

The second half of Romans 5 is one of the most magnificent pieces of Scripture in our canon. We see in it God's glorious, magnificent purpose in sending his Son to die for the ungodly (as Jeffrey preached so well last Sunday.) Yes, death came through the one man Adam, but God's purpose in sending his Son was so that life could abound all the more through the one man Jesus Christ. This passage glows with the purpose and character of God, unveiled, and rightly understood it brings us to our knees in love, worship and adoration.

More on that later; but first I'd like to talk about a very popular book in light of this scripture from Romans 5. Much has been made of the book "A Purpose Driven Life", and rightly so. This book by Rick Warren has sold 21 million copies and counting. It is the best selling non-fiction book in American History. Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Community Church was called by time magazine as "America's Pastor." Go to Barnes and Noble and you'll see stacks and stacks of "A Purpose Driven Life."

Go to Warren's website and you can find not just A Purpose Driven Life, but a Purpose Driven Journal, a Purpose Driven Workbook, links to Purpose Driven Relationships, and Conversations with Purpose Driven Women. (I'm not making this up.) Jeffrey got a letter from an Episcopal Church in Northern Virginia the other day; on the bottom of the stationary was "A Purpose Driven Church."

Along with 21 million of my best friends, I have read The Purpose Driven Life. I know many people who have read this book and been helped by it. Why is this book the current American religious phenomenon? If you haven't already read it, should you?

I won't answer that from the pulpit because I'm not into censorship or book banning, although I actually did put Joel Osteen's "Your Best Life Now" in the trashcan last Thursday. But I will say that A Purpose Driven Life falls into the already overcrowded category of self-help books. Warren admirably says in the intro that the book is not a self-help manual and that it is not about you. But then he follows that with 12 chapters that are all about you.

He says that the book is about God and not you. But here is an actual list of what you must do to really know God and live a purpose driven life:

- Discover the 3 insights into your purpose
- Ascertain the 5 reasons to live a purpose driven life
- Apply the 3 metaphors of God's view of life
- Learn God's 5 purposes for life
- Live God's 5 plans for your life
- Enact the 5 acts of worship that make God smile
- Uncover the 6 secrets of friendship with God

- Develop the 4 characteristics of God pleasing worship
- Perform 3 important truths of fruitful fellowship
- Find the 6 reasons for being committed and active in fellowship
- Discover the 4 principles of real fellowship
- Learn the 4 steps of cultivating community
- Create a covenant using the 9 principles of biblical fellowship...

You get the point; I could go on and on. In fact in order to live a purpose driven life, there are exactly 168 things you must do. I don't know about you, but that list just makes me want to go lie on the beach in Margaritaville for 6 months.

I'm not being cranky about the book just to be cranky (or just because Warren has sold 21 million copies and my 2 books of sermons have sold 21 copies total, 18 of which I gave as presents to my immediate family. Rob, who is 3 and can't read, has 7 copies of Sermons from the Advent.) The popularity of the book points to deeper issues that are expressly countered in today's reading from Romans 5.

**(1)** The first issue is that the **gospel is not about what you must do, it is about what God has already done.** Did you notice the verbs in Warren's list? Discover, apply, learn, uncover, live, enact, find, create, perform... HELP! All the sudden we become the subject of the conversation. Huge mistake, for in Christianity God is always the subject and we are always the object.

In our reading we see that God is the actor – He is active while we are passive. While we were dead in our trespasses, dead in the sin and death that came through Adam, God acted! He sent his Son to die for us. We did nothing! And the result: the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounds. There is not developing, discovering, performing, creating. It just is because God made it happen of his tender mercy, Jesus Christ as the one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, sufficient sacrifice oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

Christianity is about God coming down the stairs to us in our helplessness; The Purpose Driven Life and scores of other books like it are all about our climbing up the stairs to him. Insofar as it encourages that fruitless climb, it is antithetical to the gospel and work of Christ on the cross.

**(2)** The second issue is that **the book falls into the trap of treating the Bible like an owner's manual for life.** Americans fall into this ditch all the time. One of the unfortunate consequences of our technological advancements is that we live in a culture where technical questions have replaced value questions. Or how questions have replaced why questions.

As one person said, "a book on how to have victory in Christ will be a best seller, but a book on the victory of Christ will sit on the shelf." The bible – in glistening form in Romans 5 is about the victory of Christ. Whenever we treat the bible as a how-to guide, we've lost its power. How to raise children, how to save money, how to find happiness in

your vocation, how to be happily married, how to have a purpose driven life. The emphasis is always on me, rather than God. God cannot be treated this way.

For instance Warren says “obedience unlock’s God’s power; God waits for you to act first.” This is to treat God technically, as if we were engaging a plumber or even a computer. Turn on this button and this will happen.

**(3)** The third issue is the famous law/gospel issue: **Being told how to is not enough.** The law tells us how to act, but we can never do it right. I ask you, do your children always do what they’re told? Do you always do what you know is right? Christie hates the fact that I drink diet coke. She gives me study after study about how my teeth will rot and how I’ll get Parkinson’s disease if I drink Diet Coke. I love Diet Coke. Regular Coke is way too sweet. Today is Father’s Day. Guess what I’ll be drinking for lunch.

C.S. Lewis never discovered the depth of sin until he vowed to me more virtuous. This is what Paul means in verse 20, where he says that the law came in to increase the trespass. Our sin is an ugly, unwieldy monster causing us to do that which we do not want to do and not do that which we want to do. (Rom 7)

Thomas Jefferson was in deep denial when he said: “I am a Christian in the only sense he wished anyone to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines...ascribing to himself every human excellence and believing that he never claimed any other.” In this letter to Benjamin Rush he claims to follow and practice the virtues of Jesus. Only one person has ever done this: Jesus Himself. The New Testament knows of only one victorious life. And he died on the cross.

Being told how is not enough. Often it just increases the frustration. I love this quote from Princeton Scholar J. Gresham Machen: “*What good does it do to me to tell me that the type of religion presented in the Bible is a very fine type of religion and that the thing for me to do is just to start practicing that type of religion now? ... I will tell you, my friend. It does me not one tiniest little bit of good. ... What I need first of all is not exhortation, but a gospel, not directions for saving myself but knowledge of how God has saved me. Have you any good news? That is the question that I ask of you. I know your exhortations will not help me. But if anything has been done to save me, will you not tell me the facts?*” (Machen cited in Horton, Trust and Obey, p.40)

For those of us who can’t perform the 168 commands of the purpose driven life, there is Good News. In fact, were it just 168 command to obey. The truth is that God commands him to love Him and all others 100 percent of the time, 24-7, with all your heart, with no thought of yourself, ever. That is a truly purpose driven life: perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. For the rest of us who fall short, there is God news – there is a gospel. We have a purpose driven God. Again, we see his purpose in our scripture this morning. He tells us “the facts.”

Warren says obedience unlocks God’s power. True, but not your obedience. The obedience of the Son to die for the ungodly, to triumph over the sin, death and the devil,

to unleash the boundless energy of grace upon grace upon grace over the world. He performed, He created, He applied, He lived, He obeyed, He acted all according to His purpose of defeating death and unleashing life. All of this His loving purpose for the world He created. That is the good news; those are the facts.

Amen.