

The Purpose for Creating All Things - '~Recognize the Influence'

by Art Katz

The purpose of creation is to provide a platform for the church to demonstrate God's manifold wisdom, and the church must take eternity into its present consciousness to fulfill this purpose.

Duration: 1:19:37

Scripture: Ephesians 3:7

Topics: "Purpose Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker, Paul, begins by acknowledging the depth and complexity of the gospel message. He emphasizes that he has been given the gift of grace by God to preach among the Gentiles and reveal the unsearchable riches of Christ. Paul highlights the mystery of the fellowship of the gospel, which has been hidden since the beginning of the world. He emphasizes that the means by which this message is communicated may seem awkward and weak, but it is intentional to contradict the wisdom of the powers. The sermon warns against false teachings that lead people into bondage and death, promoting self-determination and worldly pursuits instead of acknowledging God.

Transcript

Paul is very difficult to leap into. You want to start with chapter 3 and the principal verses for verse 9 and 10, but it's almost an arduous assault to leap in like that. So you have to go to the beginning of the chapter, and then the beginning of the chapter draws you into what preceded it, and in fact you realize that Paul just rolls it out by the odds.

He's like God himself, there's no beginning and no end. But because of time, I have to pass by such juicy morsels as Paul explaining the mystery of the body and the gospel that has come to the Gentiles, which I have mentioned in a previous time, and get down to the centerpiece for tonight where Paul speaks of himself as a minister in verse 7, according to the gift of grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power unto me who am less than the least of all saints. Is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hidden God who created all things by Jesus Christ to the intent that now, in order that, and I'm going to stop, or else you'll be lulled into a kind of tranquility that will miss the point entirely.

Paul is about to tell us what the intent is and the purpose for which reason God has created all things. So, how dare you sit there as if you're hearing a mere sermon? How is it you're not leaning forward in your seat with your hand cupped at your ear that you should not miss any syllable of this answer from the apostle who was given such grace to preach these riches and to make this mystery known to the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers and heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. So the whole purpose of creation from this text is that there would be a platform for a phenomenon called the church and that that church would have something to fulfill for which reason God did not think it extravagant to create all things.

And that purpose has nothing to do explicitly nor directly with the benefits that would come to men through the church or to the nations or to the church itself. Rather, it's to make a demonstration of something called the manifold wisdom of God to some dimension of reality that is above the world and invisible called the principalities and powers of the air. And that this is the eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus.

As my Danish wife is wont to say, how do you like them apples? This is staggering, it's contradictory, it pulls the rug out from under our feet and provides a purpose that we had never once ever considered and Paul says is the very reason for all creation. What kind of a church is it that could go on from generation to generation and never once consider and take to heart seriously God's purpose for all creation for which reason he has established the church? How dare we promote our programs and consider our activity independent of this central purpose for our being as church? I want to say that the church that gives scant attention to this, that chooses to ignore it or that dismisses this as some kind of euphoric play on words that is nice to hear but not to be taken seriously is ipso facto not the church. It's an institution, it's a band of enthusiasts who are itching to promote their own ministries and perform the things that they think to please God.

It's not a church that is concerned with that which pleases God according to his own definition and according to his own word. That God thinks it important, he doesn't explain why, that a certain demonstration be made by the only agency on earth that can conceivably make it and for which reason he's created the earth that it could sustain this phenomenon called the church and that purpose is for that church to demonstrate to this invisible realm of principalities and powers, whoever they are, the manifold wisdom of God and that is the eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus. Well, I'm going to attempt by the grace that is given to expound what that means and to tell you if you've gotten the book yesterday that a whole long chapter is devoted to this very subject from which I will likely be drawing tonight.

It sounds like an irrelevancy to be occupied with those things that are eternal, the eternal purpose of God. Won't that take care of itself when the time comes? No. The church that is the church takes eternity into its present consciousness and seeks the fulfillment now, Paul uses the word now, to the intent that now this demonstration might be made, though it has eternal ramifications because anyone with so much as a drop of apostolic sap in their blood knows that only if we are occupied with the eternal can we be of any significance in the now.

The church that is only occupied with now that gives scant attention to those things that are eternal is strangely and ironically irrelevant. But what kind of wisdom is God speaking about and who are these powers to whom the demonstration should be made and why is it important to God? The question for us is we're not required to have an explanation. All we need to know that it is important, that it's so important that he did not hesitate to create all things in order to provide the fulfillment of this desire.

Because the church that is not taking the desire of God to its heart, however irrelevant it may seem to itself, however devoid of practical consequences, however it does not hint that there's going to be blessing or significance for men or for ourselves, and yet take that to itself as the first purpose for its being is the church that is the church indeed. Because that willingness to take God's purpose to ourselves all the more when it has no promise of bringing us blessing, but on the contrary, it will mark us before those very principalities and powers as an object of their attention, their opposition, and their persecution. If you want to be left alone, just ignore this text.

You want to go on with business as usual and promote your individual ministries? Just ignore this. And then they will say, Jesus we know and Paul we know, but who are you? You're not even worthy of our consideration. That church that requires our attention and that causes us stark fear is a church that does not have to have a payoff and receive a benefit for taking to itself a purpose in God.

Even if that purpose threatens a consequence that will be painful, all the more is that very willingness itself the demonstration of that wisdom. Because there are two wisdoms in collision. And you need to understand that in this context, Paul is not talking about wisdom as cleverness or wise procedure or behavior on the basis of knowledge or experience.

Maybe the better word for the kind of manifold wisdom that God is wanting made known is a value, a system of values, a way of understanding. There's a collision between value systems. One originates from below and has the prince of darkness as its author.

And the whole world is enveloped and taken up with it and never once questions its truth or legitimacy. For example, take care of number one. If you don't, who will? Seek your own self-interest.

The Declaration of Independence, the self-evident truth of the pursuit of happiness as being the commendable purpose for human existence. Avoid suffering and pain, pursue pleasure. Seek and take care of yourself.

Avoid loss, sacrifice. The wisdom of this world by which the whole world lives its life is predicated on that which comes from below. And in some and many cases gives an appearance, I won't say of sanctity, but of legitimacy.

It sounds rational. It's reasonable. It's addressed to the self-evident needs of men to put themselves first.

It's an appeal to self-interest. It's an appeal to self. So what about a church that is willing to adopt something as central to its whole purpose for being that offers no promise of any reward to itself? No advantage, no blessing, but on the contrary, that this will mark you before these powers because you are a people of such a kind as to put the eternal purpose of God before every other purpose.

So you're willing even to suffer the opposition of the principalities and powers because you want to see the eternal purpose of God fulfilled, even though it offers no prospect of improvement or betterment or blessing, but only trial, opposition, persecution? That is the wisdom of God. The very adoption of God's eternal purpose as being primary and foremost is itself that wisdom because it contradicts all to which the world subscribes that is unquestioned, unchallenged, approved, and made the normative understanding by which men are to live their lives, which excludes eternity, has no reference to that which lies beyond this life, and it's greatest lie is that this life is the purpose for our being and requires all of our attention, our energy, our consideration. It's a lie.

It's a deception. It leads men into bondage and into death. It prompts them by motives of lust, ambition, fame, fortune.

It appeals to the carnal appetite of the lust. It makes this life everything. It omits God.

It makes you God, determining your own fortune, pursuing your own course, and no one will blow the whistle on you. You'll have the approval and the sanction of virtually everyone. So we need to understand that there are two wisdoms in collision, and they're both vying as to which wisdom shall prevail in creation itself, the wisdom of God or the wisdom of the powers of darkness, who seem to have all the models, who emphasize prestige, wealth, fame, reward.

So this is solely and exclusively something that satisfies the heart of God, and only those who have a concern for the heart of God and the satisfaction of that heart will make his purpose their own, independent of any benefit that comes by doing that. And that is the church, and apostolically speaking, the church that we call the church today that has ignored this text, doesn't understand it, doesn't desire to implement it, sees itself as established to provide men with certain blessings by meeting their needs, is a distortion and is not the purpose for which God has established the church. Church is not something that panders to men.

It's not something institutional that has been established to requite the interest of men by establishing programs and services. The church at large, even in its best forms, has regrettably come to that pitiful condition only for the absence of the knowledge of the eternal purpose of God for the church. And in fact, until we identify with that purpose and look to the fulfilling of it, we never will meet the needs of men.

If we put the needs of men and the blessings of men as the foremost purpose for our being, we ironically will never meet them. But if we put the purpose of God as the first purpose, God, men's needs will be met by a church that is aligned with God and is more disposed to give them significant answers for their life, even the communication of the wisdom of God that is other than that of the world. Instead, the church is itchy, wanting to find something to do, has to have a program, needs to justify its existence precisely because it does not see its existence in any other terms but in responding and meeting the things that are immediate and about them.

It has not seen what would have given it security and foundation in God, namely, the taking up of the eternal purpose. It would have freed it from the necessity and the itch to do and to perform. Something that precedes and is greater than doing and performing is being.

And what issues from us should issue from our being and not be a substitute. Doing should not be a substitute for being. The church that takes to heart God's purpose, even though it has to deal with a realm that is invisible, has to be something in order to demonstrate that wisdom.

Paul does not say articulate that wisdom. He doesn't say that the church is called to set it forth programmatically or make statements about it. It's to demonstrate it.

And only a church can demonstrate it because the wisdom of God is a way of being. And it has to be made visible and demonstrable in the relationship and life of a people together that is called the church. This is an ultimate requirement.

It's one thing to be able to articulate statements about wisdom, but to demonstrate the wisdom of God is to bring heavenly values down to earth in a way that is so unaffected and so true in what we are about and

how we relate together that even the powers of the air are terrified at that demonstration. They don't often have to see it. I don't know how often they have had occasion to see it, but I believe that these purposes must be fulfilled before the Lord comes.

So this needs to find a place in our hearts and our understanding or we are crippled in our service for God as well as our knowledge of God. We need to understand the cosmic context of the entire faith itself. We need to understand that there's a drama of a moral and cosmic kind that has had its inception from the beginning and is moving toward its conclusion, and that this final thing is to be fulfilled by the church itself.

These are the mysteries of which Paul was a steward. The cosmic context of the church, the thing that is before time and ends time, the contest that God has with his rival seeking to bring into the earth systems of value that have every appearance of benefit and yet are false and bring to men both bondage and death. And that the only agency that God has created that can unmask this fraud, blow the whistle on this deception, is the church, not just by identifying it verbally, but by themselves presenting the very alternative in their own life together.

It's a wisdom that I'm saying that requires to be demonstrated. It's a wisdom that puts its emphasis on that which is foolish and weak. As for example, in Psalm 8, where God says that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, he has perfected praise in order to stop the mouth of the adversary, that God in dealing with these powers has got to defeat them, not on their ground, but on God's ground.

And God's ground is the choosing of that which is foolish, the choosing of that which is weak to confound what the world esteems as wise and as strong. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, God has perfected praise, has perfected wisdom to stop the mouth of the adversary. The adversary has got to be defeated on moral grounds.

I don't know how to explain what that means. I'm trusting God that the Spirit of God will impart to you a sense that what underlies the whole reality of which we are part, and we're only operating at the surface of it, is a cosmic conflict and a struggle of a moral kind over the issues of life, of truth, of reality, of meaning, and of purpose. And this has ever and always been so, and that the church itself not recognizing its call has been seduced and sucked into the wisdom of the world, so that when we ourselves, in order to promote the purposes of church, will employ techniques and methodologies and promotions of the kind that the world uses to advance its interests, if our pastors become CEOs and executives and whiz kids of ability to perform and to influence and move audiences or gather up funds or to speak in such a way to affect feeling as so as to obtain a certain response and satisfaction, we have lost all credibility, we have lost all challenge to the powers of the air, for we are playing our game in their terms.

Manipulation is the name of the game. They know how to manipulate, they know how to jerk, they know how to pull the strings, they know how to play upon mankind, they know how to play upon fear, ambition, lust, all the kinds of things to get men to be puppets and to influence nations and men and races in ways that feed the gluttonous appetite of the powers of darkness that are the powers of chaos, death, and destruction and violence. You can't understand racial genocide, you can't understand Rwanda, you can't understand black people killing each other in mindless bloodletting, not white against black, black against black.

You can't understand this Serbian thing about ethnic cleansing, men without conscience, the massive rape of women as a military expedient. You can't understand the rock culture, you can't understand sport craze, you can't understand commercialism and the whole consumer mentality of our world except that you

understand that there is an influence pressing upon men, upon nations, upon races that are called the principalities and the powers of the air. Don't think that there's some mirage, don't think that they are effectual.

Yes, Jesus met them at the cross and made of them an open spoil and disarmed them, but he didn't destroy them. So they are a disarmed and yet very effectual phenomenon who refuse to believe that they are defeated and still have the grandiose vanity and egotism that in the end they're going to succeed over God, for that's the very nature of Satan and the very nature of these powers which are the fallen angels that have followed that fallen cherub and vie for power and want influence and have obtained it. Paul says in 1 Corinthians, if they had known, if the rulers of this age had known, they would not have crucified the prince of glory.

Well, I thought it was performed by Romans under the influence of antagonistic Jews who were not themselves able to bring a capital punishment, but influenced the authority so as to see to the death of Jesus. Paul says, had the rulers of this age known what would be the consequence of his death, they were too stupid to see it, they only wanted to remove this great threat to their false rule, they would not have crucified the son of glory. So they're capable of a crucifixion, they're capable of taking over the whole nation of Germany and turning it from one of the most brilliant liberal cultures in the world that produced great writing, fiction, poetry, philosophy, theology, and making of them an instrument for the massive annihilation of the Jewish people and bringing the world into such conflict as to threaten the whole of Western civilization in ten years.

If they can take possession of an entire nation of that kind, and someone has wisely said that what they had instigated was defeated in World War II, but the powers yet remain over Germany seeking its next opportunity. I'm one of the few souls that did not rejoice for the unification of East and West Germany because I said, uh-uh, dum-da-dum-dum, Germany again, a threat yet a third time in our century. Their unification is not a happy note.

And if those powers that preside yet over Germany and have never yet once been identified by the German church, let alone contended against by that church, ventilate again their characteristic wisdom and power on that nation, we best brace ourselves for what is yet to come in our time through that people. A church that does not recognize the reality of the principalities and the powers of the air is boxing at the air, is making motions that have only a minimal prospect of consequence if then, unless they have first understood, met, and contended, and brought some dislocation of those powers over the very locality that they occupy. What would they say tonight about us and all of the worship and enthusiasm and everything that we have expressed? Would that intimidate them? Would they count themselves threatened? Would they draw back and recoil? Or are they yawning? One of the most flagrant boasts in our charismatic generation is taking cities to worship as if by turning up the amplifiers, we're going to unseat those powers who have had uncontended sway for generations and decades since time immemorial.

It's going to take something more than that. It's going to take a demonstration of that which is contrary to their own wisdom as it is expressed by a people who are living without fear, without intimidation, who cannot be threatened, who cannot be cajoled, who cannot be intimidated, and who themselves do not manipulate. We have to avoid, with great fastidiousness, any condescension to a method, a technique, an advantage that would come that is in any way manipulative, for in that we are echoing the wisdom of the powers that God calls us to defeat.

We have got to be willing for that which defeats them, which is not our devices or our manipulations, but our foolishness and our weakness. We've got to be willing to bear the humiliation of weakness, to stand up before big crowds who think that you're some kind of pro and you can turn it on and off like a faucet and you know what you are. You're just a collection of weakness and trembling ineptitude to speak a subject like this and yet to stand and trust that God is going to give grace to communicate that for which our whole environment and history has not prepared us.

Are you standing for a reason, brother? No, I can't. I'm preaching your message? Okay. Pray for me while I'm speaking.

You should be honored. You've never had to do that. I'm astonished.

I didn't hear that. Not only am I honored, I'm surprised that that's all we've had. And we're not over yet, because I want to tell you, dear saints, and this is no commendation of myself.

I didn't choose this subject tonight. The Lord has chosen it. But if I know anything, I know this.

If the powers of the air can nullify this night and make it a non-event, it will be a tremendous victory for darkness. They have never been so threatened in the history of your fellowship and your movement as this night. And I'm getting a Holy Ghost chill as I'm saying that.

That's why it's got to come forth in the way it's coming forth. And I'm amazed. It's got to be this faltering and jerking thing, because God's means must be relative to his ends.

He's not going to give you a smooth, professional statement that would contradict the content itself. If the defeat of the powers has got to come in a way that is contrary to their wisdom, then the very message about that must come in a way that is contrary to their wisdom. It's got to come in a way that is not professional, that is awkward, that is stumbling, that doesn't know what the next line is, and that is out of a weakness of a man who knows the subject so well, he could speak it in his sleep.

I don't know of another man, I have not met another man who knows it as well as I. And yet, I'm going from the text to the book as if I'm bumbling through for a first time, never having spoken it. And I understand that that is an utter necessity for tonight. Because what did I tell you before? That the prophets are required not only to proclaim, but to demonstrate.

And you're going to be called to exactly this foolishness, to exactly this weakness. If the powers of the air are going to suffer eclipse and defeat, and be loosed from their orbits, which they have enjoyed in an uncontended and uncontested way, it will be because there's a pocket of foolishness below that is believing God and trusting God for the consequence. However, the foolishness is that that speaker has got to taste and to experience.

It's not competence that we need, it's a willingness to bear the humiliation of foolishness and weakness. That's why there's hope for you. That's why we have been selected.

That's why we are elected. Not because of our distinction, but because of our non-distinction. Because we're babes, because we don't have a credential that the world would recognize.

And the moment that we begin to become credential conscious and title conscious, which is so inviting and to draw us in to levels of prestige and acknowledgement on basis of title, we're already losing ground

before those powers. It's a rare man, I hope this is one, who can enjoy the benefit of title without the loss of influence against the powers of the air who promote that whole credential and prestige system of titles, which undergirds the whole world. I don't have to take the time to tell you of the struggle that I've had in such institutions, having a master's degree in history and in theology.

But they didn't want to give me the one in theology, and gave me every reason why I could not be granted it, though I had fulfilled every requirement. In fact, my book on the Holocaust was the last thing that I was to present. And then they found objections a week before graduation, and gave me new assignments that would be humanly impossible to fulfill, and the Lord gave me grace to fulfill it within that week.

I wasn't going to come up on a platform in the great Lutheran Cathedral of St. Paul for a blank piece of paper. Not that I want credential, but somehow, what else is new? You know who oversees and inspires the whole realm of technology? Well, I'm so grateful for the day of graduation, because I watched my professors, with whom I had been in collision here and there, coming down the aisle in the ceremony of that graduation, wearing their gowns and their Ph.D. identifications, depending on the institution and the subject in which they received their Ph.D. or their doctorate. They had colored stripes.

It's a very impressive display. And when they sat together in one section of the auditorium, and my eye fell on them, I sensed such pride, such arrogance, such stateliness of what the world applauds, and for which men have labor to obtain, and can sit there in. And then I recognized in one fell swoop, seeing that, and the president on the platform, and the lesbian professor that was called from the East Coast to be the one who would preach to us that day, I saw a system.

I saw the design of the world. I saw what it was that I was bucking against, invisibly, now made vivid and real. Oh, dear saints, the world is system, power, prestige, title, wealth, stature.

We need to hate it. It's opposed to God. It's at enmity with God.

It's contrary to God, and it needs to be defeated. It needs to be identified by those who have such a sensitivity to understand the evil that is in the world, and to despise the systems of the world, because anything that is system, invariably, is the work of man. And watch that we don't ourselves slip into system out of the very necessities of the things that we are about.

We've got to walk in so circumspect a way that we need the operation of the Holy Spirit, and the wisdom of God, to avoid the pitfalls that are before us, even religiously. Or, shall I say, especially religiously, for of all of the institutional realms that the powers of the air influence and occupy, there is no greater influence and no greater expression of that power than in the realm of religion. You buck against it, and you'll know how fierce that is.

And when its mask is off and its teeth are bared, because you have dared touch it and challenge it, you'll know how real those powers are that have swayed through those men who are not at all aware that they're being influenced and operated upon. The church needs to blow the whistle. It needs to free the captives, not just by the announcement that they are deceived and under systems of bondage for ambition and fame and title, that that will leave them without eternal hope, that when they come to the end of that line, they can't take it with them, and they've been defrauded of real truth, of real value, of real understanding of the things that constitute reality.

They've been playing the wrong game, but everybody else has played it, and so they've gone along because there has never been an alternative presented to them. And that alternative has got to be presented only by the one agency that God has appointed, the church, that God has created all things in order that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God, all of its complexity and richness, contrary in every point in particular to the wisdom of the world, needs to be demonstrated, made manifest to the principalities and powers of the air. That will call us to be the church.

Because Paul doesn't say God is waiting for certain virtuosos within the church to make the demonstration. He's saying that God has created all things in order that through the church, only the church, the whole corporate knit of it, the whole diversity of it, of male and female and older and younger and fat and skinny and black and white and every shape and size and description, and all of its diversity and uniqueness and individuality, only that church, together in what it is in the genius of God as a real body, tempered and moving by another wisdom and hearing another drummer, having another incentive, another purpose, can demonstrate to the victims that there's an alternative to their death. To make that demonstration together as the church is for us to cross.

Because so long as we are under the influence of those powers, so long as we are fearful and insecure, so long as we require recognition and esteem, so long as we are looking for titles and any of those things, we constitute no threat. We ourselves need to be totally freed from those things that intimidate and threaten men and jerk and manipulate them. For it's in that freedom and the exhibition, the demonstration of that freedom, that those that are captive can be known of their bondage.

So the church that chooses to be ignorant of the eternal purpose of God and does not give itself to that purpose as the first and foremost purpose for its being, by that selfsame thing cannot be the church. The church that is indifferent to the eternal purpose of God, let it be however impressive, in every other way is not the church in any apostolic and prophetic sense, which is to say in any authentic sense. In order to be the church that is the church and truly embrace the eternal purpose of God, even though we do not see any practical or utilitarian consequence for doing so, because the whole world system is predicated on utility.

So much given for so much received. What do I have to do to graduate? How many courses do I have to take? How long do I have to serve? The first question that I got in every semester that I was a public school teacher, Mr. Katz, what must I do? What minimal amount is necessary in order to pass, to get by? We are a utilitarian world. And you know how we express that spiritually? We come before God with our petitions, and then we stop.

We've got off what we want him to consider and to answer, and that's the end of our prayer time. When it ends is where we should be beginning and continuing. We don't even know what prayer as communion means, or what Jesus meant when he said, this kind cometh not out, but prayer and fasting.

He didn't mean prayer of petition. That is not indifferent to our petitions. But our petitions are only the beginning of the relationship that is expressed in prayer.

If we are just utilitarian, we're willing to give in so much in order to obtain that much, that will characterize our prayer. And so long as we're in that utilitarian mode, we're not a threat to the powers of the air, but that's exactly how they govern and rule over men in terms of utility. What you get for so much invested.

What's in it for me? What's required for me in order for me to get this? It's the spirit of the world and a church that can break that power that is not ruled by that, that can be lavish as that woman was who came and broke the alabaster box and poured the ointment over the head of Jesus, and even the disciples had indignation at the waste. Don't know what God is yet waiting for. The principle of waste is the principle of power.

It's extravagance that God is wanting, and we're utilitarian. We give him so much time, attention of our substance. We're playing the enemy's game.

It's beyond utility that real relationship with God is obtained, and by that same measure that we constitute, by that reality that's obtained in that fellowship of union and devotion and opposition to the powers of the air. They want to keep us at the level of utility because the wisdom of the world is predicated upon self-interest and practicality that says, what is the benefit for me if I do this? What's in it for me? But the wisdom of God, which is contrary, is altogether sacrificial. It does not rest on the benefit that one receives.

It rests on the benefit that God receives. There's no benefit for us but rather the likelihood of embracing suffering in order that he receives his fulfillment, and this is so contrary at every point in particular to the ruling mentality of this world. The wisdom of the world says, take care of number one.

See to your own self-interest. Be concerned for your own security. You have only got this one life, and that's why our divorces are as frequent and as numerous as those in the world.

It's a scandal that the church has as much given to the phenomenon of divorce as the world. Well, I tried. I gave it my best shot.

This guy's hopeless. I don't expect he's ever going to change, and I'm hearing from everyone that I still have my good looks, and while I have them and life is short, I should drop this guy, this character, and try and try again. Whatever happened to covenant? Whatever happened to believing God? Whatever happened to the faith of a wife that God can in an instant snap his finger and bring those changes that could not otherwise humanly be expected? How can we be induced to divorce when we know God says, I hate divorce, and yet we lack the patience.

We don't want to continue. We can't bear the struggle, the tension. We want something conducive.

How many ministers have shed wives who are not fomenting and aiding their ministry? I could name names. And overnight go from divorce to another marriage, and the body of Christ can't even blink and take notice that it has happened. Look, my no hands.

It's a quickie. And the new wife is so much more conducive to the ministry of that man that you can almost say he did the right thing. It aided and abetted his ministry.

To suffer a wife that would have been difficult, and to trial and believe for ultimate resolution and reconciliation from God, that suffering in the relationship that God has given that no man should break would have been a testimony to the powers of the air and to the church itself. But if we are ruled by a mentality that says, well, if we suffered long enough, that's enough, and it's time now to change, and I deserve it, it's another wisdom. It's the world's wisdom.

So the wisdom of God will require a suffering. The wisdom of God is contrary to the wisdom of this world. It doesn't make our self-interest and our enjoyment and our betterment our first principle.

The first principle is, what glorifies God? What serves his purpose? What is his will in this? The man who thinks that his ministry is being aided by a much more appropriate wife doesn't know that his ministry will never be of any consequence or significance in this age. He'll be another charlatan, another glib actor, another performer. Yes, populists all get out and raking in the funds, but not affecting anything, and the powers of the air can yawn right in his face because he has removed any kind of a ground by which he would have to be recognized.

He's just another performer, another one for the religious systems. So there's a power of self-interest, even in spiritual things, that needs to be broken, and the principle thing that God gives us to break the orbit of self-centeredness is the subject of the eternal purpose of God. This is not God as some egotist who needs to be recognized that his eternal purpose is beyond any consideration of yours.

It's for your sake that he's giving you a purpose for your being that alone has the power to break the inexorable power of self-interest, even spiritually speaking. Only taking God's eternal purpose to your heart can break the power that will yet express itself even in ministry, even in religion, even in spirituality. This alone is God's provision.

That's why it's first, and that's why it's foremost. So we are out of whack and warped until eternity has come into our hearts and into our consideration for his sake. That this is of an interest to him, this satisfies his soul, he thinks it's important, that's all I need to know.

He wants to make that demonstration, that's all I need to know. It doesn't do a thing for me, but if it does something for him, that's all I need to know. And once you've come to that ground, you're on holy ground, you're on true ground.

You constitute a threat to those powers, they know you, you're marked. That power of self-interest can only be broken by embracing a purpose greater than us and other than us, namely the eternal purpose of God. And if you have not taken that purpose to your heart and made that first and foremost, are you going to tell me that you're going to be able to extend yourself to Jews in the last days who do not serve your personal interests and are not an advantage and a benefit for you? In fact, for you to relate to them and extend yourself to them in that time of Jacob's trouble is to put your head on the block and threaten and imperil your life, and you're going to do it? Not if you're taking care of number one first.

Like that German man, that older man that I met in Berlin, who described to me how he looked down out of his apartment window and below the brown-shirted Nazis with the swastikas on their arms in the early time of Hitler were breaking the Jewish shop windows and pulling the beards of old men and making them to scrub the sidewalk with little brushes and beating the children. I said, you saw that? Yeah. And what did you do? Well, he said, what could I do? I pulled the shade down and I turned away.

You'll pull the shade down. If you're living for self-interest, however thinly disguised, you'll not be able to come to the place of sacrifice for another, for that sacrifice for another that brings no benefit to you but threat to your life and to your interest is the wisdom of God. And that's the wisdom that was demonstrated at the cross when Jesus gave himself for the other, for ourselves, for all mankind, for Israel.

Ultimate sacrifice. Because at the cross was the collision of two wisdoms, two ways. The powers of darkness, emphasizing violence, threat, intimidation, having their victim in their hands and able to turn them into spit and ventilate all of their malicious bitterness against him and even threaten him to say, don't you know that if you say uncle and throw in the towel and give up your vain enterprise, you need not be

crucified? For Pontius Pilate said, I have the power both to crucify you and release you.

Oh, do you? Well, let me tell you that I'm thoroughly misunderstood and really there's no valid charge against me. And if you let me go, you can be assured I'll do nothing in any way to threaten your system of government. Jesus, without blinking, in complete calm, knowing what crucifixion meant and the agony of the forsakeness of the Father when he became sin for all men, said, you could do nothing against me except it was given you from above.

That's the way we need to walk through this world, without fear, because fear is the enemy's way of manipulating, making cowards of believers and having them to betray the Lord and aspects of the faith in one another. But to be without fear, to know that whatever comes, there's a grace appropriate to that requirement, and it will not come except the sovereign God allows it. To walk through this world fearlessly is to do this to the powers of the air and to make them turn in flight.

Imagine a whole church like that. I'll tell you the saints, we're not going to come to it by ourselves alone. Oh, I know there are individuals here of the heroic kind who perhaps can.

It's going to take the whole strength of the church. It's going to take being able to pray for one another and give counsel to one another and to identify for one another those things that we couldn't see for ourselves. I came back from an overseas trip to the fellowship in New Jersey where I'd lived for some years to find that the three or four most significant spiritual women in that congregation had all gone a-whoring, had all forsaken their husbands, had all run amok morally.

I couldn't believe it. The most spiritual women, and from our own fellowship, the most spiritual woman left her husband, had a union with her employer, had a baby by him, and is now married to him. And the one message she loved of all of my messages was Daughters of Sarah, the message of submission.

And she completely freaked out and blew it all. So how did it happen that the most spiritual women in the congregation had become notorious whores? I said to them, didn't you know in advance? Wasn't there any evidence, any suspicious thing that you had noted about any of these women before their final collapse and the catastrophe of the ruin of their marriages, their families, and the shame that has come to the congregation? Surely you must have seen some evidence of flirtation or absence from meetings or something. Why didn't you see it? Weren't you together? Weren't you rightly related? Weren't you speaking to one another in the fear of God? Didn't you know that sin is deceptive about itself and that next week is too late but that today we have to speak to one another? We're not going to make this.

We're not going to be this testimony. We're not going to see those powers defeated except we receive all the benefit that God intends for us as the church to strengthen, to receive counsel, to keep us in the way everlasting, to pray for one another, to be able to confess our faults one to another and pray for one another that we might be healed. He has to acknowledge that we're a congregation of sinners being saved and it's an atmosphere and an environment where we don't have to hide and have our lonely struggles with skeletons in the closet, that God will never allow us somehow to find solution unless we will find it in the church, in the body, and with one another face to face.

We want a private solution. We want a non-threatening, non-embarrassing solution. And God says, No.

My church is to be in the light as I am in the light. Its godliness is to be perfected by the sanctifying influence that each of the members are to each other. And in that they are a testimony and a statement of

my wisdom and can unseat the powers that have had sway over the locality they occupy just by being what they are in God.

That what they are in God and the truth of that they have come and the reality that they exhibit and the true values by which they live is enough to unseat the powers that are over them. They themselves, as they are, and the truth of their spiritual reality is an answer to those powers. The powers of the air are only obliged to recognize one thing, authenticity, reality, truth.

And they can see through the appearances and therefore yawn, but they know when they encounter the reality of God in men and women. They know whom to fear. They know whom to avoid.

They know whom to tremble and whom they can safely disregard. So when I was in the Philippines speaking to a congregation of ministers, I said better that you would be known by the powers of the air and feared than you should be esteemed and known by men and be applauded. Oh, yes, they said.

That's right. Okay, I said. How many of you will stand and let God know you're willing to lose esteem and recognition by men that you might be feared by the powers of the air? For you cannot have both.

You're going to be feared by the powers of the air. You must necessarily discard and reject any desire for the esteem and the acknowledgement of men. And I'm talking to third world ministers who are out of poverty and to become a minister of the gospel is to have some food on the table, some income, some dignity for your life.

And I'm saying get up and be willing to forsake that and be known by the powers of the air and feared. And these men stood with trembling. They chose another wisdom and God will take them at their word and the powers of the air will know whom to regard.

This is a struggle. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, the rules of this world's darkness. But we wrestle.

And Paul is not just plucking some metaphor out of the hat. He's speaking of the most arduous form of combat and opposition that wrestling represents. It's more than just the issue of strength.

It's more than just the issue of skill. It's the issue of grit. It's the issue of determination.

It's the issue of moral quality and moral character of who is going to win in a combat that is eyeball to eyeball and fingertip to fingertip. We wrestle. But, of course, there's got to be a we.

It's not an individual. It's got to be a corporate body that can be engaged in wrestling and this kind of combat that will decide the issue for mankind. So if the church lacks this orientation, this desire, this purpose, it will necessarily become in time another institution summoned by men to provide human needs, which have a life of their own, a purpose, their own reason for being that needs to be preserved and perpetuated.

And anyone who has encountered these institutions knows what I'm talking about. They take on a life of their own. They may have had the most admirable origin of men on their faces in the sawdust crying out to God.

And from that day of beginning, over a course of time, out of the logic of the necessity to organize and to arrange and to oversee and all of the other kinds of things that move the organic work of God by the Spirit

into system, they become an institution. And the foremost purpose for its being is not the eternal purpose of God, but its own preservation and its own perpetuation. And the powers of the air go, oh, have your rallies, have your programs.

Fill Charisma Magazine with your big splurgy advertisements of the great thing that your conference is going to do and going to mean. It's blah. It's sound and fury that signifies nothing.

It's empty. It's vain. It's loud.

It's noisy. It's a pompous activity that will obtain nothing. They're the quiet ones who are unseen and travailing before God and are living in a disciplined way and carefully avoiding any subscription to the world and its spirit, who are fighting the fight of faith and are not allowing themselves to be intimidated, nor intimidating others.

And what goes on in bedrooms, in the realm of private relationship between married couples and the way that a wife can coo and placate and get her way and the man condescends, that's manipulation, saints. If you will condescend to that kind of tactic in order to gain your end for the moment, you're in another wisdom. It's not God's wisdom.

And the man can do the same. You go out and buy yourself a hat or bribe or do. It's play acting.

It's performing. It's unreality. And the powers of the air love for you to continue in it and then come and have your orgiastic delight on a Sunday in a blowout of a worship time and then go back from that to living in a way that is more in keeping with their wisdom than God for the rest of the week.

There's a war on. Powers of the air are brooding over Pensacola, over Florida, over cities, over the entire nation. And only one agency given by God by which they can be recognized and combated, the church.

But a church of what kind? A church that is freed from its influence and has seen to it however painful that freedom is and maintains that because they are together with the people who know that there's a war on. And it's not going to be won by going to significant places of location and praying there as if by that activity you have turned the historic tide. The same one who is performing that is now stamping approval on other ministries that are submitting to their great apostolic and prophetic program that is now worldwide.

And someone local in Minneapolis thinking himself a prophet whose mailing I got in the corner was approved by that, that, that ministry. He's come into the system. He can use the name.

There's a prestige that goes with it. He can be recognized. He's one of the boys.

He's in the system. And it's called apostolic. My God, I want to spit my guts out.

And I've told them time again, listen, do what you want, play any game you want, leave the holy words of God alone. Don't dare employ prophetic and apostolic for your machinations and your self-seeking programs and full-color advertisements and all of the groovy things that you're doing with your international global prayer centers as if that's a hub that affects anything. Leave the great words alone.

Because if those words are desecrated, what foundation have we? This is apostolic. This is given to us by the great apostle, the mystery, that God has created all things in order that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be demonstrated. As it was demonstrated on the cross when utter malignity had to meet utter magnanimity, when utter viciousness met the charity and patience and forbearance of

God, the forgiveness of God, there came the defeat of those powers by the willingness of Jesus to bear the total onslaught and the remarkable character of God.

The wisdom of God is the character of God. And when that is displayed by the church, the powers are defeated. Jesus and Ellen Paul they know, but they don't know them yet in us.

The system is cloying and wants to bring us in. Be one of the boys. Go along.

Receive the benefit. To be out of the system is to be a pilgrim and a sojourner and a stranger in the earth. You're not one of the boys.

You're not good fun. You don't subscribe. You're looked upon with suspicion, as I am, by those very things that I'm describing, but I'm not at liberty to identify by name.

You're the square peg in the round hole. You don't go along. And I said to one of these brothers about their prophetic conferences, I said, how come I'm never invited? I was in this long before you ever heard of.

In fact, if you have any credibility at all, it's from my tapes that have found its way into your books. How is it I'm not invited? Well, Artie said, you're just not one of the in-house prophets. You're not one of the boys.

You can't be counted on to go along. You're liable to sound the note that upsets the whole apple cart. So we don't invite you.

You're not in the system. You don't need our approval and our prestige. You don't hanker to have that comforting glow of men who surround you, who have names that are world-renowned and count you as being one of the boys and a prophet whom they will recognize.

I don't need that. I don't want that. I only want his recognition because I'm jealous to fulfill the eternal purpose of God that must come through the church and know that that system that now is alienated from us and finds us not only outside of their influence but even constituting some kind of a threat is not too distant from a time when they will kill us and claim they are doing God a service.

Count on it. So if I know anything about God, his most significant work will be performed through men whom no one knows. Paul said this about himself, unknown to men but well known to God.

The powers of the air also know those who have authority and who have kept themselves from the spirit of the world. They see those who wear cellular phones in their belts and are exhibiting pride and prestige. I had to make mention of that in the Philippines at some pastor striding the platform whose cellular phone was almost like a gun in a holster.

I thought, is he going to have to make a call in the very midst of the service? Or does he enjoy the heft of something on his hip that signifies to any stricken congregation that he's in such esteem with God that he can afford this electronic device? Do you see how we strange prophets look at throwing their phones away? How we see what those things represent. You know what my message was that night? I came without a message. It was humility.

It was Jesus coming down on the back of an ass upon which never man sat. Though he said to his disciples, go to that village and you'll find a donkey and its colt. Bring them both, and if anyone stops you, tell them the Lord has need of them.

And so they found them, and they brought them both. And Jesus, instead of sitting on the mature animal upon which man had sat to go down the precipitous Mount of Olives, which is even humiliating to walk down, you can't keep an erect structure, chose that foal and that colt upon which never man sat. And they shouted, Hallelujah for the kingdom that has come.

Hosanna for the king. For your king shall come to you lowly and meek, or he'll not come to you at all, and his kingdom shall come lowly and meek, or it will not come at all. For the lowliness and meekness of God is the wisdom of God, and he'll not come in any other way than that which he has come and will again come and must come, even through his body, which is the church.

Anything that we pick up, any device, any strutting, any arrogance, any macho display is contrary to that wisdom. A little thing can undo us. God has chosen the foolish and the weak thing, and we need to live without the need to possess, to have, to seek prestige, and to be recognized.

The guileless and the childlike manifest the wisdom that defeats the powers. The Christianity that becomes prestigious, dignified, acceptable, and respectable becomes apostate. Every true obedience is a reiteration of the cross.

Every true preaching is a reiteration of the cross. Every true witness is a reiteration of the cross. I can be in a Lutheran seminary for two years and attend the daily chapel services, and I don't remember one message ever spoken.

Each one, though, was elaborately developed and fully biblical and doctrinally sound. I don't remember any of them. There wasn't one professor who would dare take the chance of trusting God without coming equipped to his fingernails, but he saw to it that his reputation and name would remain unscathed because he gave a perfect, formulated message because he knew months in advance when his day would come.

Where was the man who was willing to stand and trust God and come with an open Bible or the barest presentiment of what the theme is and let the Lord unfold it and suffer the indignity and the humiliation of choking and waiting for the next word? That is death, and that is humiliation, and that is the cross, and that is the power of God. Those messages sink in. Those messages penetrate.

Those messages constitute event, and the other just are something that passes over us without consequence. Wherever the cross is reiterated, wherever there's true prayer that costs something, wherever there's a witness, where there's palpitation of heart and embarrassed fear of being contradicted or facing a Jew in all of the arrogance of their worldly wisdom and ability, and your willingness to do that and trust God in that is the reiteration of the cross. And wherever the cross is expressed, the power of God is expressed, and the powers of the air are set back by that demonstration.

So maybe we'd be a people willing to bear again that cross. If it doesn't cost us, if there's no threat, if there's no trembling, we may well wonder if we have fallen into something less than other than what God is waiting for and desiring, because we're afraid. We're afraid to fail.

We're afraid to lose the affection or the esteem of men, and we will then see to it that what we speak is so well covered and assured that there'll be no loss. But the powers of the air then remain totally untroubled. Wherever there's an obedience unto suffering, where there's a trust in God rather than a trust in yourself, wherever the power of the air sees the cross reiterated in that place and in that moment, they are defeated and set back.

It is not only the cross proclaimed, but the cross demonstrated. Every time the cross is demonstrated, namely the suffering of it, the death of it, in that moment the power of it is released, and the powers of the air are required to flee. It is the demonstration of God himself.

What Jesus demonstrated at the cross was the wisdom of God. It is the character of God. It is God himself.

Self-sacrifice. The cross is the demonstration of God and the willingness of the God-man to yield up his life, to suffer the misunderstanding, the taunts and the jeers of his own people. Come down, save yourself.

The very thing that he could not do, was willing to bear the insults, the calumny, the pain, the suffering. That willingness is the wisdom of God. It's another wisdom.

Contrary to that self-saving, preserving, careful for one's name, one's reputation, one's life. It's another wisdom. It's what God is and what the church itself needs to demonstrate in itself as a body and bring the final defeat to the powers in the same way that they experienced the initial defeat by that demonstration of that wisdom and that value that Jesus expressed at the cross.

Every time we defer immediate gratification, it is an act on earth that verifies and substantiates that there's a God in heaven. These all died not having received the promise, but they were faithful and received a good report. They didn't need their reward now.

It could be deferred. They knew it would come at a later time. Those that were stripped of their earthly goods received it with joy, knowing in themselves that they had a greater recompense in heaven.

All of that kind of testimony is contrary to the wisdom of the world that wants its fix now, wants its gratification now, wants its reward now. Those people who can defer reward, that is not even to be obtained in this life, but in the life to come and yet serve as completely and courageously and devotedly as if the reward would come in this life, are giving evidence by that ability that there's a God who is invisible, unseen, but for whom they live and serve and have their being. Got the idea? They're living by another wisdom.

It's real living. It's without fear. It's confident in God that though the reward will not come in this life, it will come in the life to come.

And we have such an assurance of that expectation that we can live valiantly and bravely in this life and don't need to pay off now. It's contrary to the wisdom of the world that says utility. You extend yourself now, get rewarded now.

Well, you'll have to read this entire chapter. I want to pray for a church that will take to itself as its first purpose of being the eternal purpose of God, though there's no benefit, though by doing so you're mocked before the powers of the air and far from receiving reward, you'll receive opposition. But your very willingness to do so is itself the wisdom for which God waits and the wisdom that they hate.

And if you could do that now for God, you can do that for Jews later. It's the same wisdom. If you can extend yourself for Jews as a Gentile when there's nothing in it for you but the prospect of threat, of imprisonment, the loss of life, you are demonstrating not only the mercy of God that will be salvific for those Jews but the wisdom of God that defeats the powers that observe you.

And I want to say that unless you're progressively, day by day, growing in that wisdom and avoiding the wisdom of the world and any surrender to it in any form, however subtle, you'll not be able to demonstrate that wisdom and that mercy in that hour. The issue of the Jew is the final testimony of the church as the church. Because both groups say to Jesus, Lord, when did we see you naked, thirsty, hungry, and in prison? They both say, Lord, but one did not see and was not able or willing to extend mercy, and the other did, because God calls them the righteous, a people who do not live for themselves but for the purpose of God.

And if the purpose of God is going to be furthered by the return of a remnant of world Jewry as the redeemed of the Lord to Zion, then it's worth dying for. And the issue of the willingness to die, the issue of martyrdom, not as it has necessarily to be experienced, but in your willingness to bear it as being intrinsic to the faith, is another wisdom. To look upon yourself and understand the faith as an invitation to martyrdom that is not to be decided in that final moment, but now.

It's a mode of being, it's a way of life, by which your life is not your own, and those that overcome do not hold their life as dear to themselves. There is something more dear to themselves than their own life. It's another wisdom.

What is more dear than their life is the purpose of God, is the honor of God, is the glory of God. And they have settled that. So let's pray for that church.

My God, Lord, save us from system, save us from prestige, save us from title, save us from all those kinds of things that have seduced and nullified some of the bravest movements that have ever had their origin in this earth, that was born out of travail and suffering and anguish and opposition and martyrdom, and become in time an accepted system. Look at the Methodist church today, an upper middle class institution for people who want a 45-minute service that will release them for the golf course, from a movement that fasted twice in the week by a founder who was up 4 o'clock every morning in his prayer chamber and walked into mobs that were ready to tear him limb from limb with complete boldness and calm because his life was not his own. A single man who stopped the French Revolution from coming to Great Britain and destroying that Anglo-Saxon heritage and soil out of which our own nation was birthed and had come.

One man, 4 o'clock in the prayer prayer, every morning. One man who lived for the glory of God. One man who counseled those who followed him to fast, to deny themselves, to be disciplined.

That's why they were called Methodists. They had a method. And what has that become today? And the assemblies of God and Pentecostalism that has come out of that Methodist assembly.

Institutions, by and large, of a self-perpetuating kind, concerned for the preservation of themselves more than the issue of the glory of God. The powers of the air, therefore, unchallenged, unrecognized, uncontended against, influencing the lives of millions of victims who don't even know that they're being acted upon and denied the essential reality of what this purpose of life is about and are only living for themselves and their gain, their pleasure, their satisfaction, and are on their way to an eternal hell. My God raised up a church whose very being is the wisdom of God, whose very face and voice and posture and gait indicates that there's an eternity that means everything and that this life is the transient and passing thing and that the powers of the air have controverted all of the values and taken the absolute and ultimate things of God and made them to sound cheap and passing and taken the cheap and passing things of football and basketball and sport and music and jazz and all of that nonsense and made that somehow to seem to be ultimate.

It's a controversial value for which people are dying until someone will identify it and blow the whistle, not only by what they say, but what they are together. So do I pray, Lord, blessing for this church, the willingness to bear the kind of humiliation that I've had only small opportunity to taste in these days and to remember that out of the mouth of babes, out of the weak, out of the ones without prestige, with ones without recognition, comes the wisdom of God that stops the mouth of the adversary. I bless this church, Lord.

This is sacrifice. This is suffering. This is humiliation.

This is the cross.

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