

God's Big Agenda

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God's Agenda and Jesus

I often ask seminary and Bible school students: "Why did Jesus shed His blood?" One after another, students say, "He shed his blood to save our souls."

"Yes," I answer, "that's right. But why else did He shed his blood?"

"He shed His blood so we could be redeemed, and when we die we can go to heaven and have eternal life."

"Yes," I answer again, "that's right, but why else did Jesus shed His blood?"

They are focused on the spiritual aspect of God's redemptive purpose. They often have no other answer. We then look at a passage in Colossians 1. Time after time, the students express great surprise at the answer. Like the students, let's look at Colossians 1:15-20, counting how many times the word "all" appears in this amazing narrative:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (emphasis added).¹

In the New International Version, "*all*" appears six times and "*everything*" appears once.

Seven times, this passage reminds us that God's agenda is as big as "*all creation*." Paul was making a point! Jesus' blood was shed for the restoration of "*all things*." Why? "*All things*" were broken in the Fall. God loves His creation, and He wants "*all things*" reconciled to Himself!

Jesus has the same agenda as His Father. This should not surprise us. The Bible says that Jesus is "*the image of the invisible God*"² and "*the exact representation of his being*."³ As we look at Christ, we see God in human form.⁴ There's more! Scripture tells us that "*God was pleased to*

¹ Colossians 1:15-20

² Colossians 1:15

³ Hebrews 1:3a

⁴ This truth is also affirmed in John 1:1 and Colossians 2:9.

*have all his fullness dwell in him.*⁵ Since He is the exact image of God and God's fullness dwells in Him, Jesus' agenda is the same as His Father's. It includes the spiritual regeneration of mankind - *and the reconciliation of "all things."*

Wonderful things happen when churches respond to God's larger agenda! However, far too few churches equip their people to restore "*all things*." Some concentrate on spiritual salvation, where restoration *begins*. Others concentrate on social and physical reform, to the neglect of spiritual regeneration. But the church must equip its people to represent God's whole agenda, to bring "*all creation*" under the Lordship of Christ.

This may seem like a huge task, but God has placed all believers in spheres they can influence - in their marriages, families, homes, neighborhoods, schools, work sites, offices, farms, marketplaces, friendships, common interest groups, societies, governments, and environments. The church must equip and encourage its people to impact their own spheres of influence and cooperate with God's big purpose in the world - the restoration of all things. When a church disciples with an "*all things*" understanding, it equips its people to bring their spheres of influence under the Lordship of Christ.

God's All-Encompassing Love

Scripture helps us catch a glimpse of God's BIG agenda. This agenda includes the healing and restoration of all things that have been broken. It includes the physical - the redemption of the creation. It includes the social - the healing of the societal ills of our lands. It includes the spiritual - the personal redemption of our spirits. In short, it includes the redemption of all! The brokenness from the Fall was comprehensive - and so is God's plan to redeem all that was broken.

The Bible is clear that God not only loves the *people* He created, but His agenda includes the healing of *all creation*. God's now-broken creation will one day be liberated from its bondage, and this liberation will be tied to the "glorious freedom" of the children of God.⁶

We can see God's broad intentions throughout Scripture as we read familiar passages in light of God's broad agenda. Let me give an example. Even one of the dearest passages to Christians offers potentially new insights:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*⁷

In this passage, *kosmos* is the Greek word used for "world." Sometimes in Scripture, *kosmos* means "earth" or "the created world." Other times, it can be interpreted as "people."⁸ Our usual interpretation of John 3:16 is that "God so loves the people of the world" that He sent Jesus, so

⁵ Colossians 1: 19

⁶ Romans 8:19-20

⁷ John 3:16

⁸ Earth/created world: Matthew 13:35; John 21:25; Acts 17:24; Romans 1:20; Hebrews 4:3; Hebrews 9:26. *Kosmos* also appears in Matthew 5:14; John 1:9,10,29; John 4:42; and passages in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 1 John. It is interesting to note that John could have written that God so loved the *anthropos* (people), but did not.

the people of the world could believe in Him and have eternal life. Clearly, only people can choose to believe and have eternal life. Thus, God so loves the kosmos - the people of the world - that He provided a Savior, and the people who come to Him become children of God.

I believe this passage may also be telling us that God loved the kosmos - all creation - so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to reconcile all things by His sacrifice on the cross.⁹

People are a significant part of His creation. Because of His love, He has now assigned the *kosmos* (His beloved children) a role in the restoration of the *kosmos* (His beloved creation). Because we have been loved and restored, we have a role in liberating creation from its brokenness. The Apostle Paul concurred. He wrote that the entire “*creation waits in eager expectation for the Sons of God to be revealed.*”¹⁰ The creation is eagerly waiting for us to mature in Christ, so we will increasingly manage His creation according to His intentions.

God knows how we ought to live our lives. He wants His intentions, His will, and His laws obeyed at all levels on earth – now - as they are in heaven. Why? He loves us and all creation. He knows that we and the rest of creation will flourish to the degree that His will, His intentions, and His purposes are fulfilled. We, His beloved people, can again exercise our roles as vice-regents of all of His creation. We can once again steward it to reflect God's goodness and glory.

Wholistic Ministry

God's agenda to restore *all things* is addressed by what is known as "wholistic ministry." Let me define and illustrate this:

- Wholistic ministry is based on the whole Gospel for our whole lives. It ministers to the whole person and the whole of God's creation, based on the whole commission and God's whole agenda.¹¹ It reflects God's desire for wholeness, the opposite of brokenness. For these reasons, I choose to spell the word with a "w" - "wholistic" - rather than "holistic."
- Wholistic ministry looks to God and the application of biblical truth to transform lives, churches, communities, and nations.
- Wholistic ministry reflects God's care for whole persons - for their spiritual, physical, social, and wisdom needs.
- Wholistic ministry is a lifestyle of obedience and love, based on Jesus' Great Commandment to love God and neighbor.
- It is the responsibility of all local churches and all individual believers.

⁹ Colossians 1:20

¹⁰ Romans 8:19

¹¹ Disciple Nations Alliance, "Regaining Biblical Wholism," in Wholistic Ministry course, Internet, www.disciplenations.org.

In Conclusion

Certainly, God's agenda is broad! The Psalmist wrote: "*The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made,*"¹² Yes, God's concern covers all creation. It clearly includes the spiritual salvation of those who are dead in sin. Yet, when individual Christians and local churches *expand* their concern and ministry beyond the spiritual, they reflect the Good News of God's intentions to reconcile *all* that was broken in the Fall. God's agenda will not be fully completed until the Second Coming of Christ. He "*must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything.*"¹³ In the meantime, the church must understand, embrace, and represent God's full agenda.

There is nothing outside the scope of God's agenda. The restoration of all things represents a total, global transformation. The entire world is to be purified of evil. It is to be full of the glory of God. The scope of God's redemptive work encompasses all of creation, including all mankind, all relationships, and the stewardship of all creation. If Jesus were Mayor, He would have a very BIG agenda!

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¹² Psalm 145:9

¹³ Acts 3:21a