

# THE GRAND STORY

Prologue: Who Is God And What Does He Require

If we are going to understand God's eternal purpose, we must understand something about God Himself.

**We know that God is sovereign:** "Whatever Yahweh pleases, He does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps."

**We know that God has an eternal purpose.** He doesn't act randomly or indiscriminately. He "works all things according to the counsel of His will" ([Ephesians 1:11](#)).

**We know that nothing can hinder God.** "I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose' ... I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it." ([Isaiah 46:8-11](#)).

**We know that God glorifies Himself.** He says "All the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh" ([Numbers 14:21](#)), and "My glory I will not give to another" ([Isaiah 48:11](#)).

**We know that it is the primary responsibility of all creation to glorify God.** It is certainly the primary responsibility of mankind. We were created in His image; we are all to glorify Him in our lives. First Corinthians tells us that even in the mundane things of eating and drinking, "do all to the glory of God."

This morning I want to tell you The Grand Story. I've already given you the Prologue: Who is God and What Does He Require?

## CHAPTER ONE: IT WAS VERY GOOD – BRIEFLY ([GENESIS 1-2](#))

The Bible begins with the account of creation; it only takes two chapters to tell, [Genesis 1-2](#). The first and last verse of [Genesis 1](#) sum up the entire process:

**Genesis 1:1** *ESV*

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

### **Genesis 1:31 ESV**

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

[Genesis 2](#) is a more specific telling of the creation of Adam and Eve, and logically fits between [Genesis 1:30](#) and [Genesis 1:31](#).

The Scripture tells us that only mankind was created in the image of God. Mankind alone had the blessing of fruitfulness. Only mankind was given authority to fill the earth and subdue it. Only mankind was given dominion over every creature: fish, birds, and animals.

We see in [Genesis 2](#) that man and woman were uniquely created for one another. Unlike any other creatures, man and woman become made one flesh in marital union. They were placed in a Garden that God Himself had planted, where every need was provided for, and their lives could be fruitful and glorifying to God. Mankind had it all.

### The Ground Rules

In [Genesis 2](#) God lays out the ground rules for Adam, and they were very simple.

### **Genesis 2:9 ESV**

And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

### **Genesis 2:16–17 ESV**

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

### Not Just Moral, But Definitional

This was before Eve was created. This prohibition was not just a random moral Law, given by God just because. It was a definitional Law – Adam’s obedience or disobedience would establish his nature. If Adam ate of the tree of life, he and his descendants would have eternal life. Eternal life would have become a fixed aspect of human nature. If Adam ate of the forbidden tree, then he would die, and all mankind in him.

“And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”

But not for long.

## CHAPTER TWO: IT BECAME VERY BAD – FOR A LONG, LONG TIME ([GENESIS 3](#))

[Genesis 3](#) opens with Satan, in the form of a serpent, tempting Eve to reject God's Word given to Adam and substitute her own desires. Satan told her three lies – **you will not die if you sin**; instead, **you will be like God**. What is the third lie? The implication Eve was **a free agent**; that she could change her nature if she liked. In reality, her nature was not dependent on herself, but on Adam. Instead of pursuing her own desires, Eve should have encouraged Adam to remain righteous.

As we know, Eve was deceived and ate the fruit. And . . . nothing seemed to happen. She happily gave it to Adam. And Adam – who was not deceived ([Second Timothy 2:13-14](#)) ate it. And when ADAM ate, THEIR eyes were opened, and they both immediately died spiritually. Eve was not a free agent; her nature was determined by Adam, because she was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.

Adam and Eve's first act was to hide from each other.

### Adam Is The Primogenitor Of Mankind

When Adam sinned, he sinned as the primogenitor of the human race. He was the first; every other human being, Eve included, is like him, sharing his sin nature. God had warned Adam that sin would result in death, and it did. Every human being descends from Adam, and so every human being became a sinner.

Adam's sin brought about devastating immediate results.

- Spiritual death and physical death ([Genesis 2:17](#)).
- Guilt and shame ([Genesis 3:10](#)).
- Spiritual warfare with God ([Genesis 3:15](#)).
- A curse in every place that had been blessed ([Genesis 3:16](#)).
- Conflict in marriage and other relationships ([Genesis 3:17](#)).
- A constant struggle to survive ([Genesis 3:18-20](#)).
- Banishment from the intimate presence of God ([Genesis 3:22-24](#)).

Those devastating results have continued in Adam's line ever since. We can see them all around us. In the past week dear friends have suffered the loss of loved ones. We see hatred, conflict, and wickedness in our own culture. We hear people hatefully accusing others of being unloving.

#### All Part Of God's Decree

To the fallen human mind, it seems that all of this is a mistake, an accident. The sufferings and tragedies of this life are not only wrong, they are so wrong that they can't possibly be what God intended. And yet, Scripture tells us that nothing gets past God, nothing happens apart from His knowledge and His decrees, and nothing happens except what He has determined. The fall of man was not an accident; God decreed it. That doesn't mean that He caused Adam to sin; Adam made a free decision of his own will. But that decision, freely made, was in complete agreement with God's decree.

#### All For The Glory Of God

[Romans 9](#) tells us that God is putting both His justice and His mercy on display, for His own glory. In eternity past He decreed that mankind would fall into sin, deserving His just judgment. He also decreed that He would show mercy to some, according to His own choice. No one is condemned because God decided to condemn them; they are condemned because of their own sin. And no one is saved because they are worthy of salvation; they are saved because God decided to save them.

With Adam's fall began a long, long period of time, which I call The Sifting. It lasts from [Genesis 4](#) to [Revelation 20](#).

## CHAPTER THREE: THE SIFTING – [GENESIS 4-REVELATION 20](#).

God's plan of drawing His elect people out of the entirety of fallen mankind is being carried out. There weren't multiple plans of salvation, first the conscience, then the Law of Israel, and finally the Gospel. There has only ever been one plan: God's Son taking on human flesh, dying as a substitute for His people, rising in victory over sin and death. Jesus is the Second Adam, the New Adam; just as all in Adam died, all who are in Christ live.

The basis of our spiritual death is Adam's sin, not our own. The basis of our spiritual life is not found in us, but in Jesus Christ:

**Romans 5:18–19 ESV**

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

[Are You In Adam Or Christ?](#)

The big question is not “have you sinned?”, but “are you in Christ?” All in Adam are spiritually dead. All in Christ are spiritually alive. This is true because God decreed it. This is how eternal death and eternal life work.

- Each in Adam will be punished for their own sins, yes, but they will be punished because they are in Adam.
- Each in Christ will be rewarded for their righteousness, yes, but they will be rewarded because they are in Christ.

In all of this the purposes of God are achieved. He is sifting through all of fallen humanity, drawing His own elect children out from the rest.

[The Nature Of The Wicked](#)

The wicked are free to do as they wish, free to act according to their fallen nature. They must act according to their sin nature; they WILL act according to their sin nature. It's all they can do. They may have some knowledge of God's will. They may experience regret over sin, and even have some sort of temporary, self-defined faith. It is not faith alone in Christ alone – they always include their own good works or intentions or even faith in their faith. As the Scripture says, they get a taste of godly things, and sometimes even have a religious zeal. But ultimately, the deceit of sin wins. Their heart remains hard, and proves itself over time to be evil and unbelieving, which was always its nature.

## The Nature of the Elect

The elect are changed in their very nature, by virtue of being in Christ. They are not defined by their righteousness, but His. They are not defined by their nature, but His. Their new nature is made to be like Him, and learns and grows to be like Him over time, because of the work of the Holy Spirit, through the proclamation and teaching of the Word of God.

I am purposefully speaking of God's children as the elect, not as the righteous. We are not His because we are righteous. We are His because He chose us before creation to be His, and at the right time in our lives the Holy Spirit entered into us and regenerated us. The Gospel is preached, and the Holy Spirit regenerates us, softening our heart, and granting us faith. He removes our sins by the blood of Christ. He credits the righteous to our account. He makes us see the death within our sinful flesh, and gives us eternal life. For the first time we experience true repentance: a hatred for sin, and a longing for righteousness.

## One Kind Of Person?

From the outside – from our perspective – we can only see the human race. We excuse the overwhelming majority of sin. In our time very few people would even be called “bad,” much less “evil” or “wicked.” They are just living their own life, free spirits. They just make mistakes, like we all do.

## Two Kinds Of Person

But from the point of view of God and His decrees, there are two kinds of people who co-exist in this world. [Romans 9:22-23](#) calls them “**vessels of wrath prepared for destruction**,” and “**vessels of mercy which God has prepared beforehand for glory**.” [Second Corinthians 2:14-16](#) calls them “**those who are being saved**” and “**those who are perishing**.” The difference is their response to the Gospel. To “those who are being saved” the Gospel is the aroma of life. To “those who are perishing,” the very same Gospel is the aroma of death.

Two people sit in the same church, and hear the same Gospel preached. The Gospel is the dividing line. The heart of one is warmed and filled and encouraged and blessed – **they are being saved**. The heart of the other is angry or bitter or mocking or bored – **they are perishing**.

This isn't because one finds the preacher to be engaging, and the other finds him to be annoying. It isn't because one loves the music, and the other thinks the music is awful. It isn't because one likes the way the church looks, and the other doesn't. It's because of the eternal decree of God and the present work of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The preaching of the Gospel reveals whether one is being saved or perishing. Changing the Gospel to be more acceptable or appealing to the lost is a terrible sin, because it erases the dividing line, and actually eliminates hope. If the Gospel of Jesus Christ is just "do your best – with Jesus added on," then it's powerless to save, and will only condemn.

One day this sifting work God is doing will come to an end. This present age will end, and the Day of the Lord – which is never spoken about in happy terms – will dawn. The wicked will be judged for their sins, freely committed. The elect will be shown to be the elect, not because of their righteousness, but because of Christ's righteousness imputed to them. The sifting will be over. The condemned will be cast into eternal punishment. The elect will be brought into eternal glory.

Our response today must be to glorify God. We don't know His decrees. We don't know who He will leave to their own free will, and who He will save by His mercy. We do know what He has said to us. He has told us to worship Him as God, love Him as Father, trust Jesus Christ as Savior, obey Him as Lord, repent of our sin, and live for His glory.

## **EPILOGUE: WHAT GOD HAS PREPARED ([FIRST CORINTHIANS 2:9](#))**

The Bible has 66 books; I wish it had 67, and the last one told us what would happen the first million years or in eternity. The Bible has 1,189 chapters; I wish there were an 1,190th chapter that gave us a summary of what the eternal state will be like.

Paul writes in [First Corinthians 2:9](#) that our own abilities – seeing, hearing, or imagining – aren't going to tell us what God has prepared. What we know must come from the Spirit of God. And the truth is, the Spirit of God said almost nothing. The eternal state still falls into the category of mystery: something that God has reserved for Himself, and will reveal when He is good and ready.

We do know some things.

- Christians will be like Jesus in His glorified humanity. ([First John 3:2](#)).
- Death will be gone. ([Revelation 20:14](#)).
- Grief, sorrow, disease, and conflict will be gone. ([Revelation 21:4](#)).
- Temptation will be gone. ([Revelation 20:10](#)).
- We will live with God forever ([Revelation 21:3](#)).

And . . . then what? We don't know. There is so much more to know. Learning and experiencing will take us all eternity. Remember the closing of the grand old hymn?

*When we've been there 10,000 years*

*Bright shining as the sun*

*We've no less days to sing God's praise*

*Then when we'd first begun*

We are going to see the end of The Grand Story, but there will be a sequel for us to live. So let's lift our eyes above the concerns and miseries of this world, and set our hope firmly on Jesus Christ.

