

The Cross & The Eternal Purpose of God

What is the Church (Ekklesia) Supposed to Look Like?



TITLE & AUTHOR

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Preface

At the time of this writing – the closing of 2025 – America *seems to be* experiencing a change in its spiritual milieu. The following is what is reported to be taking place:

- “Revivals” taking place on college campuses.¹
- Increased interest in the Bible.²
- Increased interest in spiritual things in the younger generations.³
- The rise of what is called “Cultural Apologetics” – that is, the presenting of Christianity as being “good” for society.⁴

¹ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/a-move-of-god-students-attending-revival-events-100s-baptized.html> and <https://www.awakeamerica.com/revival-news/thousands-of-college-students-respond-to-the-gospel-at-uniteus-clemson-revival>

² https://sotb.americanbible.org/report/?redirect_to=%2Freport%2F®istered=atchriststable@gmail.com

³ <https://www.barna.com/research/spiritual-openness/> and <https://influencemagazine.com/Practice/More-Open-Than-Ever>

⁴ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/value-cultural-apologetics/> and https://hc.edu/articles/what-is-cultural-apologetics/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

- The rise of “Christian Nationalism” as a populist political movement backed by the incumbent political party.⁵
- “The Charlie Kirk Effect”.⁶

I do not doubt that these things are taking place. But at this point in time, I am not certain of the actual fruit or outcomes of that which is taking place. While I believe the Spirit of God is moving, I am not certain as to what Christians (and not-yet Christians) will do with the things of God. Historically, human responses to the moving of God’s Spirit result in a mixture which ranges from fulfilling some of God’s purposes to creating spiritual error in doctrine and practice. What God creates is good. What Humanity does with that which God creates is very often not good. God’s ways are perfect. The way of Humanity is far from perfect.

⁵https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377693515_Conspiracy_Theories_and_Religion_Christian_Nationalism_and_the_Rise_of_North_American_Populism and https://woub.org/2023/02/14/republicans-christian-nationalism-survey/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁶https://www.barna.com/research/impact-charlie-kirk/?utm_source=chatgpt.com and https://breakpoint.org/evaluating-the-kirk-effect-2/?utm_source=chatgpt.com and <https://www.dailystorm.com/news/the-reports-of-the-religious-rights-death-were-greatly-exaggerated>

God's Eternal Purpose

Because of this apparent moving of God's Spirit and having a desire to accurately discern what God is doing, it seems to me that **wisdom would have us be reminded (or informed) of God's Eternal Purpose and "how" God intends to fulfill that purpose.** Our desire should be for the wisdom of God, in order to co-labor **with God**⁷ (and not *against* Him), that we may fulfill our calling in Christ according to God's Eternal Purpose.

How will the Spirit give us this godly wisdom? By being **"taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words"**⁸ – specifically, through the Scripture which He the Spirit has inspired to be recorded – the written words of God.

"⁶Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; ⁷but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our

⁷ 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:13

glory; ⁸**the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood**; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; ⁹but just as it is written: ‘Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the human heart, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.’ ¹⁰ **For to us God revealed them through the Spirit**; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹For who among people knows the thoughts of a person except the spirit of the person that is in him? So also, the thoughts of God no one knows, except the Spirit of God. ¹²**Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.** ¹³We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those **taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.**”

1 Corinthians 2:2, 6-13

Here, from the start, I would like to point out as the above passage states: This is “**a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood.**” *Too often throughout church history, and again today, the Church has adopted a worldly perspective of God’s Kingdom and Purpose.* We must understand the things of God – the moving of His Spirit

toward His **Eternal Purpose** – by the Spirit in accord with His inspired and recorded words.

So, let's look into the Scripture to be reminded (or informed) of **God's Eternal Purpose** and how He intends to fulfill His purpose. We will consider many scripture verses and passages, but the following scriptures will serve as foundational in our discussion, as they identify **God's Eternal Purpose**:

*“When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities [those supernatural forces of evil operating against us], He made a public example of them [exhibiting them as captives in His triumphal procession], having **triumphed over them through the cross**⁹.”* Colossians 2:15 AMP

“that the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose** which He carried out **in Christ** Jesus our Lord.” Ephesians 3:10-11

⁹ “Triumphing over them on it (*thriambeusas autous en autōi*). On the Cross the triumph was won.” Robertson’s Word Pictures. “It” (referring to the cross) is the literal translation. The NET, NIV, KJV, NKJV and Berean Standard Bible have “it” (referring to “the cross”). The Berean Literal Translation, KJV, NKJV, and the International Standard Version translate it as “it”, again referring to the cross. Other translation have “Him” referring to Christ (who is nevertheless a crucified Christ).

What ?

So, what is God’s Eternal Purpose? It is in Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians where we find **God’s Eternal Purpose** revealed. In Ephesians 3:11, we find the phrase “**eternal purpose**”: “This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose** which He carried out *in Christ* Jesus our Lord.”

This verse tells us that **God’s Eternal Purpose** has been “carried out *in Christ*”. The verb¹⁰ is in past tense. As with many other things about the work of Christ on the Cross, it has *already been accomplished* in the spiritual realm and will be *physically fulfilled* in God’s creation. But it is important to note that it has taken place and will take place “**in Christ**”. Everything and everyone involved in it must be “*in Christ*”. This is a definitive feature of “**how**” God accomplishes His **Eternal Purpose**. It will be through Christ and those who are “*in Christ*”. God will not fulfill His **Eternal Purpose** through anything or anyone outside of Christ.

¹⁰ Greek: *poieo*, Strong’s # G4160

But **what** is to be fulfilled? We will see that “what” and “how” are intrinsically connected. Ephesians 3:10 explains: “**that the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places**”.

God’s wisdom is “multifaceted”, meaning manifested in many different ways.¹¹ There aren’t many wisdoms. There is only one wisdom. But like a diamond, it has many facets through which it shines, so to speak. So, although it is multifaceted, God’s wisdom is singular: It exists only “in Christ”. We need to know more specifically what is that wisdom of God which He has placed “in Christ” alone. Scripture specifies it. We’ll get to that quintessential reality shortly.

It is God’s intention “to make known”¹² His wisdom – that is to reveal and or declare His wisdom. The question is “**how**” does He intend to reveal and declare His wisdom?

¹¹ Greek: *polupoikilos*, Strong’s # G4182. One of the facets of God’s wisdom is given in verse 6: “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel”.

¹² Greek: *gnorizo*, Strong’s # G1107.

It is God's intention to make His wisdom known through "the Church which is His body"¹³. The "means" by which God intends to fulfill His **Eternal Purpose is "through the Church" – *not through human government, politics, legislation, or any other social-political-economic-cultural means within the world system*. Quite the contrary, it will be by His Ekklesia¹⁴ – those who have been "called out" of the world system.**

¹³ Ephesians 1:22b-23.

¹⁴ Some thoughts on using the word "Ekklesia": Not everyone identifying with the word "church" is part of the Ecclesia of God. There is only one true Church made up of those who have received the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9-10) - those who "possess the Son". (1 John 5:11-12) However, contrary to what is in vogue today for some, I make no distinction between the Greek word, ekklesia, and its English translation, "church". I use the two words interchangeably. If I use the word "church", I mean the full and accurate biblical meaning of "ekklesia". Simply using the Greek word, ekklesia, in and of itself, helps no one understand the biblical meaning. **The biblical meaning will always require explanation for the unlearned.** Therefore, I think the English words, "church", or "assembly", or "community" are adequate translations. When writing, I sometimes find myself leaning towards using terms like "the people of God", or "the disciples of the kingdom", or "the followers of Christ" - depending on the context. Furthermore, **not identifying as "Church" does not "automatically" make us the "Ekklesia".** If we are going to identify as the "Ekklesia", **there must be the reality of being and living as "called out" and "gathered together" and engaged in matters of the Kingdom.** (it's the latter that is demonstratively lacking today.) Donning the Greek word is duplicitous and inconsistent. If that were the thing to do, why aren't we using Greek words to communicate 100s of other New Covenant truths? Moreover, don't the words "congregation" and "assembly" *also* conjure up images of *people sitting in a building*? Doesn't the term "ekklesia" conjure up the connotation "ecclesiastical" (man-made church systems)? We also have to reckon with Paul's injunction: "Solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers." (2 Timothy 2:14) What do we do with that? I think we are still "missing the mark" and "falling short" with all of this.

And it is God's intention that the Church reveal and declare this wisdom "to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places". While this wisdom acts as a testimony or witness in the whole world, to every nation,¹⁵ it is specifically directed to fallen and rebellious spirit beings¹⁶ which occupy "heavenly"¹⁷ places". The arena in which God's Eternal Purpose is fulfilled is primarily cosmic - not limited to Humanity.

¹⁵ Matthew 24:14, Revelation 14:6.

¹⁶ Greek: *arche*, Strong's # G746, rulers, principalities, and *exousia*, Strong's # G1849, authorities, powers. Cf. Ephesians 6:12.

¹⁷ Greek: *epouranios*, Strong's # G2032, heavenly, celestial

How ?

We now need to be more specific about the definition of the wisdom of God. We also need to be more specific about “how” that wisdom is revealed and declared “to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places”:

This is how the apostle Paul revealed and declared (defined) the wisdom of God:

“¹⁸For **the word of the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is *the power of God.*” 1 Corinthians 1:18

“²³but we preach **Christ crucified**, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*” 1 Corinthians 1:23-24

Paul defined the wisdom of God as the Cross. He also referred to it as “**the multifaceted wisdom of God**”.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ephesians 3:10

Paul went on to say to the Corinthians:

“For I determined to know nothing among you except **Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.** “ 1 Corinthians 2:2

Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament epistles, said he had determined to reveal and declare *only* “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”. **To accurately reveal and declare the wisdom of God, it is all important that what is being revealed and declared is that the Christ of God is a crucified Christ.**

(That last sentence is the heart of this article.)

“¹⁹But (redeemed) with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. ²⁰For **He was foreknown before the foundation of the world** but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.”

1 Peter 1:19-20 (Cf. Revelation 13:8)

Hopefully, the above referenced scriptures help to convince that **the Cross is the wisdom which God intended from before the foundation of the world.**

“When He had *disarmed the rulers and authorities [those supernatural forces of evil operating against us]*, He made a public example of them [exhibiting them as captives in His

triumphal procession], having triumphed over them through the cross¹⁹.” Colossians 2:15 AMP

The scripture above states that it is the Cross which God has chosen as His instrument of choice to deal with evil. The Cross is “how” God has chosen to redeem, not only you and I, but the whole of His creation. The Cross is “how” God plans to fulfill His **Eternal Purpose**. As His people, we need not only to understand and believe the power and wisdom of the Cross, but also to surrender our lives for the Cross to be operational in and through us as His Church (Ekklesia). As I said, the Cross is “how” God will fulfill His **Eternal Purpose**, therefore any other approach, method, or religious activity is not the work of God, but rather human effort according to “the elementary principles of the world”.²⁰

¹⁹ “Triumphing over them on it (*thriambeusas autous en autōi*). On the Cross the triumph was won.” Robertson’s Word Pictures. “It” (referring to the cross) is the literal translation. The NET, NIV, KJV, NKJV and Berean Standard Bible have “it” (referring to “the cross”). The Berean Literal Translation, KJV, NKJV, and the International Standard Version translate it as “it”, again referring to the cross. Other translation have “Him” referring to Christ (who is nevertheless a crucified Christ).

²⁰ Galatians 4:3,9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

Changing Human Laws or Human Hearts?

From this survey of scriptures, should we conclude that it is God's intention to change human laws or change human hearts?

The Old Covenant was about law – God's law. His law was given to the people of God - God's own special possession – a people called out and separated from all the other nations.²¹ Under the Old Covenant, this was the nation of Israel. All the other nations had their own law and were "*a law unto themselves*" as it were.

When the Messiah came, was crucified, buried, and resurrected, the New Covenant was inaugurated. The New Covenant is all about heart change.²² God's law has not changed. The change was that instead of being written on stone, God's law was written on human hearts.²³ *Therefore, should we not conclude that God's intention is to change human hearts not the legislation*

²¹ Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; Psalm 135:4; Malachi 3:17; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9.

²² Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 31:33, 32:39-40; Ezekiel 11:19-20, 36:26-27; Romans 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 3:3, 6; Hebrews 8:10.

²³ 2 Corinthians 3:3, 6.

of human government? An essential aspect of God's Eternal Purpose is to change human hearts, not human legislation.

What & Where is the Kingdom of God Now?

The Kingdom of God is the rule of God's law in the hearts and lives of His people. Since the inauguration of the New Covenant, this kingdom exists in the hearts and spirits of those who have been "born of the Spirit" and have God's law written in their hearts. Jesus made it clear that one cannot see or enter the kingdom without being "born of the Spirit".²⁴ During this age, on this earth, the Kingdom of God exists within the hearts and in the midst of His people – that is, His "blood-bought" special possession – His Ekklesia, those who have been regenerated, called out and separated from the rest of the world's population.²⁵ In the age to come, the new earth will be populated only with God's people living eternally with His law in their hearts and in their midst.

²⁴ John 3:3-7

²⁵ Again, John 3:3-7

THE CROSS

“The Weakness of God”

A Captivating Phrase

“... the **weakness of God** is stronger than mankind”.

1 Corinthians 1:25b

This is, indeed, a captivating phrase penned by Paul - **“the weakness of God”**. The Greek word translated “weakness” is : *asthenes*²⁶, meaning “without strength”. There is a wonderful mystery in the many passages in which Paul speaks of “weakness”: It is **our weakness which we give to God, He takes it and fills it (perfects, completes, finishes it) with His strength.**

²⁶ Strong's # 772

This is *God's modus operandi*²⁷ "from before the foundation of the world" - in "the Lamb that was slain"²⁸, in His choice of Israel,²⁹ in Gideon's company³⁰, and most significantly, in the Cross of Christ - "the wisdom and power of God".³¹ Further, Scripture informs us that now in the calling of the Church – with all of her weakness – God has chosen to "make known (demonstrate) this wisdom to the powers and principalities"³².

God and His Power Dwell in Our Weakness

⁹ "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **power is perfected in weakness.**" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about **my weaknesses**, so that **the power of Christ may dwell in me.**

¹⁰ Therefore I delight in **weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in difficulties, on behalf of Christ**; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

²⁷ A Latin phrase meaning a method or way of operating or working.

²⁸ Revelation 13:8; 1 Peter 1:20

²⁹ Deuteronomy 7:7

³⁰ Judges 7

³¹ 1 Corinthians 1:18, 24, 30

³² Ephesians 3:9-10

The Church is Supposed to Be “Weak” – the Opposite of the Powers and Principalities

²³ “But we preach **Christ crucified**, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God**. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than mankind, and **the weakness of God is stronger than mankind**.²⁶ For consider **your calling, brothers and sisters**, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and **God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong**, ²⁸ and the insignificant things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no human may boast before God. ³⁰ But it is due to Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us **wisdom from God**, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 1:23-31

Political Authority? Supernatural Power?

Jesus was asked: “By what authority (or power) are you doing these things?”³³ Let’s ask that same question: What authority or power did Jesus of Nazareth have? There are two Greek words translated “authority” or “power”: *exousia*,³⁴ usually translated “authority” (appointed), and *dunamis*,³⁵ usually translated “power” (supernatural). The Jews understood these “empowerments” as bestowed by God. How did God “empower” Jesus of Nazareth? What mode of authority or power has God chosen to implement in order to address evil? How does God affect heart change in human beings?

God did not choose to affect change through political authority.

Where in the New Testament can we find Jesus, His apostles, or disciples affecting change in the world through political power? That approach is non-existent

³³ Matthew 21:23; Cf. Mark 11:28; Luke 20:2; John 2:18.

³⁴ Strong’s # G1849

³⁵ Strong’s # G1411

in the New Testament. How is it then that so many today – both conservative and progressive Christians – assume culture wars, involvement in politics, voting, etc. are what God would have us to do? On what scriptural precedent can we base that motivation and activity? What would be the scriptural basis for believing God's New Covenant *modus operandi* is to change governments and legislation through political means? There is no scriptural basis for such motivation and activity for the Church.

Neither did God choose to affect change through supernatural power.

Now that may sound questionable. After all, God is a supernatural Being. Isn't everything He does supernatural and powerful? And Jesus of Nazareth did exercise supernatural power. That is certainly true. But according to the gospels, the primary purpose for God anointing Jesus with supernatural power was to verify that He was the Christ of God.³⁶ His miracles did not forgive people of their sins. The shedding of His blood

³⁶ Matthew 9:6; Luke 11:20; John 20:30-31.

on the cross did that.³⁷ None of His miracles inaugurated the New Covenant. His death on the Cross did that.³⁸ His miracles were signs of the Kingdom, but to see and enter into the Kingdom people still needed to be “born of the Spirit”.³⁹

Yes, Jesus of Nazareth had supernatural power, but we need further insight in order to understand *the very unique power which God employed in Christ to achieve His Eternal Purpose*. The fact is, the Cross had supernatural power; but it was a unique power which accomplished so much more than any of His miracles. It was a supernatural power of cosmic proportions.

The Cross is the Wisdom & Power of God

It was a unique power which the rulers of this age did not understand:

“God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the

³⁷ Hebrews 9:22

³⁸ Hebrews 9:16-17

³⁹ John 3:3-7

wisdom which **none of the rulers of this age has understood**; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

1 Corinthians 2:7-8

We can see from John 18:28-19:16 that Pilate did not understand the nature of the power God the Father had placed upon Jesus and His Cross.

It was a unique power which the Pharisees did not understand⁴⁰, in fact, Jesus' own disciples did not understand it either:

“And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.⁴¹ But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, ‘Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.’ But **they did not understand this statement**, and it was concealed from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement.” Luke 9:43-45⁴²

⁴⁰ Cf. Luke 17:20-21

⁴¹ Jesus had just cast out a demon.

⁴² Cf. Luke 9:54-55 NKJV; Matthew 16:21-23

God chose to affect change through the power of the Cross.⁴³

I have written at length about the power of the Cross in the following articles: [“Seeing the Kingdom Through the Cross”](#), [“The Cross & the Powers of Darkness”](#), and [“The Weakness of God”](#). I have written about [“The Way of the Cross”](#) in the life of the individual believer. But again, in this article, we are investigating “how” God addressed the cosmic problem of evil, and “how” He works in the world with Humanity. At the risk of oversimplification, although I do believe Scripture attests to this: The Cross is the only way God does anything. The truth of that statement lies in this: “God is love”⁴⁴. God’s very nature is self-denying love. Indeed, that is Jesus’ definition of “the cross” – “take up your cross, deny yourself”.⁴⁵ **The Cross is God’s chosen way of representing Himself, and exemplifying His very nature.** *The Cross far exceeds anything represented by political authority or exemplified by supernatural power.*

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 1:24.

⁴⁴ 1 John 4:8 & 16.

⁴⁵ Matthew 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24.

Co-laboring with God

– “In His Image & Likeness”

The apostle Paul referred to ministry as “co-laboring with God”.⁴⁶ To co-labor *with* God (and *not against* God), we must do so in His “image and likeness”.⁴⁷ As His people - “the Church, which is Christ’s Body”,⁴⁸ His witnesses, His co-workers – it is imperative we understand that, **as God’s representatives on this earth, we must represent the Cross of Christ.**⁴⁹ Both Jesus and His apostles enjoin us to continue on in the Way of the Cross:

Jesus: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23, Cf. Luke 14:27; Matthew 10:38, 16:24; Mark 8:34)

Paul: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I do my share on behalf of His body,

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

⁴⁷ Genesis 1:26

⁴⁸ Ephesians 1:22b-23

⁴⁹ Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." (Colossians 1:24)

Peter: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." (1 Peter 2:21)

Is this to say our suffering – or even if we were crucified – would have the power to save people? Of course, not. "I, only I, am the LORD, And there is no savior besides Me."⁵⁰ "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among mankind by which we must be saved."⁵¹ "No man can by any means redeem his brother. Or give to God a ransom for him."⁵²

However, as the scriptures cited above indicate, God – through Paul – does speak of our "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"⁵³ – which is echoed by what Peter said: "For you have been called for this

⁵⁰ Isaiah 43:11

⁵¹ Acts 4:12

⁵² Psalm 49:7

⁵³ Colossians 1:24. This, of course, does not mean that Christ's work on the cross was insufficient. The Greek word, *husterema*, Strong's # G5303, translated as "lacking" is not an adjective. It is a noun, meaning "that which is to be filled up". In other words, it is God's intention that the sufferings of Christ continue on in "the Church, which is His body". This is "the fellowship (participation in) His sufferings." (Philippians 3:10)

purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.”⁵⁴ The Holy Spirit – who inspired the apostles’ writing – is telling us that an essential aspect of God’s **Eternal Purpose** is to reveal Himself, His Savior, His Christ – through His body, the Church.⁵⁵

What is the Church Supposed to Look Like?

If we are to co-labor with Christ⁵⁶ – “in His image and likeness” – then what is the Church supposed to look like? I believe the Church is supposed to look like what Jesus of Nazareth looked like as He walked amidst Humanity – on this earth, during this age. As representatives of God and His Kingdom, and as “ambassadors of Christ”,⁵⁷ “the Church, which is His body”⁵⁸ is supposed to look like Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said, “The one who has seen Me has seen the Father.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ 1 Peter 2:21

⁵⁵ Cf. Ephesians 3:10

⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:9

⁵⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:20

⁵⁸ Ephesians 1:22b-23

⁵⁹ John 14:9

Let's ask ourselves the question again: What then is "the image and likeness"⁶⁰ of God for the Church? As ambassadors of Christ, what is the Church supposed to look like?

Revelation 1:12-16 gives a description of the Risen Christ. Some say that our identity with Christ is with the Risen Christ, because, as they say, "*Christ is no longer on the cross*". While that is true, I think for a more comprehensive Christology we need to identify with **both** Jesus of Nazareth in His humanity, as well as the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

Certainly, in his various epistles, the apostle Paul delineates truths of being "in Christ" – that is, "*who you are in Christ*" - "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ".⁶¹ While we **do** possess these "spiritual blessings" now, in fact, these apply to our spirit man – our "inner man".⁶² But we have **both** an "inner man" and an "outer man".⁶³ And while we are

⁶⁰ Genesis 1:26

⁶¹ Ephesians 1:3

⁶² Romans 7:22, Ephesians 3:16, and 1 Peter 3:4.

⁶³ 2 Corinthians 4:16

still in the flesh, we do well to *also* identify with Christ as “in the days of His flesh” – “in the days of His humanity”⁶⁴ – namely with Jesus of Nazareth of the gospels accounts.

This is a more comprehensive Christology – one which affords an effective witness to those who do not yet know the Risen Christ. Could this be the meaning of Hosea's phrase "I have drawn you with cords of a man"?⁶⁵ God's purpose in the Incarnation was that Christ identified with Humanity so that Humanity could identify with Christ. And it is in Jesus of Nazareth of the gospels that we see the humanity of Christ.

Therefore, I offer this: “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” (Romans 8:29) The “image of His son” is two-fold: In our bodies - in this age, on this earth – we are conformed to the image of Jesus of Nazareth – the “Suffering Servant”. While, in our

⁶⁴ Hebrews 5:7 NASB

⁶⁵ Hosea 11:4

regenerated spirits, “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:6) Again, based on the writings of Paul and Peter⁶⁶, I believe that “the Church, which is His body”⁶⁷ - on this earth, during this age - is to look like Jesus of Nazareth – the Suffering Servant.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Colossians 1:24 and 1 Peter 2:21

⁶⁷ Ephesians 1:22b-23

⁶⁸ For further reading on the subject of *the Church and Weakness*, I recommend two books by Marva Dawn: “*Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God*” and “*Joy in Our Weakness: A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation*”

“Learn from Me”

We become conformed to “His image and likeness” by “learning” from Jesus.

“**Come to Me**, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take My yoke upon you and **learn from Me**, for I am **gentle and humble in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light.”

Matthew 11:25, 28-30

Regarding the Way of the Cross, Jesus is the Perfect Pattern for us. Thus, as the Pattern Son, He invites us to “**Learn from Me**.” How do we *learn* from Jesus? I believe the apostle has given us a wonderful key to spiritual change and transformation:

“ ... beholding the glory of the Lord (“in the face of Jesus Christ”⁶⁹), (we) are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18-19 ESV

⁶⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:6

It should always be our desire and goal to “see Jesus”⁷⁰ in every circumstance or situation, because receiving a revelation of Jesus has the spiritual power to transform us into “His image and likeness” - “from one degree of glory to another”. It’s a process; and it is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit.

For this article, I’ve chosen just three aspects of “the image of His Son”⁷¹ from which we can “behold” and “learn” the Way of the Cross and “the weakness of God”: *A Suffering Servant*, *A Disciplined Son*, and *A Man of Sorrows*.

A Suffering Servant *The Weakness of the Cross*

“Looking away from all that will distract us and **focusing our eyes on Jesus**, who is **the Author and Perfecter of faith** [the first incentive for our belief and the One who brings our faith to maturity], who for the joy [of accomplishing the goal] set before Him **endured the cross.**” Hebrews 12:2-3 AMP

⁷⁰ John 12:21

⁷¹ Romans 8:29

When “looking to Jesus the Author and Perfecter of faith”, it is essential to understand that the Christ of God, who is our Pattern, is a **Crucified Christ**.⁷² He modeled **suffering** for us. It may seem a bit strange to list **suffering** right at the top of the many aspects of Christ’s Pattern; but, if our model is not the **Crucified Christ**, we are involved with something other than biblical Christianity. Unfortunately, this is quite common. The apostle Paul warned that there is “another Jesus”, a “different spirit”, and a “different gospel”.⁷³ A “different gospel” introduces a different kind of “christianity”. A “different spirit” births a different kind of “christian”. “Another Jesus” presents a different image to be conformed to. The Christ of God, who was prophesied⁷⁴, but stumbled over⁷⁵, was a **Crucified Christ**.

The scope of this article cannot include a full treatment of **The Way of the Cross** or **A Theology of Suffering**, but

⁷² This is not to say that we worship a Christ who is still on the cross, for He conquered death, was resurrected and ascended, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

⁷³ 2 Corinthians 11:4

⁷⁴ Isaiah 53:1-12

⁷⁵ Isaiah 8:14; Cf. Romans 9:32-33; 1 Peter 2:8.

I have written of these things in detail in other articles.⁷⁶ A Theology of Suffering and The Way of the Cross are matters which are sorely absent in contemporary Christianity, and need to be restored in order to rectify our partial image of Christ and inaccurate concepts of Christianity.

“To be my disciple, you must **deny yourself** and take up your **cross** daily and **follow Me.**”⁷⁷

Here, Jesus gives us His definition of “His cross” and “your cross”: namely, **self-denial - for the glory of God**⁷⁸. He also specifies that a primary aspect of His image is *self-denying love*. In past generations, much was written on *self-denial* and *the surrendered life*. But, again, these topics are conspicuously absent in

⁷⁶ [The Way of the Cross, Seeing the Kingdom Through the Cross, The God-Centered Life, and The Cross & the Powers of Darkness.](#)

⁷⁷ Luke 9:23; Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Cf. Luke 14:27; Matthew 10:38; Hebrews 13:13.

⁷⁸ Cf. John 17:1-5. It must be made clear that Christ’s self-denial was *only* for the glory of God. There were times when Jesus did not allow Himself to be subjected to suffering because it was not in the will of God. Certainly, Satan is not to receive glory in our suffering. And, most importantly, we are not to fall into the insidious trap of glorifying self through self-denial. Viz. “I am super-spiritual because I’ve suffered so much for Jesus, et. al.”

contemporary Christianity.⁷⁹ In any case, Jesus made it clear that this is what it means to “follow Him” – that is, to be His disciple and follow His Pattern in suffering.

²¹ “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, **leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.**” 1 Peter 2:21

This is the “example” Jesus Christ left for us: **The Way of the Cross** – that is, *self-denying love for the glory of God*. Because of the fallen nature of the self, self “suffers” when it is denied. Yet, as we are conformed more and more to the image of Christ, *the transformed self*⁸⁰ experiences the blessing of the love of God flowing through the soul.

⁷⁹ Recommended Reading: My articles – [Brokenness](#); [Transformation of Self](#); [The Way of the Cross](#).

I can fully recommend J. Sidlow Baxter’s treatment of these things in his books: “A New Call to Holiness”, “His Deeper Work in Us”, and “Our High Calling”. (These three titles have been combined in one volume entitled “Christian Holiness Restudied and Restated”.) But I also can recommend: “The Surrendered Life” by James H. McConkey; “Born Crucified” by L.E. Maxwell; “Life Out of Death” by Jesse Penn Lewis; “The Crucified Life” by A.W. Tozer, and daily devotionals: “My Utmost for His Highest” by Oswald Chambers and “Streams in the Desert” by L.B. Cowman.

⁸⁰ In my article, [Transformation of Self](#), I endeavor to make the case for *transformation of self*, rather than “crucifixion of self” or “death of self” type language and perspectives. J. Sidlow Baxter also makes this distinction in his “Christian Holiness Restudied and Restated”.

“In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. **Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.**” Hebrews 5:7-8

In a manner of speaking, Jesus was the very first Christian – He is *the Author and Perfecter of faith* – our **Example – our Pattern**, therefore, **suffering** is to be considered an integral component of the normal Christian life. The Father saw fit for the Son to *learn and grow through suffering*. Can we expect to *learn and grow spiritually* without **suffering**? The spiritual truth that Jesus suffered *for us* in no way precludes **suffering** from the lives of the redeemed. Quite the opposite: Peter said, “You have been **called for this purpose...**”. (1 Peter 1:21) But what specific aspects of **suffering** are these verses referring to? Let’s look at what the writer to the Hebrews had to say about this:

“**He endured the cross disregarding the shame** and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God [revealing His deity, His authority, and the completion of His

work]. Just consider and meditate on Him who **endured from sinners such bitter hostility against Himself** [consider it all in comparison with your trials], so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Hebrews 12:2b-3 AMP

So, we see that just one aspect of the suffering Jesus modeled for us in His *self-denying love for the glory of God* included being **sinned against by sinners** in various ways. Who are the “sinners” being referring to? All the unregenerated and unredeemed – but also all the regenerated and redeemed sinners as well, for we Christians abuse Christ’s grace towards us and also sin against one another, even as did the first century disciples of Christ. Now, let’s return to the passage in Peter’s epistle:

“He committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, **He uttered no threats but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.**”

1 Peter 1:22-23

Again, this is a picture of a kind of suffering: namely, **the spiritual discipline of silence when being reviled.**

The inability to keep silent when being reviled often reveals the fact that we feel we must retaliate verbally, because we don't have faith that God can speak on our behalf. However, **Jesus kept silent** –

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet **He did not open His mouth**; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is **silent** before its shearers, so **He did not open His mouth.**” Isaiah 53:7⁸¹

A Disciplined Son

The Cross and The Discipline of the Lord”

⁴ “You have not yet struggled to the point of shedding blood in your **striving against sin**; ⁵ and you have forgotten the divine word of encouragement which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not make light of **the discipline of the Lord**, and do not lose heart and give up when you are **corrected by Him.**”

Hebrews 12:4-11 AMP

Here, the writer to the Hebrews is discussing “**the discipline of the Lord**”. We need to understand what

⁸¹ Also: Matthew 26:63; 27:12; Mark 14:51; 15:5; Luke 23:9.

that is and why that is. “Discipline” is *not* condemnation, nor is it even punishment. If we feel condemned or punished, then the one at work is Satan, our Adversary, and not the Lord, our Father. We need to know the difference.

But what then is “discipline”? The Greek word⁸² used here has to do with “*the training of a child, including instruction ... correction that regulates character*”⁸³. “The discipline of the Lord” includes these means: “training”, “instruction”, and “correction”. These take place in the context of “striving against sin”. **That is the nature and the purpose of the discipline - “training”, “instruction”, and “correction” for the purpose of growing in Christlikeness.**⁸⁴ This is the path of discipleship which Jesus modeled for us.

⁸² Greek: *paideia*, Strong’s # 3809

⁸³ W.E. Vine. Cf. Ephesians 6:4.

⁸⁴ It must be noted that the “striving against sin” going “to the point of shedding blood” is a reference to Jesus going to the cross; yet the same writer also said that Jesus was “without sin”. (Hebrews 4:5; Cf. 1 Peter 2:22) So, the cross (self-denying love) is God’s method for dealing with sin – our sin (not Jesus’).

“For the Lord disciplines and corrects those whom He loves, and He punishes⁸⁵ every son whom He receives and welcomes [to His heart]. ⁷You must submit to [correction for the purpose of] discipline; God is dealing with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸Now if you are exempt from correction and without discipline, in which all [of God’s children] share, then you are illegitimate children and not sons [at all]. ⁹Moreover, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we submitted and respected them [for training us]; shall we not much more willingly submit to the Father of spirits, and live [by learning from His discipline]?

¹⁰For our earthly fathers disciplined us for only a short time as seemed best to them; but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹For the time being, no discipline brings joy but seems sad and painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness [right standing with God and a lifestyle and attitude that seeks conformity to God’s will and purpose].”

Hebrews 12:6-11 AMP

⁸⁵ Greek: *mastigoo*, Strong’s # 3148, means to whip - literally or figuratively – admittedly the figurative sense is less problematic. But I believe that even physical “whippings” in our lives (e.g. negative medical, or financial, or relational developments in our lives) are not literally from the hand of God (Cf. Proverbs 3:12), but rather are the result of our choices and their consequences and/or the activity of our Adversary, Satan, which God allows and utilizes for our discipline. (Job 1:11-12; 2:5-6)

This passage, which is self-explanatory, paints a picture of Jesus as *a Son walking under the discipline of His Father*. Discipline for the purpose of training, instruction, and correction is something which typified Jesus' relationship with His Father – the Pattern provided by Jesus as the Son of God. But in much of contemporary Christianity the Christian's relationship with God is too often typified by all the physical and emotional "blessings" the child can receive from the Father. It is no wonder that we have so few Christians whom we would refer to as being truly "Christ-like". Also contained in this passage from Hebrews are two other traits typifying disciples who would truly reflect Christ-likeness – namely, Jesus' "**respect**" for and "**submission**" to the Father. Jesus Himself alluded to these traits as exemplifying *the necessary attitude and posture for walking with the Father*.

"So, Jesus answered them by saying, "I assure you and most solemnly say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself [of His own accord], unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever things the Father does, the Son[in His turn] also does in

the same way.... I can do nothing on my own initiative or authority. Just as I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just (fair, righteous, unbiased), because I do not seek My own will, but only the will of Him who sent Me."

John 5:19 & 30 AMP

Jesus walked with the utmost “**respect**” for and “**submission**” to the Father. He learned⁸⁶ to only speak what the Father is speaking and only do what the Father is doing. This is a spiritual discipline and skill which must be *learned* – in order to **hear and see what God is saying and doing, and to speak and act in accord with His Spirit**. To walk in this way shows “**respect**” for and “**submission**” to God, because it demonstrates a belief that *what God has to say and do is much more important than what we think we should say and do.*

Actually, the correct term for such a demeanor is the word “**meekness**”. “**Meekness**” includes two other character traits: “*humility*”(residing inwardly) and “*gentleness*”(expressed outwardly). **Meekness** is “*the*

⁸⁶ Hebrews 5:8 says He learned it through suffering.

gentle, quiet spirit of selfless devotion to God that is also (sometimes) translated ‘gentleness’. ‘Meekness’ is the very antithesis of arrogant pride.”⁸⁷ But key to understanding the whole concept of the “meekness” of Jesus is that “it consists not in his outward behavior only; nor yet in his relations to his fellowmen, as little in his mere natural disposition. Rather, it is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercise of it are first and chiefly towards God. It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore, without disputing or resisting; it is closely linked with ‘humility’ and follows directly upon it.... It is only the humble heart which is also the meek, and which, as such, does not fight against God or struggle and contend with Him.”⁸⁸

Inward “meekness” and “humility” towards God will naturally manifest outwardly in “gentleness” towards others. It is the same as, truly loving God results in loving others also. Now, while on a number of occasions, Jesus may not have been “gentle” in dealing with the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus was always “meek” toward His Father.

⁸⁷ *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Stephen D. Renn

⁸⁸ *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, W.E. Vine.

A Man of Sorrows

The Cross and “Being Acquainted with Grief”

¹“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ²For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. ³He was despised and forsaken of men, **a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief**; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him⁸⁹.”

Isaiah 53:1-3

⁸⁹ A thought on the phrase, “we did not esteem him”: The Father, through the working of the Holy Spirit, reveals Christ, thus drawing those who are lost to come to Himself through Jesus. (John 5:37-38; 6:37, 44, 65) The process is indeed both a mystery and unique in each individual’s life. Having said that, with regards to the idea of the Lord using our life and testimony in this process of drawing others to Christ: 1) We need to be Christ-like. 2) But, at the same time, authentic Christlikeness never has and never will be “attractive” to the world. I believe it would be accurate to say that throughout church history, whenever it has been “popular” to be a Christian, it is because Christians had become “worldly”. Jesus – and therefore, His authentic disciples – will be generally **despised, forsaken, and not esteemed by the world** simply because “the love of the Father is not in them (those in the world), and they do not know Him”. (1 John 2:15; 3:1; 5:1) Never-the-less, the Father *does* draw people to Himself through His word and His Spirit in a sovereign process involving conviction, repentance, and faith. And He *does* utilize in this most intriguing process the life and testimony of those who are authentically Christlike. (See my article, [The Drawing of the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Conversion-Regeneration Process.](#)

Isaiah 53 in its entirety is a prophecy of what the coming Messiah would look like. I've intentionally referenced just the first three verses. Verses 4 through 12 speak of His messianic role, which happened to play out in a way that was diametrically the opposite of the Rome-conquering political redeemer the Jews expected. These verses describe His work of redemption, which only He, the Godman could accomplish on our behalf. But verses 1 through 3 speak of **Jesus in His humanity as Jesus of Nazareth** - a description we can identify with and is an Example for us to follow.

¹“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ²For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has **no stately form or majesty** that we should look upon Him, **nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.**” Isaiah 53:1-2

Most of the Jews waiting for the Messiah, even those who “searched the scriptures”, failed to see that they testified of Jesus of Nazareth⁹⁰. Why did they not

⁹⁰ John 5:39-47

recognize Him when He came? He just didn't look like their concept of the Messiah – “**He had no stately form or majesty that (they) we should look upon Him, nor appearance that (they) should be attracted to Him**”. They didn't accept Him as the Messiah - instead He was to them “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”⁹¹. I believe Jesus addressed this a number of times, but maybe this was the first time – when He spoke to the crowds about John the Baptist:

⁷ “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! ⁹ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way before You.’”

Matthew 11:7-10

Jesus was speaking specifically about John the Baptist, but I believe what He said applies to all of us who would be “**His messenger**” to “**prepare the way of the Lord**”. Would we be surprised to find out what God thinks His

⁹¹ Isaiah 8:14, 1 Peter 2:8

representative messengers should look like? What do we think a “strong Christian” or “overcomer”⁹² should look like? It’s grievous, indeed, when we see “pastors” and other “ministers” who are proud, arrogant and self-absorbed, for they reflect the opposite of Christlikeness. They falsely represent the Lord. But we can say the same about all Christians who haven’t learned from Jesus His **gentleness and humbleness of heart**.⁹³ Their “jealousy, selfish ambition and arrogance also lie against the truth”⁹⁴.

So, what does Christ “look like”? The triumphant, risen Lord Jesus is an awesome sight “with eyes like a flame of fire, feet like burnished bronze, a voice like the sound of many waters, a mouth with a sharp two-edged sword, and a face like the sun shining in its strength”⁹⁵. But it is **the gentle, humble Jesus in His earthly humanity as Jesus of Nazareth** which will be uniquely “attractive” in the vainglorious world in which we live. Indeed, those who do not know Him as the

⁹² 1 John 2:13-14, 5:4; Revelation 2:7, 17,26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 21:7. Cf. Romans 12:21.

⁹³ Matthew 11:29

⁹⁴ James 3:14

⁹⁵ Cf. Revelation 1:12-16

Lord of lords and the King of kings *are looking for a Jesus they can relate to in their humanity.* That is exactly why He was incarnated in the way He is described by Isaiah.⁹⁶

“Let Christ himself be your example as to what your attitude should be. For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God’s equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal.” Philippians 2:5-8⁹⁷

So, again, what does Christ of God “look like” on this earth, during this age?

³ “He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” Isaiah 53:3

⁹⁶ Viz. Isaiah 53:1-3

⁹⁷ J.B. Phillips *New Testament in Modern English*

Isaiah described Jesus, our Example and Pattern, as “**A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief**”. This was one of the marks by which Israel was to know her Messiah – “**A Man of Sorrows**”. Sorrow and grief characterized Jesus’ life on earth. He was familiar with – intimate with – **sorrow and grief**. He knew it personally⁹⁸, and He knew it in others⁹⁹.

This characteristic of being “**acquainted with grief and sorrow**” speaks first and foremost of *Christ’s fellowship*¹⁰⁰ with *Fallen Humanity*. Jesus was intimately acquainted with the sorrow and grief of the **human condition**. Kings and lords, and the rich and powerful of the earth insulate themselves from humanity’s woes. In fact, we all attempt to do the same. But Jesus *shared in* and *partnered with* and *participated in* the fallen human condition. He was without sin, yet He ultimately became the Sin-bearer and Scapegoat of

⁹⁸ He suffered rejection and unrequited love (John 1:10-11). He endured the “hostility of sinners against Himself” (Hebrews 12:3). He was betrayed and abandoned by His own disciples (Matthew 26:47-75) and experienced the sense of being forsaken by His Father (Matthew 27:46).

⁹⁹ John 11:35; Luke 19:41

¹⁰⁰ The Greek word, *koinonia*, Strong’s # 2842, generally translated “fellowship” in the verb form, *kononeo*, Strong’s # 2841, means to “share in”, “partner with”, and “participate in”.

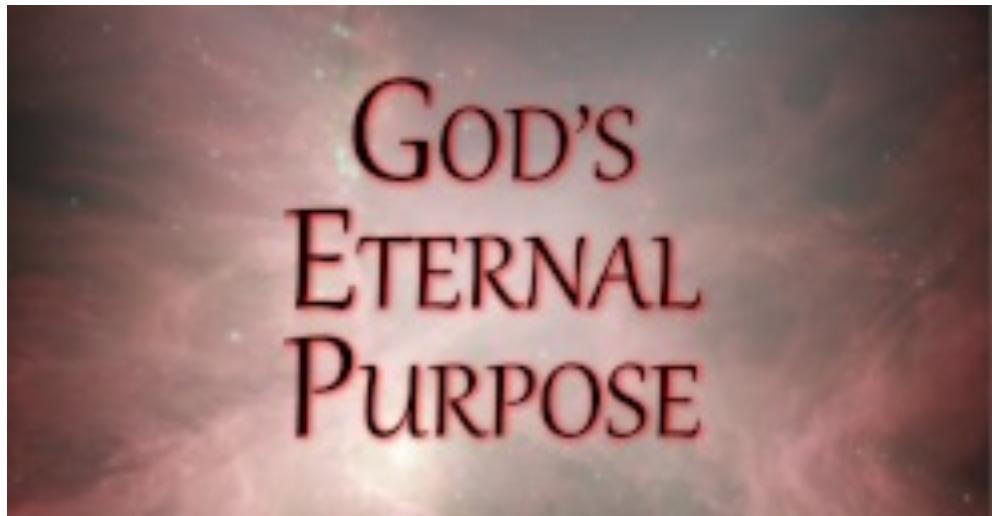
humanity on the Cross. This **identification with the human condition** when he was lifted up upon the cross is actually **the power of attraction** by which He “**draws all men to Himself**”.¹⁰¹

In this also, He is our *Example, the Pattern* for our relationship with God and with Humanity, and for living life in the New Covenant. **This is what the Church is supposed to look like**, “for as He is, so also are we in this world”¹⁰² – “for we realize that our life in this world is actually his life lived in us”. 1 John 4:17¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ John 12:32-33

¹⁰² 1 John 4:17

¹⁰³ J.B. Phillips *New Testament in Modern English*



The Commission for the Ekklesia

“⁹ To enlighten all people as to what the plan of the mystery is which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; ¹⁰ so that the multifaceted wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.¹⁰⁴
¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹⁰⁵

Ephesians 3:9-11

¹⁰⁴ NKJV: “the principalities and powers in the heavenly places”. Cf. Ephesians 6:12 NASB: “the rulers, the powers, the world forces of this darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”.

¹⁰⁵ The tense of the Greek verb, *gnorizo*, is passive tense. i.e. The subject of the sentence, “the multifaceted wisdom of God”, receives the action, “to make known”, (Greek) *dia*, “by”, of “through” (the agency of) “the Church”, “to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”. The issues at hand are: What is “the multifaceted wisdom of God”, and how is the Church to “make (it) known”?

This passage tells us that since eternity past, God has had **an Eternal Purpose for the Church (the Ekklesia)**. It tells us that He created all things with an intention, and that intention was to create a Church which would now demonstrate His wisdom to “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”.¹⁰⁶ Many might respond to this commission with “binding and loosing”¹⁰⁷ and “reviling angelic majesties”¹⁰⁸, which all sounds quite courageous; but **the real power is in surrender.**

The Way of the Cross

In considering how the Church is to fulfill this commission, firstly we need to remember that **God’s Eternal Purpose is accomplished in Christ**. As we have discussed, the Church, therefore, as the Body of Christ, should be “in His image and likeness”. Again, the apostle Peter points out that Jesus gave us “an example for us to follow in His steps”.¹⁰⁹ Jesus set an

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Ephesians 6:12: “the rulers, the powers, the world forces of this darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 18:15-18

¹⁰⁸ Jude 8-10

¹⁰⁹ 1 Peter 2:21

example for us by **denying His will for the sake of the Father.**¹¹⁰ Secondly, we must understand how God ordained for Jesus to accomplish this commission. The Scripture is very clear that it was accomplished through **The Way of the Cross - self-denying obedience for God's sake.**

Jesus, in fact, commissioned us to walk the same way - The Way of the Cross. As we have seen, it is recorded a number of times in the Gospels: “Deny your self, take up your cross daily, and follow Me.”¹¹¹ **The commission, which will disarm** “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”, **make a public spectacle of** “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”, **triumph over** “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” – **punish the disobedience of** “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”¹¹² - **is that the Church make known** – that is, demonstrate - **the self-denying obedience of The Cross.** The Way of the Cross, as defined by Jesus Himself, is to **deny your self**

¹¹⁰ Matthew 26:39; Matthew 16:21-23

¹¹¹ Matthew 16:24, Cf. 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; Cf. John 12:25-26

¹¹² Colossians 2:15 and 2 Corinthians 10:6

for God's sake. Every act of self-denying obedience for the sake of God is a *restatement* of the Cross of Christ. When The Cross is *restated* in this way, a spiritual, legal and moral power is released, and "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" must bow the knee to the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.¹¹³ The Cross is a demonstration of the self-denying love nature of God Himself. Christ demonstrated this on His cross at Calvary. **When the Body of Christ, the Church, rises above self-preservation to a self-denying obedience in demonstration of The Cross, God will be finished with "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places", and they will be condemned to their eternal punishment.**¹¹⁴

For us to rise up to this commission, we must free ourselves from the mold of "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places". We must, by growing in faith, be set free of intimidation and fear regarding the security of our physical lives and finances – be set free of manipulation and seduction regarding our personal comfort and happiness.

¹¹³ Acts 5:30-31

¹¹⁴ That is: complete obedience punishes all disobedience. 2 Corinthians 10:6

To be free of “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”, we will need to grow in our faith – namely, grow in our dependency on God. But we will also need to be free of sin. While the warfare involves the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, **the specific battlefield for which we human beings are responsible is the battlefield of our own Flesh.** The various New Age - type philosophies and religions speak in terms of “positive and negative energy”, recognizing neither God nor “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” of the Scriptures. But the Scriptures speak in terms of “sin” and “righteousness”. “The rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” feed off the sins of human beings – we empower them with our sin. When we act with righteousness – when we obey God, denying ourselves for His sake, like Christ, “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” are disarmed, are made a public spectacle, and triumphed over by the wisdom and power of the Cross.

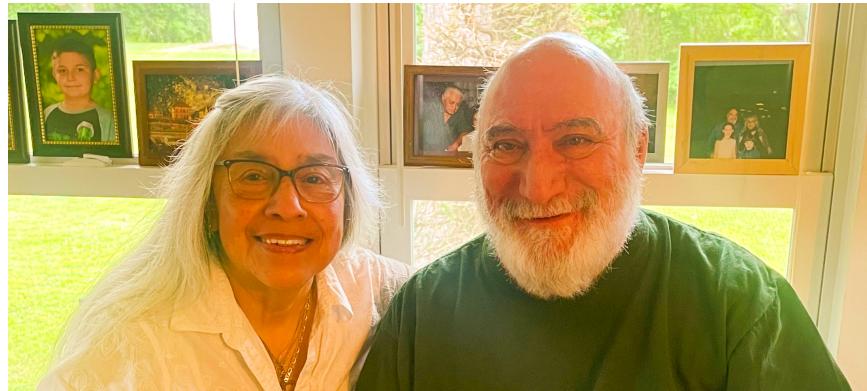
I want to make clear that this spiritual power is not human – it is not ours. But our self-denying obedience *restates* and *releases* the wisdom and power of the Cross of Christ. The power that is exercised is something legal – it is moral power. These words are inadequate; but the power that is released is something of the very nature of God Himself which overcomes all evil by the purity of its goodness.

Postscript

So, with the apparent change in the spiritual milieu in America at the closing of 2025, as evidenced by reports of revivals, increased interest in the Bible and spiritual things in the younger generations, as well as the trend in “Cultural Apologetics” and the influence of “Christian Nationalism”, hopefully this article has served as a reminder of **God’s Eternal Purpose for the Church (the Ekklesia)**, and particularly the nature of, and the way in which, He intends to fulfill His **Eternal Purpose** – namely, through the Cross of Christ being *restated through the Church, which is His body*” – *the Ekklesia* – to “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Cf. Ephesians 6:12: “the rulers, the powers, the world forces of this darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”.

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Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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