

The Vital Importance of Understanding God's Plan & Purpose

Some great military battles were won as a result of an initial feigned weakness, or letting the enemy think they had gained the advantage. Some leaders were victorious in great wars despite having lost important battles early on. Modern retailing makes much use of a lost leader item to attract new business. High Street stores enhance their annual profits by announcing amazing bargain sales, that actually get rid of unwanted stock. In any project it is vital that there is not only clear leadership but also an agreed strategy. Without an objective and a plan to reach it, good leadership is a waste of time. All the flurry and hubris surrounding leadership in such circumstances is utterly valueless. However, as part of a good strategy, considerable sacrifices can be made without harming the successful gain of the objective.

With this in mind, we can see that it is very important for us, as believers wanting to serve God, that we understand what it is that God is doing in this world, why he is doing it, how he intends to achieve it and what his programme is. Many a great leader has worked all his life only to find Ichabod¹ written over his life's work; it was mostly a waste of time. If we spend our time labouring for that which God has denied, what's the point? Why work for the average, or even for the good, when we can strive for the best?

Now some things are always right. We must ensure that we are walking righteously (1 Pt 1:15-16; 2 Pt 3:11), pray fervently at all times (1 Thess 5:17; Col 4:2), give thanks for all things (1 Thess 5:18), seek to edify one another in church (Rm 14:19; 1 Thess 5:11), make the most of opportunities to share the gospel and witness to Christ (Col 4:6). Many characteristics of the individual Christian life are a 'given'. But what about the general direction of our lives and ministries? What about the people we find ourselves yoked to in ministry? What about the way we give to the Lord's work? What about how we spend our time, what we read and listen to? What about who we vote for?

It is very easy to be zealous and active in 'the Lord's work' and yet be labouring unprofitably. Martha was loved dearly by the Lord (Jn 11:5) and was tirelessly active in his presence but Jesus gently chided her for doing unnecessary tasks; her serving actually distracted her from Christ and his current purpose (Lk 10:40-41). If she had realised that he was soon to die, she would have spent every possible minute glorying in his presence instead of sweeping up. How she must have regretted those wasted moments only days later.

I believe that we all have Martha tendencies. We seek to be active and this makes us feel good about ourselves; we feel that we are fully on board the Gospel ship, lending a hand to the oars. It doesn't matter much what we are doing, so long as we are busy in church life. Is this wise? No, it is foolish. We are to make the most of the time (Eph 5:16).

¹ 'The glory of the Lord has departed.' The name given to her son by the wife of Phinehas after hearing that the ark of God had been captured, the glory had been taken from Israel and her husband had died.

What is God's overall plan in the world?

God is saving a people for his own glory ²

Since God is a spirit and invisible, he desired to create a universe that would be full of a visible, material manifestation of his perfections; God is jealous for his own name and glory. The universe benefits from nothing better than housing the glory of God; as a perfect being, God's best gift to the universe is to fill it with his glory. Though this is hard for modern, politically correct people to understand, it is true. The universe, and all that is in it, was designed solely to be the physical manifestation of the perfect glory of God; it is the demonstration of God.

Yet God is a personality, to fill the cosmos with an expression of all his character attributes he decreed to create a race of human beings who alone are able to demonstrate his love, loyalty, holiness, beauty, integrity, faithfulness, long-suffering, etc. Since no ordinary man can match God in even one attribute of his character, God chose a large number of people to be called by his name. Only together, as his body can they begin to express the character of God.

So the purpose for the creation of mankind was as a testimony to the character and glory of God. But man chose to rebel from this divine privilege and follow the direction of God's archenemy, Satan. Yet even this was foreordained to fulfil a greater purpose; both sides of God's character must be revealed: his hatred of evil as well as his love of righteousness, his wrath as well as his mercy, his justice as well as his pardon, his condemnation of sin as well as his salvation from it.

Man needed to be rescued; freed from the dominion of sin, released from the clutches of Satan and redeemed from the just wrath of God against sins committed. The predestined remedy was in God. The Father decreed to give up his own, eternal Son to die in the place of the chosen people. Jesus would pay for their sins so that God's holy law and justice were not compromised. As a man he could give up his life, as the Son of God the value of his life was infinite, limitless, able to pay for the sins of many. In doing this the Saviour takes manhood into the heart of God; after his ascension Jesus took a perfect human nature into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. Elect mankind is also drawn right into the family of the divine Godhead, Jesus as the head, the church as his body.

The key to God's plan in the present time is clearly with this elect people, the church. It is this company which is being preserved and nurtured to be the final expression of God's testimony for all eternity. The church is God's family, called to be the full and final manifestation of his divine character.

The focus upon Christ

When the first man fell, all creation was affected. All men would now spring from a diseased root and be subject to a sinful disposition, lost without a divine salvation. But the universe was also spoiled. Even the realm of nature became subjected to futility as the original purpose for it was ruined for a time.

When Christ came into the world to save sinners, he became the only object in it that God could love without qualification. As God's Son he was eternally beloved; having left

² For scriptural support for these assertions, see appendix 1 and 2.

heaven's throne he was God's beloved on the earth. Everything else was consigned to burning so that a new world free of sin and corruption could be made. Like the ark, Christ would take all the chosen people out of this world system to be resurrected into a new life which is united with Christ. Like the eight³ occupants of the ark, resurrected believers would be all that is rescued out of a world to be deluged by judgment for its sins.

The key to everything for a believer is that he is united with Christ as a new creature. Since he is in Christ, the Christian is loved by God and not hated for his sins; is not to be judged in wrath but receives mercy and grace; is guaranteed a place in the new heaven on earth; is part of the family of God and is able to be part of the manifestation of God's character. No one can snatch these elect people out of Christ's hands because they are joined to him in a new life.

The key to every blessing is Christ. The explanation for all the details of God's plan find their purpose in Christ. Christ is the foundation and cornerstone of all God's purposes.⁴

It is very important to understand these two worlds or dimensions. Natural man is not man as God originally created him; he is fallen and full of iniquity. This man can do no moral good (Rm 3:10ff) of any kind; even his practical good works are sin (Prov 21:4). This is why he cannot believe the Gospel or repent without divine grace. However, grace is only given to the elect, those chosen in Christ before time began (Eph 1:4-5). When these are given the ability to believe and repent they are changed. They are not only declared righteous through justification, but they are actually changed to be new creatures. They are a new order of being. Thus mankind is in two realms: natural man is in Adam, fallen and wicked; believers are in Christ, raised, and are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). The wicked, or reprobate, that are not saved become the manifestation of God's holy wrath and justice in hell.

The purpose behind hell

Just as God is pleased to reveal his nature through a body of people as a demonstration of his love, mercy, compassion, grace and faithfulness, God must also ensure that there is an eternal demonstration of his wrath, justice, judgment, anger and condemnation against sin. Wickedness cannot ruin God's first creation without there being a just punishment; first against the demonic forces which inspired this fall, but also against men who wilfully choose to ignore God and sin. Hell is a place of eternal testimony to the justice and wrath of God, just as the church is an eternal witness to the grace and mercy of God. Heaven and hell are dual demonstrations of God's glory.

Election

Hell is a very unpopular doctrine today, but not as unpopular as election. The fact is, however, that the Bible screams the doctrine of election from cover to cover. Election cannot be withdrawn from the Bible without overturning everything in it, and election is a vital component of the plan of God.

Divine election means that God chooses, discriminates, selects. We are clearly told that believers are elect because they were chosen to be loved before the creation of the world and before they had ever done anything positive. God's love is particular or discriminating; he only loves those who were chosen to be placed into his Son before time began, solely as a result of his good pleasure. Conversely, God chooses not to give grace, mercy or love to

³ Eight is the Biblical number of resurrection.

⁴ For a full dissertation on the importance of our union with Christ, please see my booklet, *In Christ*.

another group of people called the ‘reprobate’ (‘rejected’). These were predestined to be the object of God’s justice and wrath from before time. Hateful though this may be to modern sensibilities, scripture is very clear on this. We may not delight in such an awesome doctrine, but we must believe it. All of this has massive practical reverberations in Gospel preaching.

Conclusion

This is a simple overview of God’s plan and purpose. It is centred in creating a visible demonstration of God’s divine attributes so that the whole universe reverberates with the glory of God. The plan of salvation is the central part of this purpose since it is the means to produce a race of people who love God and are loved by God. These become, through Christ’s work, actual sons of God who share his glory and are the means of spreading this revelation of God throughout the worlds in eternity. The glorified church is the fulfilment of God’s desire to have a people who will glorify his name eternally. The outworking of the plan of salvation is evidenced in the revelation of God in scripture and can be traced progressively through various stages, beginning with creation and culminating in the perfection of the saints at the Second Coming [See my paper, *God’s purpose – a diagram*].

The centre of everything in this plan is Christ. He is the fulcrum on which everything else rests. He is the image and glory of God, the eternally begotten Son, sent to earth to become man and then as Saviour to take manhood into God, thus creating a race of people in him, the Firstborn. Christ will always be the central focus of all divine operations just as he is the centre of God’s revealed word. As scripture focuses entirely upon him, so the church makes him the centre of her attention, desire and worship.

Some practical applications

The Focus of All Effort, Vision & Strategy

Jesus Christ must be the beginning, middle and end of our passion

Nothing should preoccupy our thoughts which is not centred upon Christ in some way. Obviously we all have many tasks which require concentration, even in the church, but the focus of the main thrust of our energies should be vitally connected to the glory of Christ.

In our lives, do we seek to plan our activities, leisure time, objectives etc. around the testimony of God or around our own desires? The reason we were created was to witness to God’s character, the sooner we get behind the program the better, and the more content we will be.

Now it is not wrong to be captivated by something which is a gift of God. We should love our spouse, be thrilled by good music, be enchanted by a picturesque sunset or be overwhelmed by a star-filled night-sky. It glorifies God that we enjoy such honourable things and give thanks in our heart to him. It is dangerous, however, to be constantly preoccupied with diversions which have no basis in God and which only seek to pander to our satisfaction. There is nothing wrong with relaxing in front of a good TV program at the end of a long day’s work; but there is a problem if one’s whole week is dominated by hour after hour of any rubbish which the media churns out.

The same principle applies to church life. It is all too easy to waste huge amounts of energy, time, and money on activities and strategies which do not glorify our Saviour at all. There is not space here to list all such efforts, but it is a valid question to ask if Jesus is being testified to in our plans. Even the ministry can be at fault here. Does the preaching seek to focus people upon Christ or is it rehearsing one pet theory and topic after another. So much ministry these days never even mentions the name of Jesus. In days when pragmatism rules, even Reformed churches are being criticised for losing their focus upon Christ.

God's plan is that we glorify him through testifying to his Son and sharing his life. This world is a preparing ground to lead us into this work. We have to learn how to put Christ first here if we are to be of use later.

Proposition 1:

If Jesus Christ is not the centre of our main efforts, in church or at home, there is something wrong which needs re-evaluation.

Church strategies must be related to the testimony

The primary objective of all church work must be the glorifying of God through effective witness to Jesus. This is not referring to evangelism, but bearing the fruit of the resurrected life of Christ in all the activities of the body. This doctrine affects absolutely everything. It is not only important because it relates to the overriding purpose of God in creating us, but only what flows from resurrection life will be any good. Only what is inspired by God will endure. Only what is produced by the Spirit will edify. Only the good works created by God for us will ensure good workmanship (Eph 2:10).

To help us be effective, God gives clear commands, just in case we don't understand how to work out principles from doctrine. In this case he states: *Unless the LORD builds the house, they labour in vain who build it* (Ps 127:1). Any work for God has to be done by him. This is not work which is merely: sincerely for him, hopefully to bless him, prayerfully to please him, excellently performed to make him proud. Nothing we do is of any use at all; God's work must be done by God's grace through us.

This is why the current trend for following human methodology to build the church is so corrupting. Practices have developed, and famous church leaders have written books, which propose:

- Using commercial management training modules to grow leaders.
- Using 'human resources' (personnel) appraisal methods to make church officers more efficient.
- Using expensive advertising campaigns to attract visitors to meetings.
- Making services more user friendly to the world by cutting back on preaching, incorporating pop and rock music, having drama sessions, using slick but dumbed-down audio-visual presentations.

We could go on and on. I have no hesitation in condemning all these ideas out of hand, and do not fear being called names for it. It is one thing to contextualise the Gospel message so that people can better understand it, it is quite another to adopt fleshly methods which have no divine sanction. It is even worse to use these methods because our failure to use God's own prescriptions has resulted in ineffectiveness.

God's plan is to use his created and redeemed people to manifest his own invisible nature through them to the immaterial and material worlds. If we lean on our own understanding we short-circuit this process. We thus fail to let God work through us and create an Ishmael, and Ishmaels only ever lead to debilitation.⁵

All church strategies, and the methods to achieve them, must arise from the mind of God and be outworked through the grace and power of God. Nothing less will ensure an effective testimony. One means of assessing this is to consider how Biblical our strategies and methods are. If our projects have originated in God, they will comply with his word, the expression of his will. Therefore, goals and services which find no support in scripture cannot be defended and should be dropped immediately.⁶

One of the worst failures of the modern church is the elevation of men. This strikes at the very heart of the proper testimony to God which we should be striving for. The very plethora of grandiose titles which adorn ministries is appalling. Even nascent church groups which arose within the last 20 years soon found that the emerging leaders had to be denominated by grand and authoritative titles. Having rebelled against ecclesiastical formalism and grandeur, the New Churches (Restorationist Charismatic) had to call their leaders: apostles, prophets, pastoral team-leaders and so on; in doing so they accredited such men with far more authority and potential for abuse than the formal systems they withdrew from. Soon enough tales of heavy-shepherding abuse became widespread, and not all of them were exaggerations.

Any elevation of men is a distraction from the focus upon Christ, both in meetings and in the more general church infra-structure. Church leaders are only ever called 'elders'. There is no other local church office. Men may have other functions like Gospel proclamation (evangelist), church planting (apostle) or itinerant bringing of the word of the Lord (prophet), but none of these ministries carry authority in the local church above that of the elders.

The role of leadership is totally circumscribed by the principle of the testimony of God. Elders ensure that meetings glorify Christ by being decent and in order. They nurture the people in order to equip them for service. They direct worship so that Christ is honoured. They enforce discipline so that unruly elements are removed. In doing this they will invoke the principle of *koinonia* (communion, fellowship). They will not hog the meetings but enable people to share their gifts as God leads them. They will not take centre-stage but encourage from within like a father, only raising their profile as necessary for the good of the meeting. This is why Biblical churches are in homes with few members.

The testimony is a body thing. It arises from the corporate man, the people in church. When a church merely becomes an audience for one or two men on a platform, it has ceased to mean anything remotely connected with Biblical church life at all and cannot testify to God in any measurable way (see 1 Cor 12).

⁵ Ishmael was Abraham's idea on how to create an heir by using his ingenuity and a proxy-wife. The result was strife in the home and the creation of a future race of enemies for Israel.

⁶ I am not considering the advances of technology here but the principles of service. For instance: using PA systems may be advisable, but they may not. If they enable deaf people to hear better through a loop system, this must be acceptable. If, however, it merely means that loud and inappropriate music is blasted to all and sundry, then PAs are unhelpful. Similarly, audio-taping ministry may help workers who miss the sermon and sick people unable to attend. Yet if the tape ministry becomes a means of boosting revenue by high prices for poor messages, it has failed. Modern technology is a two edged sword and must be evaluated according to the rule of: 'does it glorify God and testify to Christ'? None of these things are necessary in a house church.

Proposition 2:

Do nothing in church which does not arise from the mind of Christ. The Bible gives clear guidance on all basic offices, objectives, methods, tasks, ministries and service so that we are never lost for clues as to how we achieve something.

Proposition 3:

The testimony of the church will arise, pre-eminently, from corporate fellowship life, not gifted individuals. Men should never take centre-stage in ecclesiastical affairs.

Personal Ministry and Work

Don't waste time propping up dead works

At the time of Jesus, Jewish religious leaders thought that they were ardently serving God and had a monopoly on his testimony. Even as they plotted to deliver God's own Son up to a wrongful death, they thought they were doing God a favour. Weeks later, the emerging church began its ministry and witness, and the religious leaders persecuted it harshly, even killing godly men like Stephen. While they pursued this course, they listened to the Old Testament scriptures week by week (Acts 15:21) but failed to recognise the Christ or his disciples. They insisted that they served God but in fact opposed him. Can believers fall into this trap? Yes they can, at least for a time. This is why the New Testament is full of warnings about deception. Anyone who continues in deception cannot be truly saved.

Today there are many churches and ministries which claim to be evangelical but which adopt alien practices and teach erroneous doctrine. Whether the leaders understand this or not, who can say, but many sincere believers loyally support these aberrant groups.

For instance, some church groups are fixated upon healing and miracles; their whole life is founded upon the need for powerful signs. Individuals in such churches then become centred upon these things, either seeking constant personal healing of this and that or seeking to bring healing to others in the group. Now the NT gives not one example of a believer being healed supernaturally, though it gives many examples of Christian workers being hindered by sickness; it is also full of teaching about suffering and the value it has in creating Christ-like character. Thus, in these churches, we see that widespread apostolic teaching about the ubiquity of sickness, suffering, tribulation, persecution and affliction is ignored, while the basis of their church life is founded upon something without scriptural sanction. Worse, when God is seeking to train a person through suffering, these folk treat this as the devil's work and try to bring supernatural relief from the suffering – thus opposing God's will. How can people fail to see that this is a deception? Worse still, when attempts to achieve significant healings fail, many take on board occult-type techniques based upon mysticism and shamanism that have been opposed to God from the time of Nimrod and Babel. Having found no help in the Bible, they end up leaning upon outlawed occult techniques. This is worse than deception, and yet it is common today.

What do we see in Christ's example? We see suffering. We see a man who was affected in his holy character by the sin around him every day. We see human opposition to his ministry. We see those who were supposedly waiting for his appearance persecuting him, and even joining forces with their political enemies in an attempt to destroy him. We see his own disciples reject him and flee in the time of his greatest need.

- For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (Heb 2:18)

- who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (Heb 5:7-9)

If Jesus himself learned obedience through suffering, why do we think that we can escape this discipline? The modern deception fails to see Christ and his discipline of our character as the centre of practical life; it fails to understand God's purpose in suffering. It doesn't see God's plan! Consequently it ignores even clear scriptures (e.g. Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12).

Another example regards people in the Jewish Root Movement or Christian Zionism. These have made an even greater error by following the presuppositions of a false theological system of interpretation. Without going into details of why their interpretations are false [which is easily done; Matt 21:43 alone destroys this idea. See my book, *The Veil of Moses*] if they would give attention to God's plan they would see the folly of their ways. The focus of all God's purposes is Christ. He is the only object of God's desire, the beloved Son of the Father, and there is no person or object in the universe that God delights in except Christ. The elect are beloved by God because they are in Christ; as Christ is loved as the Son, so they also are the apple of the Father's eye. God has placed everything else outside the church as ready for destruction at the Last Day.

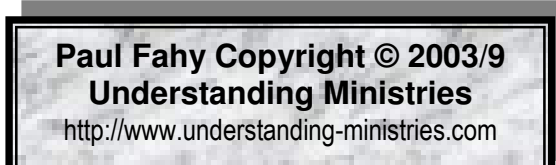
The interpretation of OT prophecies must be made to follow NT apostolic guidelines (Christ's final words revealed by the Spirit) and comply with God's plan, not modern fleshly ideas. The foundational doctrine (a split in God's purpose: temporarily for the elect but finally and eternally with Israel) only arose in London after 1830, with the origin of Dispensationalism, amongst heretical groups such as the Catholic Apostolic Church and Edward Irving; then adopted and adapted by John Darby and promoted by the Scofield Bible.

The tragedy of these people is that they spend their whole time fixated upon Israel [some even adopt Jewish names, go to a 'synagogue' eat a kosher diet, use Jewish terminology instead of Biblical words, follow rabbinic interpretation etc.]; and this even leads them to some serious ramifications, such as when Israel perpetrates war crimes with their support. This will have to be answered for on the Day of Judgment and such folk will suffer loss for it. By focusing upon Israel, a merely fleshly and sinful nation, these supposed believers fail to give Christ the attention God demands. They ignore Christ and set their lives around a political, fleshly nation. How sinfully foolish is this? It is utterly out of kilter with God's plan, which totally centres upon Christ.

Conclusion

We could continue to apply this to life's situations, but the point has been made. Believers must get a full understanding of the plan and purpose of God. Only by comprehending this can we make sense of scripture. Many problems in interpretation are resolved as we put our studies into the greater context of God's overall purpose. Certainly, our lives must be founded upon God's purpose; only by doing so can we hope to avoid errors, escape deception and create something of value to God in the way we live by doing faith works.

Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* © Thomas Nelson 1982



Supporting scriptures for assertions made regarding God's plan

God is jealous for his own name and glory.

- ... for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. (Ex 34:14)
- I will be jealous for my holy name. (Ezek 39:25)
- I am the LORD, that is my name and my glory I will not give to another. (Isa 42:8)

God created a race of angels to be his messengers or ministers, but one third of these rebelled. Angels now are either elect and serve God or are demons who follow Satan and who will be cast into the eternal lake of fire.

- I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels. (1 Tim 5:21)
- To which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make your enemies your footstool"? Are they not all ministering spirits? (Heb 1:13-14)
- ... a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. (Rev 12:3-4)
- The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Rev 20:10)

The purpose for the creation of mankind was as a testimony to the character of God.

- God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church. (Eph 3:9-10)
- ... and you shall be witnesses to Me (Acts 1:8)
- I [an angel] am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. (Rev 19:10)
- ... who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Rev 12:17)
- And my mouth shall show forth your praise. (Ps 51:15)
- So we, Your people and sheep of your pasture, will give you thanks forever; we will show forth your praise to all generations. (Ps 79:13)
- For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:10)

The fall was foreordained to fulfil God's greater purpose. God decreed the predestined remedy before time.

- He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ. (Eph 1:4-5)
- The Lamb [Jesus] slain from the foundation of the world. (Rev 13:8)
- For whom He foreknew [i.e. 'set his heart upon', 'loved' as in Gen 4:1, 18:19; 1 Cor 8:3 etc.], He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Rm 8:29)
- But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. (1 Thess 2:13)
- In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Eph 1:11-12)

Our salvation is according to this eternal, electing purpose

- And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Rm 8:28)
- ... 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 Tim 1:9)

God chose a large number of people to be called by his name.

- [The seed of Abraham's faith] ... as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. (Heb 11:12)
- And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! (Rev 19:6)

These chosen people were given to Christ.

- You gave them to me ... those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ... those whom you have given me... Those whom You gave Me I have kept... they also whom You gave Me. (Jn 17:6,9,11,12,24)

The Son is eternally beloved.

- And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt 3:17)
- While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him! (Matt 17:5)
- For He received from God the Father honour and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (2 Pt 1:17)

The Father covenanted to give up his own, eternal Son to die in the place of the chosen people.

- In these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds. (Heb 1:2)
- In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ... And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world. (1 Jn 4::9,10,14)
- For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (Jn 3:16)
- "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death." (Acts 2:23)
- "For truly against your holy Servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done. (Acts 4:27-28)

Jesus covenanted to purchase atonement for his people with his own blood

- ... knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (1 Pt 1:18-19)
- Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant. (Heb 13:20)

The Holy Spirit covenanted to apply that atonement to the elect saints

- But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me. (Acts 1:8)

- He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify me, for He will take of what is mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are mine. Therefore I said that He will take of mine and declare it to you. (Jn 16:14-15)
- He regenerates (Ezek 37:1-14; Jn 3:5-6,8; Titus 3:5)
- He resurrects (Ezek 37:12-14; Rm 8:11)
- He convicts of sin (Jn 16:8-11)
- He effectually calls to salvation (Eph 4:4 the Son and the Father also call.)
- He sanctifies (1 Cor 6:11; Rm 15:16; Gal 5:16-18)
- He indwells believers (Jn 7:38; Acts 2:17, 8:15-17; Rm 8:9-11; Eph 1:13-14)

Salvation in Christ is compared to the ark.

- ... in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype [fulfilment of the figurative picture] which now saves ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God. (1 Pt 3:20-22)
- And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man. (Lk 17:27)

After his ascension Jesus took a perfected human nature into heaven to sit at the right hand of God.

- This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God... (Acts 2:32-33)
- ... behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus. (Heb 6:19-20)
- But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. (Heb 10:12)
- Look! I [Stephen] see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God! (Acts 7:56)
- He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places. (Eph 1:20)

Jesus is now the firstborn of a new race of people able to manifest God spiritually, called the church, which is united in Him.

- He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence. (Col 1:18)
- ... having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth -- in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Eph 1:9-12)
- 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. (Rm 8:29)
- ... that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in me, and I in You; that they also may be one in us. (Jn 17:21)

The church is the body of Christ.

- And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, is body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:22-23)
- And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence... for the sake of His body, which is the church. (Col 1:18,24)

The church is the dwelling place of God

- ...a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:21-22)

- For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. (1 Cor 3:9)
- If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. (1 Cor 3:17)
- And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (2 Cor 6:16)

Believers can manifest God because they are now part of Christ's life.

- 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. (Rm 8:29)
- If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. (1 Pt 4:14)
- ... till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ. (Eph 4:13-15)
- For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. (Col 2:9-10)

The key to everything for a believer is that he is united with Christ.

- Note the phrases 'In Christ', 'In him', 'In whom' etc. repeated scores of times in the New Testament.
- For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. (Col 2:9-10)
- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. (Eph 1:3)

Christ is the foundation and corner stone of all God's purposes.

- ... the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph 3:11)
- that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ. (Eph 1:10)
- Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (Eph 2:20-21)
- For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 3:11)
- "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev 1:8, also 1:11, 21:16, 22:13)

God's purposes in this world are centred on the church because the church is united to Christ.

- And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to ['towards' or 'for'] the church. (Eph 1:22-23)
- And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (Matt 16:18)
- ... the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim 3:15)

God's purposes are not focused anywhere else, in any way, even Israel.

- Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. (Matt 21:43)

- To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you. (1 Cor 1:2-6) From this note: God's assembly is in the church; those who are God's saints are the church; those who are sanctified are in the church; those who call on God are in the church; those who receive grace are the church; those who have peace with God are the church; those who are enriched by God are in the church; the testimony of God is in the church.
- And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church. (Eph 1:22) Jesus is the Lord of all for the church, not for any other body or nation.
- ... now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. (Eph 3:10) God is known and witnessed to by the church not by anything else.
- To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:21) The church is the body that glorifies God for all generations eternally. The church is not eradicated by God at some later stage.
- For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Eph 5:29-32) God cherishes the church which is a part of him. The very divine institution of marriage was to prefigure the joining of the church to God.
- ... the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim 3:15) The church is the house of God, not some nation or race. It is also the pillar of the truth. The truth is not held in custody by some other body.
- But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people. (1 Pt 2:9) God only has one nation, that is the church. The church is his chosen vessel and his only special people.

God's love is particular (discriminating) and God's grace is specifically targeted: the elect Christian is loved by God but unbelieving, reprobate sinners are hated.

- Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. (Rm11:5, grace works by election, not indiscriminately)
- In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 Jn 4:10, those whom God loves, he saves.)
- Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace. (2 Thess 2:16, those whom God loves, he grants eternal consolation.)
- You hate all workers of iniquity. (Ps 5:5)
- The LORD tests the righteous, But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. (Ps 11:5)
- And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), as said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." (Rm 9:10-13)
- For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. (Rm 9:15-16)
- Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honour and another for dishonour? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the

riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called. (Rm 9:21-24)

- The LORD has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom. (Prov 16:4)

No one can snatch elect people out of Christ's hands.

- And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. (Jn 10:28-29)

When the first man fell, all creation was affected.

- For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. (Rm 8:20-22)

The earth, damaged by sin, is consigned to burning so that a new world free of sin and corruption can be made. In this world heaven and earth merge. God dwells with mankind.

- ... the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pt 3:12-13)
- And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. (Rev 21:3)

Hell is an eternal demonstration of God's justice and wrath.

- The wicked shall be turned into hell, *And* all the nations that forget God. (Ps 9:17)
- If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched -- where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched -- where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire -- where 'Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' (Mk 9:43-48)
- Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. (Rev 19:20)
- The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. ... and anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:10, 15)

Believers share in some measure of glory now, through grace - which is glory begun.

- I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed. (1 Pt 5:1)
- Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rm 8:30)

Believers are fully glorified at Christ's return

- For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Col 3:3-4)

- ... to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 2:14)
- ... who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body. (Phil 3:21)

The perfected church is the full manifestation of the invisible nature of God to the universe and spiritual powers.

- God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 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. (Eph 3:9-11)

Appendix Two

Figurative explanation of the plan of God

