

3,25,21 The Purpose of the New Creation, Part 2

I want to start our study with an intro I heard recently to a message I was listening to. I'm paraphrasing:

"We have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world and are accepted in the Beloved. Nothing can change that. Our destiny and our acceptance are sealed. So, as we look at *that which follows* salvation, we see the declaration of our journey between our redemption and our ascendancy to the throne. The Lord knows what the qualifications are and the grace we will need to attain this."

That's a good overview of what we have been trying to understand as long as we have been together in these studies. The journey from salvation to the throne. We search the scriptures to understand and we pray that the Lord will open our hearts to see what we need to see.

The goal is to become increasingly clear on what this life is about, and also to have the courage and commitment to move into it.

There is a passage I'll share that shows us, by example, Paul's commitment to what the Lord has brought us into.

(Col. 1:25-29) "I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor to the point of exhaustion, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."

In Phil. 3:17 Paul wrote, "Brothers and sisters, follow my example and . . . live by the pattern we gave you."

This idea of ministering to the Body of Christ in order to play our role in ‘presenting every man perfect (mature) in Christ Jesus’ wasn’t just meant for apostles and pastors.

We can see in the passage we just read in Phil. 3 and this one in Eph. 4:16, that this is call given to all who belong to the Lord.

“From Him the whole body, joined and knitted firmly together by what every joint supplies (when each part is working properly), causes the body to grow and mature, building itself up in love.”

And if we’re going to follow Paul’s example, to do our part will often involve “laboring to the point of exhaustion.”

The fruit of labor like that is to eventually hear, “Well done thou good and faithful servant”, coupled with eternal access to the Throne of Christ.

Whatever we do in time, and whatever it costs us, we will consider insignificant compared to the glory that follows.

So, let’s look first at what the Lord is doing to equip us for this kind of commitment to Him, then we’ll look at what this looks like in fellowships of believers living this way.

What I’m going to read now from Sparks is extended, so bear with me:

“The remnant represents for the Lord a link in His full purpose through the ages. When the general instrument bearing His name does not do His purpose, He seeks a vessel which will go right through, He seeks a people and they form for Him His link with His fullest intention and they are as precious to Him as His purpose itself. The instrument of His purpose is as valuable to Him as His purpose, because He has bound Himself to fulfil His purpose by that instrumentality.

This is something to dwell upon. God has chosen this people and He is never going to abandon them. But in order to reach His end, He must have an instrument. If we should be, by His grace, a part of this instrument for that eternal purpose and we are in real fellowship with God in the place He wants, then God's burden for His purpose is transferred to His instrument.

The second thing is that the remnant represents being sifted through suffering. The remnant has always experienced that. Wherever you find such a thought expressed in the Word, you will find that that company has gone through testing which has proved it worthy of keeping its place of unique value to the Lord.

The matter is as to whether we will pay the price. It is a matter of usefulness to the Lord, and effectiveness. This company, sifted through suffering, is brought into special relationship with the Lord's purpose, a relationship in a deeper and fuller intelligent understanding. To bring them into this relationship, He has to take them through the depths, but the afterward makes it well worthwhile. The Lord is seeking something of great value to Him.

Finally, you can trace right through the Word of God the Lord's desire that His people should know Him. On the one side are those who want and seek to know the Lord for themselves, those to whom the Lord can reveal His secrets, but on the other side are those who are just willing to get their direction from those who know the Lord, and not from the Lord Himself. We see this in the great contrast between Moses and the Children of Israel. The Lord could only show His acts and miracles unto the Children of Israel, but He could show His *ways* unto Moses. The Lord desires a people with inwardly implanted Divine knowledge.

You can draw that line very distinctly in the people of God. There are those who are undoubtedly Christians, but it is all objective with them; on the other hand, there are those who know the Lord in an inward way. They speak often together of the Lord and speak in a language which the majority do not understand. It is all about the Lord. It is a mark of the true remnant that they know the Lord in an inward way and are always occupied with Him.”

After the Lord sifted Peter, Peter knew Him in a way he had never known Him before.

Assuming we want to know the Lord like this, we will first have to very clear in our understanding of His purpose for the Church, we will have to commit to that purpose with no hesitation and no strings attached, and we will have to allow the Lord to equip us through sifting to serve Him in accomplishing what He desires.

Sparks closes what I read a minute ago, with these comments:

“What we have said is that the company of His own should be a sifted, tested and proved company, standing for Him on this earth for all that is truly of His mind, in an intelligent way by reason of their knowledge of the Lord, and maintain the testimony in power and fulness. I pray that the Lord may make of us - few, weak and insignificant as we may be - parts of such a vessel in the earth today, which stands in clear distinction from the general spiritual weakness and declension around us - through the power of His name!”

To be honest, for most of my Christian life I have been self-identified as a ‘big picture’ person. I *said* that I wanted my studies to be practical, street level, and not just ‘big picture’ studies. But then when I started to hear the practical implications of the big picture, I discovered that the only reason I’m a ‘big picture’ person, is because I didn’t want to do the things the big picture implied. At least that’s my experience. I love seeing new big things, but I’m a little resistant of seeing the personal implications of those things.

I still love studying the eternal purpose of God for His Son. It focuses me on things above, on destiny; and lifts me out of the distractions of this life.

But now I’ve also come to realize that if my life doesn’t, in some way, practically correspond with what I’m learning, then my life has no value for the Church or the world.

I’m not talking about being ‘busy in the Lord’s work’ (like Martha thought she was), I’m talking about knowing the Lord in the way that brings me into the center of His will for me personally.

Being in communication with Him, empowered by Him, and led by Him in all that I do.

Anything less than that just means that I have more studying and praying to do – which is why I spend a lot of time studying and praying, because “less than that” feels like the story of my life.

From God’s viewpoint, the Church is a corporate man that has Christ as its Head and Christians as the members of His body.

Whatever the will, character and nature of the Head is, that’s what the body is meant to reveal.

The Church exists by Christ and for Christ – “From Him, through Him and to Him are all things” (Rom. 11:36)

Our continued existence post-salvation has one purpose only, and that is that Christ be seen in us.

Somehow, we’ve got to keep this in mind, especially when self-interest surfaces and prevents us from acting on the interests of the Lord. Because only that which is related to His specific will in Christ has any value to God.

Here’s how a one pastor explains how the apostle John moved into this reality:

“There were no promises, only an unforgettable moment when Jesus fixed His eyes upon John. He never forgot those eyes looking deeply into him. Neither could he forget those words that kept resonating in his ears: Follow Me! Probably for quite some time he was already following Him and listening to His words as one more among the multitude. But that day, while he was mending his fishing nets on the beach next to his brother James, the Master unexpectedly stopped in His steps in front of him, spoke directly to his heart and changed his life forever. From that moment on, John lived to know Jesus. . . Eventually John understood. He Who was in the midst of them was more than a teacher or a prophet. This Jesus was far greater than all the great leaders of the past. What was being manifested in the midst of them was the same Divine life, preceding time and history, because they were truly gazing at the eternal Son of God.

“In each one of us the Lord's call takes a distinctive expression. The way He deals with each, takes us through unique paths of knowledge and experience, because He seeks to make us useful in the edification of His

house. He is making us workers that will have something specific and unique of Christ to contribute to the growth of all the Body.”

There is a uniqueness to each of us that can't be fully defined by ourselves or by others.

We can appreciate the contribution of other Christians to the building of the Church and to missions, but we only have a glimpse of what happened in them, just like most people have no real idea of what we're going through.

Not just in experiences or struggles, but in the hidden work of the Holy Spirit deep in our spirits and souls.

This work is not only unique in each of us, designed by the wisdom and love of God for our lives personally, it's also unrelenting. There is too much compassion and desire on the part of our Lord for our growth, to ever stop doing all He can, without violating our free will - our responses to Him.

And often that inward work expresses itself in ways we would not necessarily desire to see.

Here's another author's comments on this:

“Not everything was glorious during those early years. There were also failures, stress, friction, arguments, fights, and all those things that human nature is capable of when exposed. And it has to be like that. Time and again they were put to the test, only to discover how incapable, weak and prone to failure each of them was. As it has been said before, their most hidden motives and desires were exposed to glaring light, in stark contrast to the evidence of the manifested Life that kept shining from the Lord. This is how they came to know how egotistical, self-centered, weak and sinful they really were. This is one of the immediate results of life in fellowship with the Lord. Sooner or later what we really are becomes manifested, no matter how much we try to hide it.

“Something similar happens to us in marriage. Before we get married, many of us believe we are very spiritual. Nevertheless, once we begin living with somebody else, difficulties soon begin. Our true character is exposed and brought to light. Suddenly, we do not seem to be so lovable, humble and

patient as before. To what end? Once exposed, everything artificial crumbles down into dust.”

Unfortunately, as I’m sure you’ve realized by now, there is no other way to learn both the lack of our sufficiency and desperate need for His.

This is a very familiar passage where the Lord is telling Zechariah that he is going to do amazing things, but then He adds:

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.” (Zech. 4:6)

We have to be gotten out of the way and I often wish there were another way to do this besides the application of the Cross to our lives, but there’s not.

So, don’t be discouraged by exposure – it just the Spirit making sure that you see you, so you will stop relying on you.

The biggest obstacle to the Lord fulfilling His purpose in us is not Satan or the World – it’s us. Our human nature, which is occupied with our own interests over His.

Its ego, pure and simple.

But since the Lord loves us, He uses *all* these painful experiences to nail our ego to the Cross.

We’ve seen this in Phil. 3:7-8. It takes time because we are all slow learners, but eventually, hopefully, we understand that to gain Christ empirically, we have to lose everything else first.

I’ll read that passage from the Amplified:

“I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege (the overwhelming precious, surpassing worth, and supreme advantage) of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord and of progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him [of perceiving and recognizing and understanding Him more fully and clearly]. For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all to be mere rubbish in order that I may (gain) Christ.”

Paul didn't realize that at first, none of us do, but when he *did* finally understand, you can see the superlatives he uses to express his gratitude for what the Lord took him through to make that understanding real to him.

He's doing that with us every day in a million ways with that same goal in mind – that we may gain Christ (not for salvation, that's settled), but for Life– for the expression of full spiritual life in us.

All of us know this, but when the Lord really bears down on us to move this along, our response is rarely gratitude.

Apparently, giving praise, thanksgiving and expressing 'superlatives' to God in the midst of this training we're going through takes the kind of understanding that Paul eventually got.

He saw the goal as being worth the process needed to reach that goal.

We're almost exclusively focused on, and obsessed with, the process.

Let's go back to what we began with, regarding the Church as a New Creation. There are still things related to the nature and function of this new humanity that we need to see beyond just a theological understanding of it.

I'm going to draw from Sparks again to help with this:

“On the road to Damascus Paul was conquered and then he became the prisoner of Jesus Christ, then he became so taken up with the Lord Jesus that nothing that all this world could give him would separate him from Jesus. He said, "For me to live is Christ. I have no other interest in being alive except Jesus Christ." You see, it is that that makes the Christian, and the people who have that mind are truly spiritual.

Philippians has come to be called "Paul's joy in Christ." And if you look at it you will see it was the most joyous letter that ever Paul wrote (which he wrote from prison). Paul was just overflowing with joy when he thought about these Philippians and wrote to them.

“Now, some people seem to think if you surrender to Jesus Christ and obey Him, it's going to be a very miserable sort of life: You'll have to give up this and you'll have to give up that. You'll have to give up everything if you're

going to be a growing Christian, and it's going to be, therefore, a very miserable experience. See what Paul gave up. Yes, he gave up everything, but was he miserable? When he wrote this letter, he was the happiest man on this earth. He had found that Christ was more than everything that this world could give.”

We have talked about the driving force behind the Lord in coming to save us; we have talked about the driving force of the early Church in serving Him.

In both cases, that motivation is love.

“God so loved the world . . .” and “We love Him because He first loved us”.

It may be that we don't realize How much He loves us, so our love for Him is weak. But even if that's the case, His love doesn't change or decrease.

Whatever spiritual weakness we have and wish we didn't have, and whatever personal problems we struggle with, can be resolved by a full and correct knowledge of God.

It's the “truth” that sets us free, not striving in the flesh to set ourselves free.

The same is true of spiritual life itself.

(John 17:3) Amplified again, “And this is eternal life: to know (to perceive, recognize, become acquainted with, and understand) You, the only true and living God, and to know Him, Jesus [as the] Christ (the Messiah), Whom You have sent.”

It really doesn't matter where you go in the Bible, whether it's the historical accounts of God's people or the exhortations given in scripture to study God's word – the goal and the outcome of what we see and learn is always the same.

The Holy Spirit uses the written word to reveal to us the living Word. But unless knowing the living Word is the goal, studying the written word will be a lifeless endeavor.

“You study the Scriptures because you think that by them you gain eternal life. These are the words that testify of Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life.” (John 5:39)

When I was a new believer, I poured over books by people like Lewis Sperry Chafer and all of what he and others wrote laid an invaluable foundation for me.

But these things can be done in a very intellectual way; a way that lacks a spiritual dimension. It's not knowledge that brings life; it's a relationship that's real and personal with Christ.

The reason there is so little love and obedience to the Lord in our generation is because there is almost no serious, in-depth study of God's word with Christ Himself as the goal of that study.

The enemy has stolen from us what he knows is the only way to have freedom or to experience real love for God.

Another writes input on this:

“Love is the very nature of God. When we live by His life, love is the fruit that is manifested and evident. The body of Christ is distinguished by possessing this predominant feature of His nature. . . The Lord liberates us from a self-centered life and its bonds (which is intrinsically a loveless life) to submerge us into something absolutely different: the life of Christ. To that end, He pours His love into our hearts through His Spirit.”

Expressing Christ, which is our purpose in being here, is not done by being motivated by guilt, regret or legalism; it's done by knowing the *truth* about God which deepens our faith in Him and to which He responds by conforming us to His image.

As that happens, what's coming through us to others is not Christianity, but Christ.

That's the eternal purpose of the New Creation – to provide an outward visible manifestation of the image of our invisible, indwelling Creator.

All we are going through is moving us toward that one goal; Christ in us the hope of glory.

When we've really decided and settled the issue of personal commitment to the Lord, we discover that the Lord comes in with full support. He will honor a heart like that and see that person through no matter how weak they are in themselves.

He can't force or manipulate our will, but He can take a person who has genuinely given his will to the Lord and build the character, the image, of Christ into that person.

And then display him to the world and to principalities and powers who watch us to see what God is doing.

We may not be able to achieve this, it's only something the indwelling Spirit can do. But we *can* decide whether we will commit to it. As this author puts it;

"People with their minds, wills, hearts and bodies committed know what they're after. That man knows where he's going. There's nothing tentative about him. Nothing indefinite. These people or that person, they are not beating the air. Like Paul, "So fight I, not as one that beats the air." There is this registration of an impact of purpose. As the apostle Paul wrote, "This one thing I do... This *one* thing I do".

Now, dear friends, what is our single inclusive purpose in being? Have you got one? Have you become mastered by it? A single purpose in life. The purpose that you bring into your business, into your profession, into your home, into wherever you are. Whatever people may have to say about you, and they can level many criticisms at you and perhaps rightly so, and may on many points have some disparaging things to say, but they have to come back to this: 'That person, that person has a great love for God. They're bent upon the interests of the Lord and there's no doubt about it.' That's a characteristic of Christ with those around Him. He was never abstract, never indefinite, never passive. Meet Him anywhere, and you'll meet One who is definite and deliberate, who carries always with Him this, 'I am about My Father's business. Come with me. Go with me. Or if you will not, I will not wait. I'm going on.'

"So, do we have this deep sense of being mastered by a single purpose that runs through every aspect of our lives? The Lord has called His church to be like this. If He cannot get the whole, *He'll get parts of it like this.*"

I know that for most, if not all of us, our lives are marked more by a lack of commitment than by being fully surrendered to the Lord.

That's not exactly rare in the Bible either.

But as we can see with people like Jacob and Abraham (and many others), the *last* years of our lives are the determining factor in pleasing God, not the decades of failure or spiritual passivity that may have marked us when we were younger.

If we can close out our time here, leaning on our staff and worshipping God, we will have an abundant entrance into His kingdom.

Since we only have a year or so left, this might be a good time to make those decisions.

In Watchman Nee's book, *The Normal Christian Life*, he wrote this:

“God is waiting for a settlement of all our controversies with him. Our complete surrender of ourselves to the Lord generally hinges upon some one particular thing, and God waits for that one thing. He must have it, for He must have our all. I was greatly impressed by something a great national leader wrote in his autobiography: ‘I want nothing for myself; I want everything for my country.’ If a man can be willing that his country should have everything and he himself nothing, cannot we say to our God: ‘Lord, I want nothing for myself; I want all for You. I want what you want; I want to have nothing outside Your will.’ Not until we take the place of a servant can He take His place as Lord. He is not calling us to devote ourselves to His cause; He is asking us to yield and adjust ourselves unconditionally to His will.”

So, as we close tonight, I'm going to read an excerpt from an essay by George Cutting;

“The Divine purpose in creation and redemption was that God should have many children. He wanted us, and could not be satisfied without us. Do you know that we cannot do without Him? And do you know, He cannot do without us? In reading the story of the prodigal son most people are impressed with all the troubles the prodigal meets; they are occupied in thinking what a bad time he is having. But that is not the point of the parable. "My son ... was lost, and is found" -- there is the heart of the story. It is not a question of what the son suffers, but of what the Father loses. He is the sufferer. A sheep is lost: whose is the loss? The shepherd's.

A coin is lost: whose is the loss? The woman's. A son is lost: whose is the loss? The Father's."

In His deity, the Lord Jesus is absolutely self-sufficient and complete. But in His glorified humanity, He will remain incomplete until the Church, His body is fully formed. When that happens, Christ becomes all and in all, in corporate expression.

All creation then sees the glory of God's Son in the Church.

Paul makes it clear in Eph. 5 that the Church is 'bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh'. He was drawing from the typology of Adam and Eve. 'It's not good that Man should be alone' – and the Lord needs His bride by His side to finalize the Father's purpose for Him.

This is what the Triune God has been working toward from eternity past and on into eternity future – that the second Person of the Trinity would be corporate.

The mystery that was revealed to Paul, concerning the "one new Man" Paul speaks of in Eph. 2:15 and other places, is Christ as both Head and body. This is brought out also in 1 Cor. 12:12,

"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ."

Until the New Testament, this was a hidden mystery in the plan of God, unrevealed to man or angels.

Which is why even principalities and powers look with amazement at God's work in forming His Son in the Church.

Now we know what has been in the heart of the Father from all eternity – a creation, and the crown of that creation, a bride for His Son.

The Lord has completed our redemption and will soon finalize the glorifying of a race of humanity to be presented to Christ, without spot or wrinkle, as His eternal consort.

All that God is doing, and has ever done, is working toward the completion of this one goal.

We are the recipients of His labor of love for His Son.