

THE ETERNAL PLAN OF GOD

LESSON 3

Ephesians 1:3–14, Colossians 1:15–22

At the conclusion of the last lesson, we discovered that man can do nothing to reach God through his own efforts. No religion and no amount of being good can measure up to God's holiness. This leaves us in a predicament. If we cannot make ourselves right with God, how can we be right with God? This is where the Bible tells us Good News! Where man was hopeless, God has made a way. He has prepared and executed a plan to reverse the effects of Adam's sin and make man right with God again.

Prepare to think outside the box a little bit today, because God's plan is big. And by "the box" I mean the limits of space and time. God's plan encompasses everything, and it is far beyond our ability to comprehensively understand. If you have difficulty wrapping your head around this stuff, you're in good company. As you study these passages and answer these questions, focus in on the main ideas. This will set you up well.

READ EPHESIANS 1:3–14 _____

1. How many times does Paul use the words "plan" or "purpose" in these verses?
2. According to verse 4, God chose his people for what purpose, and when did he do the choosing?
3. What does Paul say some of God's motivations were in predestining us? Name at least three that appear in the text. (vv.4–6)

4. What advantages and blessings come to us because God has predestined us for adoption as sons? (vv. 7–9)

5. What is God’s plan ultimately leading to? (v. 10)

6. Some might complain that the doctrine of Predestination makes God seem cold and distant. What are some things that you see in this text to counter such an opinion?

Like an architect drawing out every single detail of a complicated building before construction begins, God has created a plan that encompasses everything that will ever happen throughout history. God’s plan is not cold, or merciless, or detached from relationships. Far from it! Ephesians 1 communicates that God’s plan is one that is established in love with the purpose of uniting all things—bringing unity for all things—in Christ Jesus his Son. It is for the glory of Jesus Christ that God has created the universe and forged this plan of salvation.

The Bible tells us that God alone is the author of destiny. He is the giver of all good things: talents, gifts, opportunities, and pleasures. God is also the one who allows evils and trials and sorrows to come across our path. How different this is from our modern way of thinking! We like to think that we are in control of our own lives and our own direction. We find a perverse comfort in thinking that the storms and tragedies of life are simply the way of nature. But when we imagine life this way, we bind ourselves into a pointless, destructive existence. The truth which the Bible speaks into our lives is this: “The heart of a man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps” (Prov. 16:9).

Christ came into the world in order to reconcile us to God through his death on the cross. It was no accident that Jesus died. Acts 2:42 says, “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” This means that Jesus faced life the same way we do, under the knowledge that God is in control over every detail. He knew he was going to die according to God’s plan, and he knew that it would be for the good of God’s people and for his own glory. Jesus’ death and resurrection is the climactic focus of world history in God’s plan.

1871, Spafford lost his property and all of his investments during the Great Chicago Fire. In 1873, there was an economic recession which forced his family to flee to England. While he remained in Chicago to settle the last of his business, Spafford's wife, Anna, and their four daughters traveled to England ahead of him. While crossing the Atlantic, their ship collided with another and sank quickly. All four of his daughters drowned in the ocean. Anna survived and sent Horatio a telegram that read, "Saved alone..."

When he took his trip across the Atlantic, Spafford asked the captain to wake him when they reached the location where his daughters drowned. When that moment came, he rose and looked out over the ocean. It was then that he was inspired to write the words, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, 'It is well, it is well with my soul.'"

We cannot know why God allows certain trials and tragedies to come our way, but the passages we have studied today make clear that everything is a part of God's grand plan. Nothing is outside of his control. Nothing is beyond his ability. And whatever happens, "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). It was this knowledge that moved Spafford to write his hymn, trusting God's goodness even when he was overwhelmed with pain.

IMPLICATIONS

Bring this discussion close to home by reflecting on and discussing at least one of the following questions.

- A. According to Ephesians 1:11, what types of things happen outside of God's plan? How can you use this knowledge as you experience problems and challenges in life?

- B. God's sending Jesus is his remedy to the problem created by man's fall. Do you think that this was an unplanned response—that God hadn't planned on the Fall happening? Why or why not?

- C. In both Ephesians and Colossians, Paul emphasizes God's purpose in predestining us for holiness before him. If this is God's intent in predestination, what role ought the pursuit of holiness and right living take in our lives?