

Introduction

As the end of another year draws closer, I think it is good that we reflect on our goals in life. Time moves by us quickly and in the midst of our busy, fleeting, and fast-paced lives, it is good to stop for some time of reflection. We can ask some basic questions: What am I doing? Why am I doing it? Where am I? Why am I where I am? For what end do I exist where I am?

To answer these questions we need to know *the* great end or goal of history. When that target is in clear focus, then we have a point of reference for everything else. Our theme for this morning therefore is *God's chief end* (thus, it is the reference point *for everything*). By knowing *His* chief end, we can know our chief end with certainty, and we can put such knowledge to good use.

I will begin with a description of God's chief end (this is like laying a foundation for a building). Then, I will make some application (this is like putting up a building that fits the foundation). Perhaps, we can discuss some difficulties and give clarification after the message; that would be like putting reinforcing rods in the concrete foundation.

There are a number of key passages related to this topic and I will refer to some of them. Clearly, a central passage is Romans 11:33-36 where Paul bursts into a doxology while reflecting on the purposes of God.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

1A. A description of God's Chief End (laying the foundation for this building)

If you get this point, then you have the bottom line of this whole point in a nutshell: God's chief end is a comprehensive, glorious, and God-centered purpose. We can now work with the pieces of this bottom line.

1C. First, working backwards, this end is a purpose.

Paul says, "**from him and through him and to him are all things.**" Notice the key prepositions: from, through, and to. It is from this last preposition *to* (unto or toward) that we get the notion of an end. Things are moving toward something. That to which they move is their end.

Therefore, the end (God's chief end) is not simply the final unit in a series like "The End" on the last page of a book. Instead, the end has the richer sense of purpose. There is something out in front of us. An objective, a goal, a purpose is in front of us. Life is not meaningless. History does not lack purpose. There is a goal. The end toward which things move is the goal set for them. Therefore, this first point is very simple and basic. The fact is that the end that we are talking about is not a final terminal point, but a purpose. We are thinking about God's chief *purpose*.

2C. Second, it is a God-centered purpose.

What is the goal, the objective, the purpose or end of all things? It may be obvious to you. However, before you fix on your answer, let me restate the question in light of Romans 11:36a. The verse has two parts, two sentences each with a period. Consider the first sentence: **For from him and through him and to him are all things.** Now, what is the goal toward which all things move? The goal is God: "to Him." In context, Paul is talking about the covenant keeping God:

²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; ²⁷ "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." ²⁸ As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Paul speaks here about God's covenant with Israel that spills over to all nations in unsearchable and inscrutable ways. He is faithful to Israel to such an extent that even when He judges her, He uses that very judgment to fulfill His promises to her in blessing the nations (v. 30, **Just as you [Gentiles] were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience**). Moreover, God uses His blessing of the nations to provoke Israel to jealousy to bring mercy to back to her again (v. 31, **so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy**). His purpose is to show mercy to all (v. 32, **for God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all**).

Perhaps, the nature of this goal is so obvious that we need not say it. However, I am not sure that it is that obvious because we keep getting it wrong. Therefore, we should emphasize the fact that we are here for God. We exist for God. History rolls steadily forward for Him. **"The Lord hath made all things for himself"** (Prov. 16:4, KJV). He is Himself the great objective and goal of creation (Col. 1:16, **"all things were created by him and for him"**). There is a personal dimension to the ebb and flow of things. We are not part of a mass of brute forces, facts, and events. Rather, we are part of a mass of forces, facts, and events that serve a person, the Lord God. They serve Him. They are for Him. The point at which all things converge is the covenant keeping God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

3C. Third, it is a glorious God-centered purpose.

From 11:36b we have another answer to the question, "What is the purpose of all things?" His glory is the purpose of all things. Paul ends the verse with the phrase **"To him be the glory forever! Amen."** Paul is exalting in the Lord. "Glory" here is not a reference to God's glorious attributes directly. It does not say that in Him is the glory forever though that is true, of course. What we have here is an ascription of glory to God. The goal ends with Him, it is for Him, and it is for His glory. I love the way children put it when quoting the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "Who made you and all things? God made me, and all things. Why did God make you and all things? God made me and all things *for His own glory*."

Thus, He made the display of His majesty, beauty, perfection, and excellence the grand purpose of history. The end is a glorious God-centered purpose.

4C. Forth, it is a comprehensive (glorious, God-centered) purpose.

Comprehensiveness comes from the relationship that exists between God's purpose and the series leading toward it. The purpose relates to the beginning, the middle, the end of the series, and to the series as a whole.

1) Let's begin at the beginning.

All things are *from* God (Rom. 11:36a). The end is the purpose that obtained from the very beginning (all that is for Him is *from* Him by creative power). The glorious God-centered purpose explains why there was a beginning in the beginning-in the first place. "All things" came into being for a purpose, for God's purpose, for the purpose that centers on Him, for the grand display of His glory. We can reflect on Genesis 1-2 in this light, and ask, "Why did God create the world?" Why did light come into being on the first day? Why did He create man on the sixth day? Why did God work in six days and rest on the seventh? Why did He create the heavens and the earth? Why did He create the sun, moon, stars, mountains, valleys, sheep, donkeys, cabbages and kings?" We have an ultimate answer: it is for Him; it is for His glory. **The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof**; the earth and its fullness are for Him.

2) What is in the middle?

All things are *through* Him (Rom. 11:36a). They not only exist by God's creative power, but they move from the beginning to the end by His active agency. This is saying, "God is the providential ruler of all that He created." He is the active agent that sustains the creation across time. He is the sovereign Lord of history **"who works all things after the counsel of His will"** (Eph. 1:11). It all moves steadily along, toward its goal *through* Him (Rom. 8:28). The middle is the history of the creation.

Nevertheless, we must be more specific. The middle is the drama of redemptive history since the fall. Thinking of the biblical record, redemptive history spans the ages from Genesis 3 to the end of the book of Revelation. This verse (Rom. 11:36a) succinctly tells us that every stage of redemptive history; every part of redemptive history is due to His active agency, and He directs it all toward the God-centered purpose, which is His glory. In this connection, consider the forceful fact that both God's judgment and His mercy serve this great end of His own glory. Paul says this in Romans 9:22-24 (in wrath He displays the majesty of His power and patience, and this serves to accent the riches of His glory displayed in mercy).

Now, we fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). However, by the coming of Christ and the gift of righteousness that we have through His death and resurrection, God made us vessels of mercy in contrast to being vessels of wrath. He tied our salvation to His glory inseparably. Accordingly, this God-centered end dominated the life of our Lord. For example, facing the cross by which He would redeem us, Jesus recoiled but exclaimed, "**Father, your will be done, Father glorify your name**" (Jn. 12:28; Mk. 14:36). At the middle of the middle in history and in the history of redemption is the life work of Christ. What sustained Him in the hours of suffering? What encouraged Him in the hour of His deepest humiliation? He had a purpose that He expressed in prayer: "**Father, glorify your name.**" Thus, in the middle, God directs history, the history of redemption, and the redemptive work of Christ for Himself, for His own glory.

3) Of course, the series has a final point of termination.

It will come one day to the end. This God-centered purpose relates to the final destination point (to the ending). That point in time is an ordained point that will arrive by the Lord's providential governance. This is similar to God counting out the days of the ancient king Belshazzar (cf. the day of the handwriting on the wall was the last in the series, Dan. 5:26). Likewise, God counts out the days of creation history to the last day. The ending serves His end. The end of a book, how it closes, is also part of the point of a book. God has set the terminal point of history, of "His-story," in accord with how it will serve His glory.

4) This goal that God has is the objective that the whole realizes

He obtains His goal by a series from beginning to end in each part and as a whole. All is for Him, the beginning, the process, the close, each part and all of it together. He directs the story line of every page of the book to His chief end.

God's end is His purpose that engulfs the whole series from beginning to end governing the middle, and transcending both the beginning and the end. He existed before the beginning of history and He will exist beyond the end of history. God created all things and He sustains all things by His providential governance. Thus, He created all things and He sustains them for Himself. If you ask, "what is the whole series for?" then you begin to take in some of the magnitude of God's purpose. It is all for Him, it is all for His glory. Nothing stands outside of the picture. Nothing occurs unless it serves to magnify the glory of God.

5) But the end is beyond the ending.

The purpose of a book is much more than coming to the closing words, "The End." The end of a book is how it affects you. God's end or purpose abides into the unending ages of eternity (Rom. 11:36b, "**into the ages**" or to him be glory **forever**). It takes in all things on a historical plane from the beginning to the very end of the history of the creation and beyond that history into the unending ages to come. We can properly define heaven by one word: glory. A great way to speak of the end of our journey is to say, we are bound for glory. This is so because God takes up our salvation in that grand end: **creation will be delivered up into the freedom of the glory of the children of God** (Rom. 8:21).

Summary: What I have said so far is that God's end is a purpose, a design by a personal designer. His purpose is God-centered. It is for Him. It is for His glory. Moreover, it is a comprehensive purpose. It sweeps across the history of the universe and it touches the history of you and me through the person of Christ our risen Savior, the Lord of glory. Jesus is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last.

2A. Application (putting a building on the solid foundation)

Now that we have characterized and clarified God's chief, you might be wondering how this applies in a practical way to your life. In this connection, it is time to note that His great end must also be your great end. There are four ways, at least, to unpack applications of God's chief end.

1) This is an ultimate ought

Of all the things that you ought to do, this ultimate end is an ultimate ought. Because everything exists for God, for the ultimate end of manifesting His glory, then that must explain why you and I exist. Everything is from Him, through Him and for Him. Glorifying God must therefore be what you exist for as well. That *is* the purpose of your life. Therefore, you ought to make it the purpose of your life, that whatever you do, you do it for the glory of God! Because glorification, praise, and honor are His forever, then it is your obligation to glorify Him now. Because all things in your life *are* for His glory then you *ought* to honor Him in all things. This fact cuts against any kind of sacred-secular mentality. It calls you to give yourself, all that you possess, and all that you hope to be to Jesus Christ, risen Lord and Sabbath king.

2) It is an appropriate obligation

Glory rightfully and appropriately belongs to God forever. He is perfect. He is the greatest and best of beings. He is all glorious, perfectly glorious such that no increase in glory is possible, and none of His glory will ever fade. This is truth with an exclamation point. It is an enduring amen (Rom. 11:36b) because He is perfectly and abundantly glorious. Thus, glory rightfully and appropriately belongs to God as something that you and I should acknowledge in the practical way of ascribing glory to His name. Thus, in prayer, you should address your Lord as Sovereign Lord, and include expressions of honor to His name: "O Lord, you are great and greatly to be praised; you are holy, just, and good in all of your ways; you are worthy of all my praises."

3) It is a fitting duty

Furthermore, God designed us to be His image bearers. This means that He made us to reflect the beauty of His holiness and truth in the world. This is an ethical duty *par excellence* because it is a duty that arises from human nature by creation. Because you are His image bearers that He made for the express purpose of reflecting His glory, then it is a fitting duty that you now pursue all your days on this earth.

4) It is a filial duty, a duty of childship to God

Finally, Jesus sought this goal more than any other goal and He sought this goal as an end in itself with nothing further beyond it for which it is a means. The Father's glory is not a means to something else. He sought the glory of God as His chief end; therefore, you ought to seek it likewise as your chief end. It is His ultimate end, so it should also be your ultimate end. For Him, all other ends serve this end; likewise, all other ends that you pursue should serve this end of bringing honor and glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Scripture confirms this point in this most comprehensive way. "**Whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God**" (1 Cor. 10:31). A good way of putting this has to do with what you do with a new pair of shoes, as someone here recently stated (I won't say who, but his initials are Dan King): "I just got to make sure I walk right in them." Making God's chief end your chief end is like getting a new pair of shoes; now the key is to walk right in them, to seek God's glory in every step by living under the authority of Christ as your king.

In a marvelous way, this doctrine instills hope for the future and gives direction to the present as we journey through difficulties and discouragements. It is an ultimate reference point to guide us in everything we do.

May we fall down before the majesty of our God in due recognition of our comparative smallness in relation to His unparalleled greatness; may we learn more of how far we fall short of the glory of God; may we humble ourselves before Him and ascribe all glory, honor, and kingship to the triune God, both now and forevermore, amen.