

The Key to the Deliverance of a Church in Captivity

Why did Jesus die? The most common answer from the average Christian would be: So that our sins could be forgiven.

That sounds right. It even sounds biblical. But it falls so short of striking at the core of God's heart and purpose for mankind and for His glorious church.

This common response reveals just how far we've drifted from God's true purpose in saving us. And I will even go out on a limb and say that it is the very reason for a weak and anemic church, and her lack of power, character and endurance. You may be asking, "How is this so?"

Instead of going back to the cross to uncover God's original purpose for us, let's go further back to creation. Have you ever asked yourself what was in the mind of God when He created man? What was His original intent and purpose? You really cannot even understand the cross or the gospel until you understand that, because sin was not yet an issue. At creation, the fall of man was not yet a reality.

Some will say that God's purpose was to have a relationship and fellowship with man. Yes, that is definitely true, but how is that relationship defined? Let's dig a little deeper.

Here is a key Scripture that will shed more light in determining God's eternal purpose:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they are thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn

from the dead, so that in all things He may have the preeminence. (Col. 1:16-18).

We tend to interpret the cross through self, or a shallow “what’s-in-it-for-me” attitude, but God had something greater in mind than just forgiving us of our sins. He wants to have preeminence in all things. This means He wants to be your Lord. He wants ownership of you. Jesus died to establish His Lordship over your life and not just to forgive you of your sins. This means He wants ownership of your time, your talents and your treasury or money. But He wants you to surrender that to Him out of love and choice, and your own free will. We are not robots and God is not a dictator. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

In Christendom today, it is becoming rare to hear such basic truths. Instead, we hear of who we are, what we have, what God will do for us, etc. Although this can be a good beginning place in the faith, many never seem to graduate from it. The snare of it all is this: Teaching and instruction that focuses on us breeds selfishness. Selfishness is contrary to the gospel and the purpose for which Jesus died. (See The Real Gospel).

“And He died for all, that those who live should not from now on live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:15).

Are you living for yourself? Or as the late Leonard Ravenhill so succinctly stated: “Are the things you’re living for worth Christ dying for?”

Charles G. Finney said it much more strongly:

Nothing which is selfish is Christian. There is nothing faithful in any selfish act. A man may just as much commit sin in praying, reading the Bible or going to a service as in anything else, if his motive is selfish. Suppose a man prays

with a view to simply promote his own happiness. Is that God-fearing? It is no more than attempting to make God his Almighty Servant! It is nothing but an attempt to put the universe and God in a position to make the self happy. It is the greatest degree of wickedness. It is so far from piety and goodness that it is superlative wickedness.

Wow! That quote always arrests me and causes deep reflection and self-evaluation. The heart is indeed deceptive.

The enemy disguises himself. He offers you substitutes for the true life of God and obedience. He offered Jesus the kingdoms of this world (Luke 4:5), and He offers us the same through subtle substitutes of material comforts and a lifestyle of ease and convenience that produces a false peace. Sadly, when given the opportunity, most believers will choose a comfortable lifestyle and the things of this world above obedience to God; and pleasure-seeking over God-seeking, simply because they are still living for themselves. Do not be deceived by these things for they are not the hallmarks of true disciples.

True disciples long to obey God even in difficult times. If your motive is comfort and convenience, bigger and better possessions, a lifestyle of ease and always taking the path of least resistance, you will be forever deceived and faint in the day of adversity.

More than ever before, we need to be careful about our associations and who we listen to. Be careful of those voices who feed your hearts with false motivations. Many preachers are putting people at ease and even denying the Lordship of Jesus (2 Pet. 2:1, Jude 3-4). The tenor of a lot of \ the spiritual instruction we receive today is on how much God loves you and wants to bless you. Of course He does, because that is the nature of our good and loving heavenly Father, but a saturation of this kind of teaching tends to corrupt our

motives. It results in our approaching God only to get something from Him. It breeds arrogance as we determine our own course in life without consulting God or having regard for His perfect will for our lives (James 4:13-17).

There's a reason Jesus began His public ministry with teaching on the beatitudes and the motives of our hearts when we pray, give, and fast (Matt. 5-6). The character and motivation of our hearts is the most critical principle in the kingdom of heaven. It keeps us from being deceived and corrupted and it's the foundation of all of God's judgments.

One of the great tragedies of the modern Western gospel has been the accentuation of the blessings and benefits of salvation at the exclusion of other components of the cross. There is a very large movement that has swept through many churches today that majors on life-enhancement, self-help and self-esteem. This is contrary to the cross. Jesus did not just die to forgive you of your sins and purchase blessings for you, but He died to purchase you and then conform you to His own image. This is at the heart of the gospel.

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God, and that you are not your own? You were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

We've been purchased with holy blood. We are not our own! We've robbed God, not because we haven't given Him our tithes and offerings, but because we've not given Him our lives. This is at the core of the church's captivity and reason for all our failures in producing true converts and true disciples who live for God's glory, obey Christ's commands and carry out His Great Commission.

Jesus has little access to His body and the ownership of His people. We dump sin but remain selfish. We make decisions

outside of God's will and plan for our lives.

God is interested in restoring His character in His people,
and it begins with truly making Jesus Lord of our lives. {eo}