

The Big Questions, Part II—The Purpose of Life

The first of the two big questions in life is, "Who made us?" We addressed that question in the previous article and (hopefully) settled upon "God" as the answer. As we are creation, God is the Creator.

Now, let us turn to the second "big question," which is, "Why are we here?"

Well, why *are* we here? To amass fame and fortune? To make music and babies? To be the richest man or woman in the graveyard for, as we are jokingly told, "He who dies with the most toys wins?"

No, there must be more to life than that, so let's think about this. To begin with, look around you. Unless you live in a cave, you are surrounded by things we humans have made with our own hands. Now, why did we make those things? The answer, of course, is that we make things to perform some specific function for us. In short, we make things to serve us. So, by extension, why did God make us, if not to serve Him?

Our purpose, then, is to serve God. We receive this message from the prophets, as well as from scripture, but nowhere more clearly than in the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam: "And I [God] did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me" (TMQ 51:56).

Which brings us to the next point. If we acknowledge our Creator, and that He created humankind to serve Him, the next question is, "How? How do we serve Him?" No doubt, this question is best answered by the One who made us. If He created us to serve Him, then He expects us to function in a particular manner, if we are to achieve our purpose. But how can we know what that manner is? How can we know what God expects from us?

Well, consider this: God gave us light, by which we can find our way. Even at night, we have the moon for light and the stars for navigation. God gave other animals guidance systems best suited for their conditions and needs. Migrating birds can navigate, even on overcast days, by light polarization. Whales migrate by "reading" the Earth's magnetic fields. Salmon return from the open ocean to spawn at the exact spot of their birth by *smell*, if that can be imagined. Fish sense distant movements through pressure receptors that line their bodies. Bats and the blind river dolphins "see" by sonar. Certain marine organisms (the electric eel being a high-voltage example) generate and sense magnetic fields, allowing them to "see" in muddy waters, or in the blackness of ocean depths. Insects communicate by pheromones, the trail of which guides them to food, and then home again. Plants sense sunlight and grow towards it (phototropism); their roots sense gravity and grow into the earth (geotropism). In short, God has gifted every element of His creation with guidance. Can we seriously believe he would not give us guidance on the one most important aspect of our existence, namely our *raison d'etre*—our reason for being? That he would not give us the tools by which to achieve salvation?

Of course not. Hence, revelation.

Think of it this way: Every product has specifications and rules. For more complex products, whose specifications and rules are not intuitive, owner's manuals are provided. These manuals are written by the one who knows the product best, which is to say the manufacturer. A typical owner's manual begins with warnings about improper use and the hazardous consequences thereof, moves on to a description of how to use the product properly and the benefits to be gained thereby, and provides product specifications and a troubleshooting guide whereby we can correct product malfunctions.

How is that different from revelation?

Revelation tells us what to do, what not to do and why, tells us what God expects of us, and shows us how to correct our deficiencies. Revelation is the ultimate user's manual, provided as guidance to the one who will use us—ourselves.

In the world we know, products that meet or exceed specifications are considered successes whereas those that don't are ... hmm ... let's think about this. Any product that fails to meet factory specifications is either repaired or, if hopeless, recycled. In other words, destroyed. Ouch. Suddenly this discussion turns scary-serious. Because in this discussion, *we* are the product—the product of creation.

But let's pause for a moment and consider how we interact with the various items that fill our lives. As long as they do what we want, we're happy with them. But when they fail us, we get rid of them. Some are returned to the store, some donated to charity, but eventually they all end up in the garbage, which gets ... buried or *burned*. Similarly, an underperforming employee gets ... fired. Now, stop for a minute and think about that word. Where did *that* euphemism for the punishment due to an underperformer come from? Hm ... the person who believes the lessons of this life translate into lessons about religion could have a field day with this.

But that doesn't mean these analogies are invalid. Just the opposite, we should remember that both Old and New Testaments are filled with analogies, and Jesus Christ taught using parables.

So perhaps we had better take this seriously.

No, I stand corrected. Most *definitely* we should take this seriously. Nobody ever considered the difference between heavenly delights and the tortures of hellfire a laughing matter.

(To be continued)

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The author can be contacted at BrownL38@yahoo.com. He is the author of *The First and Final Commandment* (Amana Publications) and *Bearing True Witness* (Dar-us-Salam). Forthcoming books are a historical thriller, *The Eighth Scroll*, and a second edition of *The*

First and Final Commandment, rewritten and divided into *MisGod'ed* and its sequel,
God'ed.