

I Used to be Saved

By Anthony C. Burrell

Introduction: That they may know You

You learn a lot about a person from their dying wishes. Just look at the concerns of Jesus' heart when He knew the time had come for Him to give His life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. He prayed with His disciples after giving them powerful instruction concerning His departure and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We find what many have called His High Priestly prayer in John 17¹. Here, Jesus is concerned with the sanctification of His church (v. 17). He desired that His Father would keep the first generation of His disciples from the corrupting influences of this world (v. 15). He prays for the future generations of disciples that would come to know and trust Him through the witness of the Apostles. He desires that His would be perfectly united in oneness. Jesus wants His followers to enjoy the same oneness with each other that He has experienced with His Father throughout eternity. He wants the world to see God through the witness of the unity of His people (John 17:20-26).

But before these things, Jesus in His prayer recognizes that “the hour is come” (John 17:1). Every moment of His life has led up to this one. As Jesus “lifted up His eyes to heaven” we see that He is totally dependent on His Father, looking to Him for grace and strength for this decisive moment of His life. What is His all-consuming desire at this point of His life? He prays, “Father... glorify Thy Son,” and emphatically repeats “glorify Thou Me” (John 17:1, 5). His ultimate concern, on which the very balance of the universe is hanging at this moment, is that in this hour of great trial that looms before Him He would reveal the character of His Father. Why? “That they might know Thee, the only true God” (John 17:3). Jesus isn't concerned with protecting His life or avoiding the conflict with sin and death that stands just before Him. His only desire, is that He would show the world the only true picture of God His father. In his death, Jesus wanted the world to see that the Lord God is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and

¹ This article will be best appreciated by the reader who takes time to look up and read the Bible text that are quoted, referenced, or paraphrased.

truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:6-7).

We see this all-consuming desire of the true knowledge of God in His servant Moses. The Lord assured Moses that He would forgive the sins of His people who so quickly broke His covenant, forgot His merciful deliverance, turned aside from His law, and worshipped other Gods (Exodus 32; 33:12). But Moses was not content with the assurance of God’s pardon. He wanted more. He prayed to the Lord, “Shew me now thy way, that I may know Thee” (Exodus 33:13).

This all-consuming desire is also reflected in the experience of the apostle Paul. He rejoiced that he had given up his ambitious pursuit of influence and status among the Jews. He had rejected the idea of his own worthiness because of his heritage and accomplishments (Philippians 3:1-7). He counted all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus His Lord (v. 8). In comparison to Christ, anything that could be considered good about him amounted to a pile of garbage. Now, the desire of his life was to “know Him” (Philippians 3:10).

If we’re honest, our desire in life is not so noble as Jesus, Moses, or Paul. Many of us are content to achieve some level of status in this world and comfort in this life. Some go farther and are satisfied if they can earn a decent living and provide for those under their care. Or even worse, the disease of apathy sets in and a person has no great desire in life and becomes content merely existing. Some go to great lengths to fulfill their all-consuming desire to feel good about themselves. More and more, the world, especially Western civilization, is displaying great ingenuity in evading reality and helping people to simply be happy with themselves. Reality is ignored if it causes the slightest bit of insecurity. We’d rather feel good than actually be good.

For many Christians, this kind of insecurity has shaped their view of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many will agree that at the core of the Christian faith is a good news message that brings hope and encouragement. However, we don’t all agree on exactly what that good news is. Many Christians use terms such as “Christ-centered” and “Jesus-Focused” to describe what Christianity ought to be. But, have we lost sight of who Jesus really is and what He wants to accomplish through His people? Christians generally agree that the

overall tone of our message should be inspiring, uplifting, encouraging, assuring, and positive. However, we often settle for a hope and encouragement that merely feels good. We don't stop to consider whether or not it actually is good.

Our insecurity can prevent us from experiencing “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.” Often our insecurity leads us to simply seek after Christ for a way out of hell and a way into heaven. In this kind of religion, Who Christ is doesn't matter so much as what He can do for me. I've met an evangelist who literally gives away “get out of hell free cards.” For others, escaping punishment is not their great pursuit. They may be excited that Jesus can rescue them from depression or unfavorable circumstances like poverty. Some people feel that their greatest need is to be recognized as a victim and rescued from a corrupt social order that doesn't favor their race, gender, level of education, or economic status.

But what if the “glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Timothy 1:11) is more than all of this? What if Jesus is concerned with our insecurities, but His greatest concerns eclipse our insecurities? What if our insecurities would vanish away if we only wouldn't focus on our insecurities, but on “the eternal purpose which [God] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:11). Read on in this series of articles and you'll find out why I used to be saved, but now my mission in life is to “know Him.”

Part I: The Context of the Gospel

Doing Theology

Everyone's a theologian whether they recognize it or not. Theology is the study of God, more specifically the nature, ways, and character of God. God created us to image Him, or reflect Him (Genesis 1:26-28). Our greatest responsibility in life is to love God completely, which includes loving Him with our minds (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 22:37, 38). Therefore, we are theological by nature. For example, even professed atheists are theologians. It's just that atheistic theology has no room for God. In the same way, professed agnostics are theologians whose theology doesn't affirm that it is possible to

know God. Maybe this is because many are attempting to avoid the responsibility that comes with knowing God (1 John 2:3, 4).

Because we are theological by nature, the responsibility devolves upon every member of the human race to learn how to do theology. In the conservative Christian world, you see two major approaches to theology; Biblical theology and systematic theology.² Now, of course every Christian wants to claim that their theology is Biblical. But, the terminology “Biblical theology” refers to carefully studying the Bible in light of the historical narrative of the plan of salvation that emerges from the individual books of the Bible. Systematic theology, on the other hand, seeks to organize the major teachings of the Bible into themes, topics, or doctrines. Both approaches are valid and represent necessary components of fruitful experience in studying God’s Word.

One author in particular recognizes the necessity to balance both Biblical and systematic theology in studying the Bible.

“The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God’s original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found.”³

Notice the need to “view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts.” The Bible has a “grand central theme.” These are all words that resonate with the practice of systematic theology. However, the good Bible student should also grasp “God’s original

² Other notable approaches to theology include historical theology and practical theology. Historical theology observes how particular Biblical teachings have been understood by the church over time. Practical theology, possibly the most important, seeks to apply the teachings of the Bible to real-life situations.

³ Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 190

purpose for the world, the rise of the great controversy, and the work of redemption.” We need to trace the principles of this “great controversy... through the records of history and prophecy.” This kind of language supports the approach of Biblical theology. This author was also a practical theologian who recognized that the teachings of the Bible enter into “every phase of human experience.”

Either way you go, it’s important to recognize that good theology is organized and has a framework. For the Biblical theologian the framework is the story of redemption. For the systematic theologian the framework is the grand central theme of the Bible and the connections between the whole and its parts. Even Jesus was a systematic theologian. He recognized that the entire Bible of His day, the Old Testament, revealed two major principles of whole-hearted love for God and love for humanity (Matthew 22:40). However, Jesus was also a Biblical theologian who realized the Bible told the story of His saving work in the plan of redemption (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39). Both Biblical and systematic theology are included in “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

The danger in doing theology is inventing a human framework and attempting to bend the Bible to fit limited human ideas of who God is and what He’s doing. This is called twisting the Scriptures to our own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).⁴ This is where Biblical theology is a helpful safeguard and balance to systematic theology. When organizing the teachings of the Bible into various themes, it is easy to become unaware of allowing human philosophy to form a framework, or even a foundation for theology. Human speculations and opinions can be used to attempt to explore the deep mysteries of Scripture and solve some of the difficulties that are presented. However, in doing Biblical theology the student is dependent on God’s revelation of the story of redemption. The narrative of the Bible is clearly seen. Each book of the Bible reveals new parts of the story that shed light on what happened before and pave the way for what’s to come.

I believe that because of doing systematic theology unbalanced by Biblical theology, many sincere Christians have been looking at the gospel through a lens that is too narrow to capture the full glory of the gospel. That is, they see many beautiful pieces of the gospel, but they never discern the glorious whole. When this happens, it’s easy to

⁴ The Gospel of John doesn’t have the only important 3:16!

understand the gospel out of context. The various pieces of the gospel are seen, but never in their proper setting. It's like marveling over the various components to the engine of a car, but never assembling the engine, or better yet, actually benefiting from driving the car! To attempt to assemble the engine of a car without any guidance is like trying to use human philosophies to organize the teaching of the Bible without the God-inspired narrative framework presented in the Bible itself.

Before “the Beginning”

Therefore, to grasp the gospel of Jesus Christ, we need to see it in the context of the story of redemption. The book of Genesis seems to be a great place to start. We see God introduced to us as the Creator (Genesis 1:1). We see Him creating the world in six literal days and resting on the seventh day. We see God preparing the world for His crowning act of creation, humanity. We see humanity created in God’s image and given the responsibility of having dominion over the earth and multiplying and filling the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). God sees everything that He has made and “behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). He rests on the seventh day, sets it apart, and blesses it as the seal of His satisfaction with the perfection of His work (Genesis 2:1-3).

The second chapter zooms in on God’s creation of humanity on the sixth day. He created a man and placed him in a garden of delights (Genesis 2:7).⁵ Man is given the pleasant task of tending and keeping the garden and the noble responsibility of naming the various animals that God created (Genesis 2:15, 19). God even blessed Adam with a helper who was perfectly suited for Him (Genesis 2:18). God entered in a covenant of loyalty with the human race that they would enjoy a life of pleasure and unbounded joy if they would obey His voice. If they would demonstrate their trust in Him by respecting the boundaries that He set they would live and not die (Genesis 2:16-17).

It’s a beautiful story. We could wish that the Bible ended there and said “And mankind lives in perfect communion with their Maker, happily ever after.” However, that verse does not exist in the book of Genesis. We see that the first two humans break their covenant of loyalty to God. We see that the woman was deceived into doing this by a serpent (Genesis 3:1-6). We see God behaving mercifully towards Adam and Eve. He removed them from the garden and told them that their lives would be marked by the discipline of hardship. But, God promised deliverance through the offspring of the woman (Genesis 3:15). This “seed” would crush the head of the serpent who had led the first pair into sin. God established this new covenant of mercy with a system of sacrifice (3:21). The humans were to recognize that their only hope of deliverance was in the self-sacrificing love of God by offering animal sacrifices. This constant reminder of God’s love was

⁵ The Hebrew word *עֵדֶן* translated “Eden” literally means “delight.”

intended to create a love for God in the heart of fallen humans so that they could once again be loyal to Him.

However, God's promise of deliverance did not find speedy fulfillment. The first offspring to come from the woman ended up being a life-taker, not a life-giver (Genesis 4:8). Moreover, only ten generations after the first man Adam, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:5,6, 11).

In this context we see the power of God in creation and the mercy of God in redemption. But, for many the story of the creation and fall of the human race raises more questions than it provides answers. It's relatively easy to conclude that since "God is love" (1 John 4:8), He expressed His love in creating beings whom He could share His love with. But, why place the first humans in a garden with such a peculiar and particular command? Why was a deceiving serpent in the garden to tempt Eve? Some Christians will accept that God desired the love of His creation which requires a free will decision. He put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden to allow them an opportunity to choose to love and trust Him. Even so, why was an antagonistic character present to tempt and encourage Adam and Eve to do something other than love God?

Furthermore, why the cryptic language in communicating the first glimpses of the hope of the gospel? Who is the "seed" that will crush the head of the serpent? What does it mean to crush the head of the serpent? How will it be crushed? Who is the serpent and why does His head need to be crushed? Why was a blood sacrifice needed to represent God's provision for fallen humans coming back to oneness with God?⁶

Some when face with these questions respond "O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus" (Romans 9:20)? Now, it is true that we should not question God doubtfully and disrespectfully. But on the other hand, God has given humans a natural curiosity and loves

⁶ In the language of theology, this is called atonement.

to dialogue with them so that they can discover truth for themselves (Ecclesiastes 3:11; Isaiah 1:18). He leads us to reverently ask these questions and loves to provide answers (Jeremiah 33:3).

The answers to such questions and an infinity more can be found if we go back in the Bible's story before the beginning. We have to put the gospel in context. Does the story of redemption begin in Genesis? Or, does the Bible open to our eyes events that happened before the beginning? How will understanding these events broaden our scope of the full glory of the gospel? Let's see.

The Plan

The first chapter of the book of Ephesians is complex yet glorious. It communicates clearly that the plan of salvation is a blessing to us but it is bigger than us. In one long, complex sentence Paul tells us how God "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Even among all of the prepositional phrases and adverbial amplifications that modify the main ideas of this text, one truth shines through. God has a plan and he is accomplishing that plan "in Christ."

Jesus Christ is at the very center of God's plan. Paul tells us that God has made the mystery of His will known to us in Christ (Ephesians 1:9). That is, God's purpose had been hidden from human knowledge, but was revealed in Jesus Christ. God's plan is that in the fullness of time, the entire universe will be united in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:10; cf. Colossians 1:20)

Paul tells us where we enter God's plan. God "chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him" (Ephesians 1:4).⁷ "In love," He "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus

⁷ The ones chosen in this verse are all those who come to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul uses pronouns to refer to the recipients of the blessings of the gospel until verse 12. There, he tells us that he is referring to those "who first trusted in Christ." Verse 13 also includes those who "also trusted" after hearing the word of truth, the gospel of salvation. This is the Biblical sense of a person being elected to (or chosen for) salvation. Theologians often refer to this understand as the corporate view of election. That is, God chose a corporate body of people who would come to salvation through faith in His Son. The Bible's teaching of election in no way lessens the human's responsibility to choose to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by faith.

Christ to Himself” (Ephesians 1:5).⁸ The end goal that God had in mind when He did this was that we would be “to the praise and the glory of His grace.” It is within this purpose that God “hath made us accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). God has a plan that includes us, but it is bigger than us. Our part in God’s plan was marked out for us before the foundation of the world!

What does all of this mean? “God is love” (1 John 4:8). In eternity past, God wanted a universe that would be secure in His love. He wanted a universe full of intelligent beings who would choose to love Him back. In His wisdom, God’s plan to achieve the eternal security of His universe took into account the possibility that His intelligent created beings could choose not to love Him back. God’s universe will only be secure when all of His intelligent creatures intentionally (not passively) love Him. It was not enough that His creatures loved Him by default because they were created perfect. God wanted to reveal Himself in such a way that His creatures could intentionally decide that they loved their Creator back. He purposed to do this in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the “brightness of [God’s] glory” and “the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3). He is the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). Who would be better to so reveal the Father as to secure the loyalty of all of God’s intelligent beings.

However, God wanted to put the matter beyond all doubt. He wanted a second witness to His love and power. He purposed to create a race of beings who He would adopt as His children. These sons and daughters of God would be reflections of His holy and blameless character. They would be “to the praise of the glory of His grace.” It has been God’s “eternal purpose” to reveal His “manifold wisdom” “to the principalities and powers in heavenly places” “by His church,” or His called-out representatives (Ephesians 3:9, 10).

⁸ Predestinated (KJV, or more commonly predestined) should not be understood the same way as pre-determined. The Greek word προορίζω (*prohorizo*, lit. pre-horizon) means to set boundaries or limits. Luke uses the same root in recording Paul’s speech on Mars Hill: “And (God) hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined (ὀρίζω, *horizo*, lit. horizoned) the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us” (Acts 17:26-27). God has set limits on every person, like when and where they’re born. He has set these limits on us with the intention that we will find Him, and salvation through Him, if we will seek Him. David discusses this same concept when he writes of the knowledge and foreknowledge of God in the 139th Psalm: Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me (Psalms 139:5).

It's in the context of this plan that God created humanity in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). The earth was to be like a lesson book for the universe. God gave the first man and woman the charge of exercising dominion over the earth. As long as the human race perfectly reflected God's Character in ruling over the earth, the rest of the universe would behold a picture of the wise rulership of God. It's no secret that angels observe the activities of this world with intense interest (1 Corinthians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:12). Jesus' witness to God's character and the second witness of the image-bearing human race would seal the allegiance of God's created beings for eternity.

An Enemy hath done this

Not everyone was excited about God's plan. Some didn't like the idea of the Son of God being honored as the Chief Executor of this plan. Some were not willing to comply with the policies of the heavenly government. How anyone could not rejoice over such a glorious plan is truly a mystery (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

There was one named Lucifer. Lucifer was an angel whom God had appointed to an exalted position in heaven. We learn of Lucifer in the 14th chapter of Isaiah's prophecy.

Isaiah was sent to prophesy to God's people, the southern kingdom of Judah. The burden of Isaiah's prophecy was a warning that if God's people continued in their unfaithfulness to His covenant, their nation would be destroyed and they would be taken captive by the King of Babylon. Isaiah's prophecy also offers the hope of deliverance from captivity, and the ultimate deliverance of salvation to those who turn from their sins and trust in the Lord. The beginning of the chapter 14 is a promise of this deliverance from Babylonian captivity. Isaiah prophesied that when God delivered His people, that they would sing a mocking song against the king of Babylon. We learn of Lucifer in this context. The rise and fall of the king of Babylon is compared to the rise and fall of Lucifer the exalted angel.

In sarcastic shock and horror, Isaiah exclaims "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning (Isaiah 14:12)! In a play on words, Lucifer is given a name that can mean brightness or boastfulness. He was created to shine. Like God's other

creatures, he was made to reflect the brightness of God's glory. However, he didn't see that he was given any special place in God's plan to secure His universe. He saw that the Son of God was preeminent (Colossians 1:18). He saw that God would create a special race of beings for this purpose. But he didn't see his name given any special mention in this plan. Why would God exclude such an important angel from His plan?

After all, Lucifer was "the anointed cherub that [covered]." He was "upon the holy mountain of God." He "walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire" (Ezekiel 28:14).⁹ Ezekiel writes of him, "Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, perfect in beauty" (Ezekiel 28:12). Lucifer was "perfect in all [his] ways from they day that [he was] created." That is, "till iniquity was found" in him (Ezekiel 28:15). Lucifer became prideful and his pride led him to corrupt his wisdom (Ezekiel 28:17). The gifts that he had been given for the glory of God were turned against his Creator.

Lucifer's problem began in his heart. "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). His dissatisfaction with God's plan led him to believe that he could come up with a better one. He figured that he could rule the universe better than God. He determined to engage in a political war against God.

Lucifer began to lobby the other angels. Ezekiel refers to this a merchandising and trafficking (Ezekiel 28:16, 18). He wanted to lead other angels to distrust God's form of government by selling them lies about God's character. If he could prove that God wasn't worthy to be loved and trusted, he could prove that God wasn't worthy to be the Leader of the universe. Discussing the same event, the book of Revelation tells us that "there was war in heaven" (Revelation 12:7). John employs the Greek word from which we derive the English word "polemic," meaning a strong written or verbal attack against someone or something. The nature of this war was political debate over who should be the ruler of the universe.

⁹ Ezekiel employs the same literary device as Isaiah. He compares the rise and fall of the prince of Tyrus with the rise and fall of the anointed cherub in heaven. Thus, we see that several prophecies connect the actions of human rulers with the actions of unseen spiritual forces (cf. Isaiah 45:1ff; Daniel 10:12-13; Ephesians 6:12).

Lucifer's arguments were directly leveled at the Son of God. Lucifer was able to deceive a third of the holy, sinless angels (Revelation 12:3, 4). They knew the Jesus as Michael, the Commander of all the angels. Lucifer asserted that it was not fair for Michael to be honored with such privileges as being the Chief Reconciler in God's plan. Lucifer forgot that while he reflected the brightness of God's glory, that the Son of God was the brightness of God's glory. He did not accept the fact that it was the Son of God who had created him and appointed him his position (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Ezekiel 28:14). Lucifer's rebellion led to him and his followers being removed from heaven and imprisoned on earth (Revelation 12:8; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6).

When on earth, Jesus taught his followers about this great controversy. Jesus compared himself to a man who sowed good seed in his field (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). The good seed was His perfect revelation of His Father's character of love. However, his enemy, the devil, sowed bad seed which produced weeds. The devil's bad seed were his lies about the character of God. He represented God as egotistical and self-serving. "Devil" was Lucifer's new title. He had once been a light-bearer. Now he was a slanderer. Those who believe Jesus are children of the kingdom. Those who believe the devil are his children.

In the parable, Jesus's servants were troubled when they saw weeds cropping up in his garden. They were sure that he had sown good seed in his field. They had no explanation for the presence of weeds. Jesus said, "an enemy hath done this" (Matthew 13:28). The servants trusted their Master. Now that they knew that the weeds were not supposed to be in the field, they could just go and remove them. However, Jesus counterintuitively instructs His servants not to do so. He tells them allow both the wheat and the weeds to grow to full maturity. At harvesttime they could harvest the wheat for the Master's use and gather the weeds to be burned. In a picture, Jesus was revealing His wisdom in allowing both the principles of His truth and the devil's lies to develop. This would give everyone involved time to see and understand the nature of Lucifer's rebellion. This would give them opportunity to reject Lucifer's ideas and renounce any sympathy with him.

One interesting detail of this parable is that Jesus identifies the servants who were asking Him questions as the angels (Matthew 13:39). Lucifer had spread ideas that caused the much perplexity over God's character and His form of government. They asked questions and God had a plan to provide answers. God's plan was prepared to meet such a crisis if it should arise. What's amazing is that God purposed that the human race should play a pivotal role in revealing the His wisdom to heavenly intelligences (Ephesians 3:11).

“Grace did much more Abound”

So, it was that Adam and Eve were fulfilling their purpose. They were protecting and serving the garden and ruling over the earth and its creatures. They were revealing the wisdom of God as perfect reflections of His image and likeness. Eve ran into the devil-possessed serpent because Lucifer was serving his prison sentence as a result of his rebellion (Revelation 12:9). God allowed the serpent the opportunity to tempt His first humans because He wanted the universe to see the nature of the opposing principles of sin and righteousness in conflict. He would have been vindicated if Adam and Eve would have remained holy and blameless. They would have been to the praise of the glory of His grace.

But when Lucifer gave Eve his pitch, she bought it and then sold similar lies to Adam. What would God do with the human race now that they failed to fulfill His purpose? They were no longer perfect reflections of His glorious image? Would he scrap the plan and start all over?

The beauty is that God's plan had a contingency. God would have been perfectly satisfied for His humans to have resisted the devil and caused him to flee (James 4:7). But now the universe would have an opportunity to see a side of God they had never witnessed. Lucifer charged God with being harsh and severe for kicking him and other non-compliant angels out of heaven. It was not fair that they were imprisoned on earth until the execution of their death sentence. But, God would tell the truth about Himself. He would show that He was merciful. God would prove in His dealings with the human race that He was “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to

repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). He would show that the only reason that any sinner would ever be lost would be because of stubborn, prideful resistance of His saving love.

Instead of treating the human pair harshly, The Lord comes “to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). He doesn’t sneak up on Adam and Eve. He let’s them hear Him coming (Genesis 3:8). God counseled with Adam and Eve. He lovingly drew their attention to the fact that they were afraid, hiding, and poorly dressed. What happened to the joy, peace, and contentment they once enjoyed? Why were their glorious garments of light exchanged for aprons of fig leaves (Genesis 3:9-11)?

God promises to save them from their wretched condition. Through believing the lies of the serpent and distrusting their Creator they had learned to love sin and hate the law of God (Romans 8:7; 1 John 3:4). God would restore their peace by teaching them to once again love His law and hate sin (Genesis 3:15; Psalm 119:65). He would do this by once again revealing Himself in His Son. His Son would come as “the Good Shepherd” (John 10:14). Satan was like a serpent who was seeking to kill God’s sheep. Jesus would crush the head of the serpent. But in the process, he would absorb the deadly poison of the serpent into Himself. This revelation of the Father’s love in the sacrificial death of His Son for the sins of the world would provide the most convincing argument in the great controversy (John 15:14; 1 John 4:8-10). This revelation of God’s righteousness would be “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18).

Through the sinless life, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ love would be planted in the hearts of men and women (Romans 5:5). They would return to their allegiance to God. God’s purpose would still be fulfilled. As a token of His promise God led Adam and Eve to sacrifice a lamb. He then clothed them in the skins of that lamb (Genesis 3:21). This revealed to them that sin caused death. It showed them that God in His self-sacrificing love would absorb the penalty of death into Himself. In so doing, He would atone for their sins and cover the shame of their nakedness. The sacrificial system was designed to be a faint foreshadowing of “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Lucifer, in leading the first humans into sin, had actually provided God with an opportunity for a greater revelation of His love. God was prepared to work all things

together for good (Romans 8:28). Sinful humans would be forgiven for their sins if they turned from them and trusted in God. More than that, God would restore His image which had been corrupted through the entrance of sin in repentant, trusting humans. Where sin abounded grace would much more abound “teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Titus 2:12; cf. Romans 5:19). Redeemed humans would be exalted higher than if they had never fallen. Not only would they rule on the earth, but overcomers would be granted to sit with the Son of God on His Throne, even as the Son sits with the Father on His throne (Revelation 3:21). Words too great for the human imagination to conceive! Restored humans will enjoy the privilege of being the co-regents of the universe with Christ! Christ will be universally honored. God’s character will be seen to be worthy above all others to be praised, adored, and imitated. The Father will be ultimately glorified in His Son (Philippians 2:11). All questions regarding the trustworthiness of God will be answered. The universe will be eternally secure in the love of God.

Continue reading this series of articles to find out how this broader *context of the gospel* informs our understanding of the *content of the gospel*.