Christian Life Sermon
God's Goal in Our Journey

Introduction:

Unless one is wandering aimlessly, every journey, whether short or long, has a purpose. It exists to accomplish a goal. Sometimes that goal is routine, as when one takes the daily trek to the mailbox, sometimes it is for one's health, as when a walk is simply for exercise, sometimes it is to do something fun, as when one goes on vacation, and sometimes it involves a serious purpose, as when one goes to look at a piece of property that might eventually become one's home. These and all the many other journeys that we take in life are all associated with some goal. Even when we think of our lives as a whole, we normally associate it with a journey to accomplish a particular goal, as in the question we were all asked when we were children; "*what do you want to be when you grow up?*"

Therefore, one question we should ask ourselves as Christians is, "*what goal did God have in mind for my life when He chose to save me?*" Correctly knowing the answer to that question will enable us to look at our life journey in a way that harmonizes with how God Himself looks at it. Since God's ways are always best; we should want with all our hearts to see God's goal for our lives fully realized. The better we understand what God has said about His goal for us, the better we will be able to actively participate in the pursuit of that same goal with Him.

I. God's Goal Stated:

Some are tempted to think that God's only goal for Christians is simply to save them from eternal damnation. However, that is actually an intermediate goal, an objective that God needed to accomplish in order to achieve His ultimate goal. God indeed intended to save His people from the consequences of their sins; however, He had a much greater plan than simply ensuring that His people would gain an eternal length of life.

God made His goal for His people very clear from the very beginning of Israel's history as a nation. In the law He gave to His people He said:

> "*For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God, you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy*"
>
> Leviticus 11:45

God, through the apostle Peter repeated these words so it would be understood that this was God's purpose for His people throughout every age:

> "*but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*",
> *because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'*"
>
> I Peter 1:15-16

Peter specified that the sphere of the believer's holiness is to be "*in all your conduct*". The Greek word translated as "*conduct*" was used to refer to the moral pattern of one's life. Therefore, it designates the way a person behaves, and the

moral characteristics of their life. To be holy as God is, means to possess a full and pervading holiness that reaches to every aspect of who a person is, and all that a person does. In addition, being holy involves not only avoiding outward sin but also maintaining an instinctive delight in God and in His ways so that one is motivated to emulate the character of God.

The idea is clear, since God intends to have a significant relationship with His people throughout eternity, it was necessary to make us compatible with God, which means the redeemed having the same perspectives, values, and priorities that God Himself has.

The apostle Paul also wrote that God's ultimate purpose for His people was that they should be holy:

> "*just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,*
> *that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*"
> Ephesians 1:4

Paul wrote that God chose His people. The Greek word translated as "*chose*" refers to making a selection of one option out of a number of possible alternatives. The terminology indicates an expression of significant preference, often implying a strongly favorable attitude toward what is chosen. The use of the verb in the middle voice indicates that God chose individuals for Himself, by Himself, and in pursuit of His own interests. The phrase "*that we should be*", is a purpose clause indicating the purpose God had in mind when He chose His people. It was so they would become "*holy and without blame*". This expresses God's goal in both positive and negative terms. Positively that they would be holy, and negatively that they would not be guilty of anything evil or shameful. The addition of that latter characteristic indicates that God's goal related to ethical righteousness. The Greek word translated as "*without blame*" literally meant that something or someone was absolutely free of any moral blemish. It was used in the Greek translation of the OT to refer to the requirement that animals have no unsightly disfigurement that would make them less than perfect and thus unacceptable to God. These words indicate that God's election of His people did not simply relate to the beginning of the salvation process, but to its completion.

Together these verses make it clear that God's goal for our lives is for us to become holy.

II. <u>God's Goal Defined</u>:

Understanding that God's goal for believers is that we should be holy raises a logical and important question; what does it mean to be "*holy*"? In general, in our culture when one uses the word "*holy*", it is understood to refer to something that is profoundly good in an ethical sense. The word does include this idea, however, both the Hebrew and Greek words translated as "*holy*" have a deeper meaning. The most basic idea in these terms is separateness, or distinctiveness. So, when God describes Himself as "*holy*" He is primarily saying that He is different or distinct, someone separate from others. But distinct and separate from what? The Old

Testament makes it clear, that first of all, God is distinct from everything that is made, and second that He is separate from everything that is evil. God is more than merely good; He is the very definition of what is ethically good. He is the standard by which everything is measured in terms of whether it is good or evil, and to what degree. Because of this, the word "*holy*" refers to the transcendent greatness of God, how He is incomprehensibly majestic, and to His absolute ethical purity (as a secondary aspect of God's holiness that reflects just how different He is from the creatures and structures of this world). It is this secondary sense of holiness which the believer is to pursue.

In his letter to the believers in Rome, Paul gave us another way of understanding God's purpose that we be holy. He wrote:

"*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren*."
Romans 8:29

In the reference above to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the quotation included that God's choosing of His people took place "*before the foundation of the world*". In this verse Paul again made reference to God's redemptive purpose from the perspective of eternity past. But here, rather than writing that God intended to make His people holy, he wrote that God predestined them to be conformed to the image of Christ. This informs us that Christ was the very embodiment of God's holiness (Jn.14:9), and thus to be made like Christ is to be made holy as God is holy. So, to be made holy is to be transformed into His likeness, to be in one's basic nature identical to God. But identical in what sense? How much can we be like God?

III. <u>God's Goal Explained</u>:

We begin to get an answer to those questions in what Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth:

"*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*."
II Corinthians 7:1

Paul made it clear in this verse that the pursuit of holiness involves a process of cleansing, and the cleansing that Paul referred to here is separating oneself from those things that God defines as "*filthiness*". The Greek word translated as "*filthiness*" refers to those things that cause ritual defilement in a religious or moral sense. This term is rooted in the ceremonial teachings of the Mosaic Law where physical filth is used as imagery of moral evil. Therefore, the primary way in which the believer is intended to become like Christ and God is by a transformation that makes us morally righteous as God is. When Paul wrote that the cleansing was to be done in "*flesh and spirit*", he was saying the transformation would involve the entire person. Paul referred to this process of moral transformation as "*perfecting holiness*". The Greek word translated as "*perfecting*" means to bring something to its intended end, or to complete something. Additionally, the tense of the verb

emphasizes the fact that the process of growing in holiness is continuous and ongoing. In this verse Paul informs us that this process is to be done "*in the fear of God*". This phrase expresses instrumentality; meaning that the perfecting of holiness is accomplished by means of living in fear of God. The fear of God is neither mere caution nor a debilitating terror; it is an emotional state in which one reflects upon the awesome dimensions of God's nature and power and as a result is rendered appropriately sober by that reflection. Finally, Paul expressed this teaching in the form of an important principle regarding our part in the transformative process; the principle of substitution. One is not only called to get rid of sinful thoughts and practices, but one is also called to replace those things with an aggressive determination to be holy. Over all this verse teaches us that holiness does not develop in us naturally but is something we must actively pursue throughout our lives, recognizing that by engaging in this pursuit we are working to fulfill God's goal for our lives.

In the letter to the Hebrews, we are told just how important the pursuit of holiness is to the life of a Christian:

"*Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord*"
Hebrews 12:14

In the second clause of the verse the author wrote that without holiness "*no one will see the Lord*"; meaning that only the holy will be welcomed into God's presence. The reference here cannot be simply to positional holiness alone that one gains from Christ by faith, because the context is focused on outward manifestations of righteousness. Therefore, the insight that the author adds here is that the cultivation of attitudinal and behavioral holiness is an essential part of the redemptive process.

In Peter's second letter he wrote:

"*as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*"
II Peter 1:4

The first key thought in this verse is that God's transformative work in His people involves partaking of the divine nature. The Greek word translated as "*partakers*" refers to one who is a participant in something, and it implies sharing with someone in a common purpose, or experience. The idea Peter was expressing here was that without ceasing to be men, or becoming gods, believers will share in that which is characteristically God's own, glory, perfection, blessedness and immortality of life. The Greek word translated as "*nature*" refers to the basic makeup of a person or thing, the result of its natural development or condition. Therefore, Peter was saying that believers share in the very life of God by the power and provision of

God. This begins at regeneration and continues throughout one's life and is consummated when Christ returns.

IV. God's Goal Realized:

The goal that God has for our lives, characterizes the entire journey of our life. As noted above, the process is only completed when Christ returns and believers are brought into His presence:

> "*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*"
> I John 3:2

John does not attempt to give a detailed description of the transformation that will take place when believers come into the presence of Christ. It is likely that since he wrote "*it has not yet been revealed what we shall be*" that even the apostles were not privy to all the details about how the believer will change when he or she enters into eternity. However, since the following verse refers to how this expectation is to motivate the pursuit of ethical purity (in light of Christ's own ethical purity), it is clear that the transformation is not just physical (the element of the transformation that Paul described in Philippians 3:21), but moral as well. The process of becoming holy will be complete. This is what Paul referred to as being "*glorified*":

> "*and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be* ***glorified*** *together.*"
> Romans 8:17

> "*Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*"
> Romans 8:30

Theologians define glorification as the final part of the redemptive process wherein believers will enter into a perfect existence that will include immortality and complete righteousness. Not only will every impact of the Fall be reversed, but believers will also become something greater than what Adam and Eve were at the original creation.

The importance of this insight is that it clarifies where God is taking us in terms of the sort of people, we will eventually be. In a sense He is telling us what we will be when we grow up, to give us something to which we can aspire.

Conclusion:

The call to be holy as God is holy can seem to be an impossible standard that brings only discouragement, for honestly, who can be as righteous and good as God? But such a conclusion represents a misunderstanding of the instruction. The instruction in the New Testament does not carry the expectation that we will be "*as*" holy as God is; instead, it focuses not on achievement, but on a pursuit that

culminates with a miraculous work of God. In its original context the admonition to pursue holiness was meant to convey the idea that with the arrival of the New Covenant, becoming genuinely godly was now possible in a greater and more accessible way than it ever was under the Mosaic Law. There is a marvelous simplicity in a pursuit of holiness patterned on being like God Himself. It does not require an encyclopedic grasp of endless commandments and prohibitions. Instead, it gives us something easier to grasp and easier to fulfill. The idea is akin to an invitation Christ gave during His earthly ministry:

"*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*"
Matthew 11:29-30

The commandment to be holy is a complement to Christ's commandment to love God supremely and to love others as we love ourselves (Matt.22:37-40). It encompasses all that God wants to accomplish within His people in an overarching instruction that helps us grasp the big picture of God's redemptive purpose.

Together, the verses we have examined help us understand that in practical terms becoming holy involves the following:

- Possessing a heart that is pure in its devotion to God.
- The habit of being of one mind with God so that our perspective and view of things correspond to how God Himself views them.
- The choice to avoid everything that is evil and to keep every ethical commandment God has given, trusting that this is best for us.
- To strive to emulate the example Jesus Christ set in His earthly life.
- To pursue love, compassion and kindness toward others, particularly one's fellow believers.
- A mind focused on spiritual realities with one's affections set primarily on things above rather than those on the earth.