

The Gospel Is for All Generations

Dennis Jones

“For the promise is to you and to your children...” —Acts 2:39

It would be an understatement to say that God plans long range. The apostle Paul wrote the following about God: “Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own **purpose** and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus **before time began**” (2 Timothy 1:9). Notice the word *purpose* in the preceding passage. Paul is reminding us that God does what He does on purpose: His **own** purpose, and that He purposed to provide salvation to all generations “before time began.”

God’s purpose is an eternal purpose. Again, the apostle Paul makes this clear in his letters to the Christians in Ephesus when he wrote, “To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places according to the **eternal purpose** which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:10, 11). Since God thinks, plans, and purposes from eternity, we can conclude that it is His desire that the message of the sacrifice of His only begotten Son for the sins of mankind be communicated from one generation to the next.

The concept of intergenerational exchange of faith is clearly seen in the Old Testament. Not only did God promise Abraham that his descendents would become a great nation (Genesis 12:2, 7), but He confidently stated that Abraham would have **long-range** influence over the faith of his descendents: “Since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Genesis 18:18, 19).

Perhaps the most vivid example of intergenerational faith is found in the commands of Moses to the fathers of Israel: “Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in

the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged” (Deuteronomy 6:1, 2). He continues to charge the fathers with responsibility with these powerful words:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Moses sets forth three truths that must be passed down in order for families to maintain a proper relationship with God. (1) A **revelation** that God is eternal and one, though we know that the Godhead is three persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), and that each person of the Godhead is essential and in total harmony (Deuteronomy 6:4). (2) A total **response** of love is required in one’s heart, soul, and mind toward the eternal God who has revealed Himself (Deuteronomy 6:5). (3) A threefold **responsibility** to allow God’s truth to govern the heart, the home, and habits of those who love Him. This responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of the fathers in each generation. Fathers are to teach their children formally (“diligently”) and informally (“talk of them”). In short, the home is to be a divine school where children witness their fathers’ demonstration of faith personally, privately, and publicly (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Notice the genealogies listed in the Bible. Why are they there? What purpose do they serve? Are they simply historical, or could it be that God wants us to see a continuing line of faith from one generation to another? The first genealogy listed in Scripture is Genesis 5:1-32, a record of generations from Adam to Noah and his sons. Each of the generations listed chronicle faith, or the lack of it, in the lives of the individuals named. In the New Testament, the genealogy of Jesus from David to Joseph (Matthew 1:1-16) and from David to Mary (Luke 3:23-38) emphasizes the importance of continuity of faith from one generation to another.

One of the most fascinating genealogies listed in Scripture is that of Asher, son of Jacob (1 Chronicles 7:30-40). It would be fair to say that Asher “built a family” one generation at a time. Apparently, this great man set some things in motion that lasted longer than the length of his own life. Somehow, he was able to instill some values in his children that resulted in his descendants becoming (1) “heads of their fathers’ houses” (2) “choice men” (3) “mighty men of valor” (4) “chief leaders.” “And they were recorded by genealogies among the army fit for battle; their number was **twenty-six thousand**.” What a family!

Asher’s example serves as a challenge to all of us who care about what happens to our descendants down through the generations. While there are no perfect families (“for all have sinned...”), this great man did a lot of things right. And his sons and grandsons adhered to the standards set in place by their patriarch and family leader. Your family and mine can greatly benefit from this wonderful example.

Moving forward to the New Testament, the apostle Paul recognizes and honors the influence of forefathers, grandmothers, mothers, sons and grandsons. “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Timothy 1:3-5). Paul is not denying that Timothy has his **own** faith, but he is saying that Timothy’s grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice created a spiritual environment, set the proper example, and taught essential truths that caused faith to take root and grow in his heart. Then Paul charges Timothy to “pass it along” and “keep it flowing” from one heart to another: “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

So what’s the bottom line? It is simply this—each generation is responsible for the perpetuation of the Gospel message to the next generation. “For the promise is to you **and your children...**” (Acts 2:39).