came from? Living things are all genetically coded - we've all heard of DNA. My question is - who put the design in the DNA?

The Bible nowhere attempts to prove the existence of God - it merely assumes it. Therefore, in the Bible we discover that . . .

I. GOD OPERATES FROM A PLAN.

As Paul puts it in our text, God is working from a plan. Notice **v. 5** "**... in accordance with his pleasure and will**"; and again in **v.9** "**And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure,**" And again in **v. 11** "**... according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.**"

Paul is making the case here that nothing that has come to pass has happened by chance. Behind all creation there is a plan. Is that important? It is if you believe there is any meaning to life, any ultimate purpose or reason for being. Where people have no meaning or purpose in life, there is moral and spiritual chaos. **Proverbs 29:18** says, "***Where there is no revelation (word from God); the people cast off restraint;...***"

From time to time you'll hear in the news about someone who commits a

murder or goes on a killing spree with no real motive in mind except the misguided logic that since every one is going to die anyway, everything is therefore meaningless and nothing really matters. The Christian's view of reality runs just the opposite. **Since everyone is going to die nothing is meaningless and everything matters.** That is because the Christian views everything in this life as a prelude to the next. This life is not all there is. **C.S. Lewis** once said, *"If we live with heaven in view, earthly blessings get thrown in besides. But if we live only with this world in view, we get neither."* Knowing that God's plan includes eternity doesn't prompt us to escape this life; but rather, to make the most of it.

Why are we here? Or more specifically, **why am I here?** This is life's most fundamental question. Are we here just to look good? Back in the day, I remember a survey which reported that an amazing **25% of men** said they would consider trading five years of their life for a full head of hair. When you get to be my age, that trade doesn't make sense. But the same survey found that **48% of women** felt "**wholesale displeasure**" about their bodies. This figure was up from **23% in 1972**, and **38% in 1985**. This report is more than amusing - it's insane. **Is physical appearance what life is all about?** I hope not, because one day we're all returning to dust. There is more to life than mere superficial concerns. There is a plan to life and a Master Planner behind the plan. Secondly, Paul tells us ...

II. THE CENTER OF GOD'S PLAN IS HUMANITY.

Paul writes in v. 11 -

"In him (Christ) we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity

with the purpose of his will,"

In other words, God's plan is centered on human beings. Is that important? You bet it is – especially if you believe in the dignity of human life.

That said, we must understand that human beings are not without faults. Original sin has worked itself out in human experience since the Garden of Eden. **Romans 5:12** speaks to this saying -

"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, (Adam) and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned -"

Sometimes I marvel that God thinks humanity is worth saving. The world is a mess. But into this malaise of sin and self-centeredness comes the good news of God's revelation to us in **Ephesians 1:5** –

"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will -"

There you have it. God was not willing to leave us in our sins. It gave God great pleasure to bring us into His family through the saving work of his Son Jesus Christ. Christ's saving work on our behalf is a demonstration of the Father's great love for humanity -

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

There are many forces tearing away at human dignity today. Darwin said we're merely part of the animal kingdom - yet **Hebrews 2:7** says that we are made ***"a little lower than the angels; and crowned with glory and honor."*** Yet the misguided quest for human dignity continues. The ***"sexual revolution"*** sold to us in the 60's in the guise of ***"freedom of expression"***

has only served to intensify sexual exploitation in our culture on many levels over the past half-century. How about the rise of **terrorist cells and hate groups** in our world that espouse anarchy and violence as their goal? Even the **life issues** of our day touch the issue of human dignity. How much dignity does an un-born child, or an elderly person possess in today's world?

What case, therefore, can be made for the worth of an individual human being? **Only this, that according to God's Word, we are at the center of God's plan for creation.** God created the earth in six days - saving His best for last. The sixth day records the creation of mankind. Within 9 verses from Adam & Eve's Fall into sin, we read the *first gospel promise* in **Genesis 3:15**, in which the Lord says to the serpent (Satan) ***“He (the Messiah) will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*** This meant that even though the human race would be bruised by Satan, people would be redeemed by a Messiah who would ultimately crush Satan's head. We are at the center of God's plan. When we forget that humanity is at the center of God's plan, life becomes meaningless and burdensome.

Interestingly, the Greek word for humanity is "**anthropos.**" The etymology of this word suggests the meaning - ***“the being with the upturned face.”*** Henry Alford Porter comments on this by saying:

"Man is made so that he cannot be content with forever looking down. He may look down a long time, so long that he almost forgets there's anything above, forgets that he was made for God - until something happens, some crisis comes. And then he remembers and looks up."

Indeed, looking up is our only hope - to look to God and be reminded of who

we are and why we are here. Behind this world is a plan and a Planner. At the center of the plan is humankind.

That leads us to one final point ...

III. THE AGENT OF FULFILLMENT IN GOD'S PLAN IS JESUS CHRIST.

As I go through vv. 3 - 14 of **Ephesians 1**, I find **nine** references to "***in Christ,***" or "***in him.***" Christ is God's agent in fulfilling His plan for humanity.

Time won't allow us to consider all nine of the "**in Christ**" references in detail, but allow me to focus on v. 7 as a key statement of what we have in Christ. It says:

"In him (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace"

A) In Christ we have redemption – This is why God became man in the first place – to accomplish our redemption. The word "**redeem**" comes from the realm of the slave market, common in the culture of the Apostle Paul, and meant "**to purchase or buy back by paying a ransom,**" as for instance one could do for a relative who was made a slave because of their inability to pay a debt to a creditor. In its Christian use, redemption meant that Jesus Christ, through his sacrificial death on the cross, purchased freedom for believers **1)** from the **slavery of sin**, (which is the innate predisposition and controlling tendency of all humans to break God's Law), **2)** from the **penalty of sin** (which is death, or eternal separation from God) and **3)** from the **power of sin**, (which includes succumbing to the tempting and accusing voice of Satan, God's spiritual adversary). Slaves in the market place were purchased with money, but in this Biblical sense, the price of redemption was not money, but

Christ's precious blood, shed during his execution on the cross. Therefore, it is true that God's righteous anger concerning human sin was satisfied at the cross when Christ's life was accepted by Him as payment in full, thus setting humanity free. What sacrifice! What love!

B) This freedom through redemption is spoken of further in **v. 7** as **"the forgiveness of sins."** Paul didn't often refer to salvation in terms of the forgiveness of sins since he thought of **"sin"** more in terms of a **"power or tyrant"** that needed dethroning rather than certain erroneous human behaviors. Here, Paul is thinking of **"the forgiveness of sins"** more in terms of *"release from sin's tyrannical power and the indictment that this despot brings against us."* (**Snodgrass, NIV Application Commentary, p. 52**). Because of grace, Christians no longer live in sins or under their indictment of guilt. Instead they live in Christ, who sets us free from sin's slavery, penalty, and power.

C) All of what we've just spoken is **"in accordance with the riches of God's grace."** This freedom through redemption and forgiveness was made possible by Christ's work on the cross and is freely given to us out of His unmerited favor and love. Truly God's grace is a treasure - **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**. The Law says, **"Do better," "Try harder," "Perform at a higher level!"** but it provides no power to help us do so. **The Law can crush us, but it cannot cure us.** It can indict us, but it cannot pardon. It can kill us, but it cannot make us alive. Only God's grace in Christ can overcome sin in our lives. **Dr. Rod Rosenblatt**, a former Professor of Theology at Concordia University in Irvine, CA, tells a true story of how he wrecked his car when he was sixteen years old during a night of drinking and carousing with his friends.

Granted, it was 1958, a time when DWI laws were less strictly enforced, and Rod called his Dad that night to confess that he had been drinking and had had an accident. His Dad's first question was **"Are you all right?"** Rod assured him he was fine. No pushover in the discipline department, Rod was terrified about how his father might respond. Later that night, after he made it home, Rod broke down in his father's study, weeping in remorse over what he had done. He was embarrassed, ashamed, and guilty. At the end of the ordeal his father simply made one comment, saying: **"How about tomorrow we go and get you a new car?"**

Rod Rosenblatt now says when telling this story (he is currently 76 years old) – that **he became a Christian in that moment.** What he means of course is that God's grace of forgiveness became real to him that night as his Dad extended forgiveness and mercy to him. Rosenblatt says that every time he tells this story, some people get upset, sometimes even angry that his Dad didn't use this incident to teach him moral responsibility. Rod simply responds by saying **"My Dad's grace didn't turn me into a drunk – it made me love him all the more and the Lord he served."** He adds,

"Do you think I didn't know what I had done? Do you think it wasn't the most painful moment of my life up to that point? I was ashamed; I was scared. But my father spoke grace to me in a moment when I knew I deserved wrath ... and I came alive." (Podcast by Rod Rosenblatt, PhD).

That one act of grace is what God used to transform an undeserving 16 year old, and it is precisely what God's grace in Christ does for all sinners in His big picture view of life. In other words, God chooses to freely save us from our sins, on the merits of Christ's death and resurrection! Since Jesus died in

our place, God the Father graciously gifts us with a righteousness that isn't based on our own goodness. **It's His own righteousness, based on the merits of Jesus Christ that He freely bestows upon all who believe. With the righteousness of God in Christ, we receive the greatest gift of all – God's gift of eternal life. A-men.**