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PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSES

In the earlier messages, we have seen that the mystery God has made known to Paul reveals what has been in the heart of God before the foundation of the world, and has a direct bearing on the fulfilment of God's purposes. We have also noted some key features of the mystery and the fulfilment of God's purposes.

I will go on to consider with you, from a biblical perspective, the goal of God's purposes and how He seeks to bring it about.

In our consideration of this subject, it is relevant for us to bear in mind two issues:

1. Why did God create man?
2. What is our present context?

If we understand why God created man and what is our part in the fulfilment of God's purposes, we will be able to understand better how we are to cooperate with Him in His purposes. If we understand our present context, and how similar or different it is from that in the Garden of Eden, where God first placed Adam and Eve, then we will be in a better position to work out God's purposes in our own day.

There are various major issues emphasised in the Scriptures – for example, worship, prayer, fellowship, service, good attitudes and building God's kingdom. All these are important. But what is at the core centre of the fulfilment of God's purposes? If we can grasp the core centre, we will be helped to see how and where all the important issues fit in.

In this message, I will give a panoramic view (a brief outline) of this subject. In the messages that follow, I will go into the details, elaborating and substantiating from the Scriptures.

I will first put the core centre in a single statement before breaking it into several points and elaborating on them.

God has created us in His own image as moral and spiritual beings, with the potential to attain to the highest level of moral and spiritual stature, through the reception of God's life and positive response to God's provisions and the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives, resulting in increasing depth of oneness with God and quality of

fellowship with Him and with one another, and meaningful participation in the outworking of God's plans and purposes together with Him, during our time on earth and continuing into eternity.

1. God has created us in His own image as moral and spiritual beings ...

God has created us in His own image (Gen. 1:26-27). One key aspect of our being created in God's image is that God has created us as moral and spiritual beings. We are given the freedom to choose and our moral choices have meaning and eternal consequences.

Men as spiritual beings

John 4:24

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

"God is spirit", and we are to worship God in spirit and truth. We can worship God in spirit because God has created man with a spirit. Man's spirit and the spiritual dimension are major aspects of what it means to be created in the image of God as spiritual beings.

Men as moral beings

God is morally perfect. There are various aspects and manifestations of His moral perfection. A major thrust of the Scriptures are exhortations for man to nurture and manifest similar moral qualities – for example, the Scriptures exhorts us to be holy as God is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16). A key aspect of God's moral perfection is His attribute of love, and the Lord Jesus teaches us that at the heart of God's commandments is that we love God with all our hearts and our neighbour as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-40).

Love is at the very heart of moral meaning, and the capacity to love God and others is a vital aspect of what it means to be created in the image of God as moral beings.

2. ... with potential to attain to the highest level of moral and spiritual stature ...

I say "potential" because we are not created with the highest level of moral and spiritual stature. But we have the potential to attain to it. This potential is so great as to be beyond our comprehension.

The Scriptures describes it as "complete or mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28), or "to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The moral and spiritual stature of Christ – that is the potential and our goal. We are to encourage and help one another towards reaching that goal.

In Romans 8:29, Paul tells us it has been God's intention that we "become conformed to the image of His Son". The image of Christ again relates primarily to His moral and spiritual quality and stature, which we are to move towards.

God is a God of perfect moral and spiritual stature and beauty. He has created us in His own image, with the potential to rise up to the highest level of moral and spiritual stature and beauty, not just in specific acts or at specific moments, but in the qualities of our being, expressed consistently in our daily lives. It is indeed incredible that frail human beings can have such great potential for growth in moral and spiritual stature.

3. ... through the reception of God's life and positive response to God's provisions and the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives ...

It is not feasible for us to grow in moral and spiritual stature unless God makes provisions for us, and unless we receive God's life and the Holy Spirit has the freedom to work in our hearts.

The apostle John tells us that "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life" (1 John 5:11-12). This life is bound up with the Son of God Himself; it is the life of God. We who have repented and trusted in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour have received Him into our lives, and together with that, the life of God.

The apostle Paul tells us that one major aspect of the mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). To attain to God's plans and purposes for us – the hope of glory – we must have Christ in us.

The apostle Peter tells us that God "has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness" and "His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:3-4). So our growth in godliness and our being partakers of the divine nature are possible only because of God's provisions.

In Galatians 5:16, the apostle Paul tells us to "walk by the Spirit". In Ephesians 5:18, he also urges us to "be filled with the Spirit". "To be filled" is in the continuous present tense, which means it is to be a continuing experience – to be filled and be continually filled with the Spirit.

When we are filled with the Spirit and are walking by the Spirit, the Spirit of God will have the freedom to guide us, enable us and do a deep work in us. When that happens, the fruit of the Spirit will not be an occasional experience in our lives, but an abiding reality. The fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – these will become a part of our being. What is critical is that as the Holy Spirit works in our lives, we must respond

positively to Him. It's only then that we will move in the direction of God's intentions for us.

4. ... resulting in increasing depth of oneness with God and quality of fellowship with Him and with one another ...

Our attaining to moral and spiritual stature is an aspect of the goal in itself. But it is also related to another aspect of the goal – that of increasing in depth of oneness with God and quality of fellowship with Him and with one another.

1 John 1 helps us appreciate the goal of the ministry of the apostles and what ought to be our goal and ministry.

1 John 1:1-3

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—

2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

The apostle John says: "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you". Here, he is referring to all that he has come to experience, understand and appreciate concerning the Word of life – the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he goes on to say: "so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ".

"So that" tells us that this is the goal of his ministry. True fellowship must first begin with our fellowship with God. Only then can we have true fellowship with one another. If we do not have fellowship with God at the personal level, then we do not have the basis for fellowship with one another. Biblical fellowship is not just about fellowship with God alone. It is also about fellowship among the brethren and the basis and quality of that fellowship.

The apostle John goes on to say:

1 John 1:4

These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

The kind of life God intends for us in Christ includes "our joy ... made complete" – a life of true joy, one that truly satisfies. John continues in verse 5:

1 John 1:5

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

Here, John highlights to us one important attribute of the being of God – “God is Light”. “Light” has the moral and spiritual dimension that is positive. John adds: “And in Him there is no darkness at all”, highlighting the contrast of darkness of the evil one and his ways. Then in verses 6 and 7, the apostle tells us:

1 John 1:6-7

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;
7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

The basis for true fellowship with God is our walking in the light and not in the darkness. Some walk in darkness and yet claim that they appreciate God and have deep fellowship with God. This cannot be true. To the degree we walk in darkness, to that degree our fellowship with God will be hindered.

True fellowship is in the light – whether it is fellowship with God or fellowship with one another. As the quality of our lives deepens, and we are walking more and more in the light, our fellowship with God and with one another will deepen.

Fellowship with God cannot be just a profession of the lips or a question of doing many things “for God”. And fellowship with the brethren is not just a question of spending much time together or doing many things that we enjoy doing together. True fellowship is fellowship in the light, fellowship in the truth and fellowship in the Lord. And that is why throughout the Scriptures, we are exhorted to walk in the light, to nurture moral and spiritual qualities. This is important for our personal well-being and also for deep fellowship with God and with one another.

5. ... and meaningful participation in the working out of God's plans and purposes together with Him ...

God does not want to work out His plans and purposes all by Himself. He wants us to do it together with Him. But for us to have a meaningful part, the first four aspects are critical: We must be created in the image of God; we must have the potential to rise up to a high level of moral and spiritual stature; we must respond positively to God's provisions; we must grow in increasing depth of fellowship and oneness with God. It is when these are in place that we can participate meaningfully in God's plans and purposes.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:1:

2 Corinthians 6:1

And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—

In the preceding verses, Paul has been talking about God reconciling the world to Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ, and how we are to be ambassadors for Christ. It is with that in mind that Paul says: "And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain".

There are two aspects here. First, our working together with God. And this involves our working with God at the personal level and together as His people. Second, God gives us grace that we may work together with Him. It is possible for us to receive His grace in vain, and we must make sure it does not happen to us.

The Scriptures records a number of prayers of Paul for believers. One of these prayers is found in Colossians 1:9-10. In this prayer, Paul expresses his earnest longing for believers.

Colossians 1:9-10

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Paul's prayer is that believers may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. God's will can refer to what God has revealed in the Scriptures. It can also refer to what God reveals in the lively communication between God and man in everyday life. Both aspects are important in a healthy walk with God and in meaningful participation in the outworking of God's purposes.

Knowing God's will "in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" goes beyond having mental, intellectual knowledge. It requires a lively appreciation of what is in God's heart. It calls for spiritual insight. If we have a lively knowledge of God and His will, we will be more able to meaningfully participate in His plans and purposes. We will be more able "to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God".

God wants us to have a meaningful part in the working out of His plans and purposes, and He wants us to do it together with Him. This is feasible if we grow in moral and spiritual stature, in our relationship with Him, and in the knowledge of His will.

6. ... during our time on earth and continuing in eternity

We can participate in the outworking of God's plans and purposes during our time on earth, and beyond that, into eternity.

The Scriptures indicates to us that there is much more that awaits us in God's kingdom in eternity – much, much more in God's heart that He has yet to reveal to us.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:7 that in the ages to come, God is going to show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. The Scriptures talks about the present age in Galatians 1:4, that is, our time on earth. Here in Ephesians 2:7, it talks about "the ages to come", which is eternity.

All that God has shown us and provided for us during our time on earth is not all there is. Much more awaits us. When we enter eternity, it is feasible for us to experience more and more of "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus". All this is "in Christ Jesus". All that God seeks to bring about is in and through the Lord Jesus.

The degree and meaning of our participation with God in eternity depends very much on how we fare during our time on earth – how much we have grown in moral and spiritual stature, the quality of our oneness and fellowship with the Lord, and how faithful we are in all that God has entrusted to us.

Yes, we will face many difficulties and obstacles in our walk with God during our time on earth. But let us not be deterred or discouraged. These are very meaningful times for us, times in which we can learn and grow so that we can have a meaningful part in the outworking of God's purposes on earth and in eternity.

Parable of the stewardship of minas

The Lord Jesus told a parable about the stewardship of minas (Luke 19:11-27). There was a nobleman who went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself. He called ten of his slaves, gave them a mina each and said to them, "Do business with this until I come back." When he returned, he ordered these slaves to give an account of the business they had done with the minas.

Luke 19:16-19

16 "The first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.'

17 "And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.'

18 "The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.'

19 "And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'

Notice the difference. The first slave, in the way he went about his business, made ten minas with the mina given him. The master said to him, "You are to be in authority over ten cities." To the second slave, who made five minas, the master said, "You are to be over five cities."

Then the next slave came to the master, saying, "Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief." And the master rebuked this slave severely.

Luke 19:21-24

21 for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.'

22 "He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow?

23 'Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?'

24 "Then he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.'

Luke 19:26-27

26 "I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.

27 "But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence."

How well we have lived our lives while on earth, how much we have grown, and how faithful we have been to what the Lord has entrusted to us – all these will make a difference when we meet the Lord. They will make a difference to the meaning of our time in eternity and how we participate and work out God's purposes together with Him and with the brethren.

God's intention for man has been from the beginning

The core centre of the fulfilment of God's purposes that we have seen has been God's intention for man from the very beginning. This is indicated by the revelation that God has created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26-27) right at the beginning of His creation of man. And God's intention for us to move in that direction by the reception of His life can be seen in His provision of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9).

Although there is the Fall (Gen. 3), which has brought about significant changes, God's essential intentions for man has neither been aborted nor changed. He has

provided for our redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him, God's plans and intentions for man can and will be fulfilled.

We have seen this in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians when he talks about the mystery and God's purposes for us in Christ.

Ephesians 1:9

He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him

What God intends and purposes for us are "in Him". And, as Paul tells us in verse 4, God's intentions for us in Christ were already in His heart before the foundation of the world:

Ephesians 1:4

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

God's desire that we be holy and blameless has been in His heart from the very beginning. It is part of God's *eternal* purpose, which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:11).

Personal and corporate

In the earlier messages on the mystery and the fulfilment of God's purposes, we saw there are two dimensions to God's intentions for us in our oneness and relationship with Him:

- a. Our personal relationship, oneness and fellowship with God.
- b. Our corporate relationship, oneness and fellowship with God. The healthy expression of body-life of the church as intended by God and the relationship between Christ and the church, His body, the bride of Christ, are important features of the mystery and the fulfilment of God's purposes.

These two dimensions of our personal relationship with God and our corporate relationship with Him bear a symbiotic relationship. A deep personal relationship with God and personal growth in moral and spiritual stature in the lives of the brethren are extremely important for the health and strength of the corporate aspect and expression of church life. When church life is healthy and strong, and the body of believers enjoys an intimate relationship with God and His blessings, there is a conducive context for the brethren to grow in their personal relationship with God and in their moral and spiritual stature. When both dimensions are going on well, it paves the way for believers to live lives that are truly and fully satisfying, fulfilling,

effective and fruitful. In this way, God's purposes can be fulfilled in and through our lives and God's glory is manifested.

The significance of the moral and spiritual stature of man

God's intention is that man attains to the highest moral and spiritual stature. Moral and spiritual stature is not just the means to an end, but a major goal in itself. God being a God of perfect moral and spiritual stature, desires that we too attain to moral and spiritual stature.

The attainment of moral and spiritual stature is crucial for the meaning and well-being of man. It is also crucial for depth of oneness and fellowship with God and with one another, and for meaningful participation in the working out of God's plans and purposes.

Moral and spiritual perfection and beauty is an integral part of God's being. As such, fellowship with Him must also involve the moral and spiritual stature of man. This means that our sins have to be forgiven and our hearts cleansed. It also means that we have to grow in moral and spiritual stature.

Deep fellowship and partnership between God and man is an expression of a love relationship. God loves us and wants to relate with us, discuss with us and share things with us. He wants us to work together with Him with deep meaning and fellowship.

But this deep love relationship is possible only when there is holiness and righteousness and when we grow in moral and spiritual stature. The deeper our response and the more we grow, the richer will be our love relationship with God and our fellowship and partnership with Him.

Just as it is the basis for a deep relationship with God, moral and spiritual stature is also the basis for deep relationship among the brethren. Such fellowship and partnership among the brethren in the outworking of God's purposes together are likewise expressions of a love relationship.

Creation of man and what it means to God

It is not difficult for believers to appreciate God's kind intention towards us in His creation of man and what this means to man. But we should not view God's purpose in creation of man merely from the angle of its meaning to man, but also its meaning to God.

Some may say God is self-sufficient, perfect and complete in Himself. They say that God does not need to create man or other beings. So they find it difficult to understand why God wants to create anything.

If we say that God has created other beings with moral potential so that He can have meaningful relationship with them, some may reply that from the very beginning, there has been perfect love relationship within the being of the triune God – between the Father and Son and Holy Spirit. So God does not have to create other beings in order to have deep, meaningful relationships. There are also those who say that God has created man and other creatures simply because He is a creator.

Why is the creation of man meaningful to God? Although there is perfect relationship and fellowship within the being of the triune God, God also highly values relationship and fellowship with other moral beings. As a moral being, man can freely choose (and that is the key issue) the path of moral goodness and righteousness and become conformed to the character of God. He can choose to have fellowship with God and work out God's purposes together with Him, in voluntary submission to Him. If man chooses this path freely and voluntarily because it is the right thing to do, despite facing difficulties and obstacles, it is something very meaningful and precious to God. It brings much joy to God's heart. And this love relationship between God and man and our partnership in working out God's purposes together is not only for our time on earth but continues through eternity in God's kingdom. What we have learned and how we have grown during our time on earth will have a direct bearing on the meaning of our relationship and partnership with God in working out His purposes together with Him in eternity.

Human beings are distinct moral beings and not an extension of God's being. Yes, we are in Christ and Christ is in us. But we do not become a part of God in that we are not an extension of the being of God. Human beings relate with God as distinct beings. The relationship between God and man is a genuine relationship. It is dynamic, not one fixed by God. We have the freedom to choose how we want to respond to God, and if our response is positive, it will be something very meaningful and precious to God. Conversely, our sins and failures grieve the heart of God.

While man's freedom of choice is a very meaningful thing, it is also at the root of the problem of pain, evil and suffering.

This problem began before the creation of man. It began with the creation of angels and the fall of Lucifer, the evil one, and, together with him, other fallen angels. These evil beings were not created evil, but they rebelled against God.

Man, too, rebelled against God and God's intentions for him. But there will be those who, in response to God's love and grace, freely choose to respond positively to God, and through repentance and faith in Christ, they become reconciled to God and become God's children. They will grow in moral and spiritual stature, have deep fellowship with God and with one another, and work out God's purposes together with Him, as they continue to respond well to God and His provisions.

As we take our rightful place in humble submission to God and worship of Him, this relationship and fellowship between God and man is very meaningful in both

directions. It is very meaningful to man; it is also very meaningful to God. It is not just that man can receive from God and attain to well-being and meaning in their lives. It is also that when they do so, they will delight God's heart. If we understand this, it will help us to appreciate more of what it means to live to the glory of God.

A failure to appreciate what our positive response means to God will hinder our appreciation of the meaning of the fulfilment of God's purposes and the significance of man's development in moral and spiritual stature. It will dilute our appreciation of the richness of our relationship and fellowship with God and our partnership with Him.

Our present context – a fallen world

Our present context is no longer the same as that in the Garden of Eden. The fulfilment of God's purposes now takes place within the framework of the effects of the Fall and the rebellion of Satan.

We live in a fallen world held in bondage to sin and the evil one. We see this in various parts of the Scriptures. One portrayal of it is in Ephesians 2:1-3.

Ephesians 2:1-3

- 1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,
- 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.
- 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

We all formerly lived in the way Paul describes here. For mankind in general, this is still an issue – bondage to sin and the evil one; living according to the spirit of the world, the course of this world and the influence of the evil one.

It is not exactly the same for believers as it is for the world in general. Paul says "you were" and "you formerly walked". Before we became children of God, we lived in that way. Now that we are believers, our lives are no longer to be characterised by that. But we need to be mindful that we come into this world with the weakness of the flesh and we live in a fallen world, in the midst of spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-20). The evil one has been actively opposing God and His purposes. He seeks to draw us away from God by the attractions, distractions and temptations in the world. He exploits the weakness of the flesh and attacks us in every aspect of our being. He sows dissension among the brethren; he promotes false doctrines and wrong emphases; he deceives and blinds the minds of men. He will oppose God and His purposes in all ways that he knows how.

God's answer

What is God's answer to the rebellion of Satan and the fallen angels? What is His answer to the Fall and man's bondage to sin and the powers of darkness? And what is His answer to the attainment of His ultimate goals and purposes for man?

God's answer is the Lord Jesus Christ and the Cross. The Cross is extremely important. But more than that, it is the living Lord, the risen Christ. Christ's death, His resurrection, ascension, exaltation and even the outpouring of the Holy Spirit – all these should not be viewed in isolation, but as one unit. We need to appreciate the whole meaning of what has taken place and the implications for our current context.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Cross, the New Covenant and healthy church life – together, they enable us to live a life that overcomes sin and the evil one, a life that grows in moral and spiritual stature, and one where deep fellowship with God and the brethren is a continuing reality.

The way to fulfil God's purposes

How does God intend His purposes to be fulfilled? Summarised in one statement: Through the proper working of each individual part in healthy church life, with each member growing unto maturity in Christ and together in submission to Christ the head, abiding in Him and He in us, according to God's revelation in the Scriptures, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, on the basis of what has been accomplished at the Cross.

God's kingdom is built up as the body grows in quality and size. This is essentially what it means for the body to be built up in love (Eph. 4:16). All this takes place in the context of overcoming the evil one and setting the captives free. Setting the captives free has relevance to non-Christians, for they are under bondage to the evil one and need to be set free. But the principle is also relevant to believers, in whose lives are also various forms of bondage.

God's intention for us is positive. But positive outcome is not automatic. God desires all mankind to come back to Him, but not all will respond positively to the call to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Even for Christians, who have already entered the kingdom of God, not all will respond well and grow well in the direction of God's call. But there will be those who do. To the degree that they do, they will together move towards the fulfilment of God's intention for the church – that of expressing His manifold wisdom.

Ephesians 3:10

so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

What we have in this verse is a very rich and profound truth. Why does Paul put it in this form? What does it mean? How does it come about? What are the implications?

In the next verse, Paul says that "this was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He (God) carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord".

These two verses tell us the manifold wisdom of God being made known through the church is very important in God's heart – it is a central feature in the outworking and fulfilment of God's eternal purpose. Together with the preceding verses, they communicate to us the centrality of the role of the church and what God intends to carry out in Christ.

Many issues are involved in healthy church life: consecration, commitment, true worship, the spirit of discipleship, deep fellowship, preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God and effective prayer. All these are integral parts in healthy church life. And they are all to be worked out in submission to God, according to His revelation in the Scriptures.

The various key issues are vital and interrelated. They have a direct bearing on one another, on the total picture and on the final outcome.

For example, although effective prayer is extremely important, it cannot be nurtured in isolation. If there isn't consecration and commitment, how can effective prayer be nurtured?

Likewise, true worship and the spirit of discipleship – they can be very difficult to nurture when there is a lack of fellowship. Good fellowship can help us to be more committed to God. And those who are committed to God can help us to deepen the quality of fellowship.

Preaching and teaching the whole purpose or counsel of God are also extremely important. True preaching and teaching grant light to believers, motivate them and help them to respond to God's call based on the truth.

Effective prayer plays another important part. As we learn to pray for one another, there can then be good fellowship, effective preaching, true discipleship, proper outworking of our lives. And as we grow well, we can deepen in our prayer life.

Quality of worship is also extremely important. But there cannot be quality worship if we are not prepared to walk in the path of true discipleship. And as we deepen in our worship of God, we will also be strengthened in our walk with God, in the spirit of discipleship, quality of fellowship and so on.

So, as we can see, the various issues are all vital and inter-related.

The Lord willing, I will subsequently consider more fully the various important issues when we go into the major theme of "The Church and the Fulfilment of God's Purposes" in this series of messages on "The Fulfilment of God's Purposes".

Concluding remarks

Let us reflect on what has been in God's heart when He created us in His own image, with the potential to attain to the highest level of moral and spiritual stature through the reception of God's life.

Let us respond positively to God's provisions and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Let us deepen the quality of fellowship with God and with one another, so that we may participate meaningfully in the outworking of God's plans and purposes together with Him, both during our time on earth and in eternity.

There is much that awaits us in God's kingdom in eternity. The degree and meaning of our involvement will be closely related to how we fare on earth, how much we have grown in moral and spiritual stature, the depth of our oneness with the Lord, and how faithful we are as stewards of what He has entrusted to us.

Let us reflect on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the mystery of Christ and what was accomplished at the Cross. He is at the very heart of the fulfilment of God's purposes. It is in Him that we can attain to God's high calling. Let us draw near to God and express our deep appreciation for His high calling. And let us be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that we may respond well to His high calling.

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