

# SGU PAMPHLETS



## God's Purpose of Grace

by

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*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”* (2 Tim. 3.16.) If this be so we should very carefully guard our hearts that we indulge in no prejudices against any portion of Divine Truth. If God has revealed anything to us, it will do us good to receive it with meekness and fear.

It is not possible for any candid person to deny that the Bible uses words which seem to teach that God governs the world by a fixed plan, and that the events occurring in a manner to us accidental, or brought about by human agency, were foreseen and pre-ordained by God. Without dealing in general assertions, let us come at once to God's Word.

## **THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE LORD** **God's Decrees.**

There we find first the word decree applied to God's plan. The reason why the sea is contained within certain limits is that God has determined it shall be so. “He gave the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment.” (Prov. 8.29.) He has “placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree.” (Jer. 5.22.) Elsewhere the same thing is taught in almost the same words. It cannot therefore be denied that God holds the sea in bounds by His unchangeable decree. The Scriptures also declare that it is the fixed decree of God, which nothing can alter, that His Son should be the mediator. “Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” (Psa. 2.6-7.) None will deny that the mediatorial throne has its stability in the everlasting unchangeable

purpose of God. So likewise Daniel declares that Nebuchadnezzar was expelled from among men “by the decree of the Most High.” (Dan. 4.24.)

### **God’s Appointments**

The Scriptures also use the word appoint as expressive of the same idea. Thus Christ says: “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me.” (Luke 22. 29.) Men must have made great advances in boldness before they can deny that all Christ’s exaltation and glory are fixed and given Him by the unchangeable appointment of God, and yet by an appointment of the same kind all His people shall have a kingdom. So also the day of judgement is fixed. Nothing can hasten it; nothing can defer it: “He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world.” (Acts 17.31.) So also no man can die a moment sooner, or live a moment longer than God pleases, and His pleasure and His counsel always agree. “Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?” “Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months is with thee, Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass,” (Job 7.1 and 14.5.) Nor is this doctrine offensive to the pious. Job says: “All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.” (Job 14.14.) The subversion of the plots of the wicked is in Scripture ascribed to their running counter to God’s fixed plan. “For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the extent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom.” (2 Sam. 17.14.) God’s Word no less clearly declares that the wicked rejection of Jesus Christ by sinners, instead of defeating, is executing God’s plan. For He is “a stone of stumbling, and rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.” (IPet. 2.8.)

### **God’s Fixed Plan. His Counsel**

Again: the Scriptures call God’s fixed plan His counsel and declare its unchangeableness. If it could be changed, it would be either

for the better, or for the worse. If it could be changed for the better, it is now imperfect. If it should be changed for the worse, it would become imperfect. In either case, it would be unworthy of God. But it cannot be changed: "I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." (Isa. 46. 9,10.) "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations." (Psa. 32.11.) No plotting and ingenuity and malice of man can hinder what God will do. "There are many devices in a man's heart: nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand" (Prov. 19.21.) The Apostles held that God's plan was carried out, even in the wickedness shown towards Christ, and they adoringly said that His enemies "were gathered together for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done." (Acts 4.28.) Indeed Paul says that God does "all things after the counsel of His own will." (Eph. 1.11.) He also says that God has taken great care "to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel." (Heb. 6.17.)

### **God's Purpose**

In like manner the Bible speaks of God's purpose; and says that our conversion is in fulfilment of it - "called according to His purpose." It declares that this purpose embraces the destinies of men. Before Rebecca had given birth to any child it was said, "The elder shall serve the younger," and all this Paul says was, "that the purpose of God according to election might stand" (Rom. 8.28 and 9.11.) Nor is God's purpose temporal, or mutable, but He conducts all things "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. 3.11.) Here is the foundation of all our hopes of life; for He "hath 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 us in Christ Jesus before the world began." (2 Tim. 1.9.)

## God's Predestination

Nor are inspired writers afraid of the word predestination, or of the doctrine taught thereby: "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified." (Rom. 8.29,30.) "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." (Eph. 1. 5. See also verses 11 and 12.)

## God's Election

We also find election taught throughout God's Word and in many ways.

1. God's well-beloved and eternal Son was chosen out of all in the universe to be the Redeemer of lost men. Accordingly in Isaiah 42.1 and in 1 Pet. 2.6 Christ is called God's elect. I have never seen the professing Christian who was bold enough to deny that our Saviour was "chosen of God." **Augustine** well says: "The highest illustration of predestination and grace is in the Saviour Himself, the Man Christ Jesus, who has acquired this character in His human nature, without any previous merit either of works or of faith."
2. Election extends to the angels, some of whom are holy and happy, others sinful and miserable. The holy ones are expressly called "elect angels." (1 Tim. 5.21.)
3. When some angels and all men had fallen under condemnation, God's electing love turned towards sinners of the human race and not at all towards fallen angels. (John 3.16; 2 Pet. 2.4.)
4. When all nations were rapidly hastening to idolatry and gross corruption, God selected one man and granted to him and his descendants peculiar privileges and mercies. "He did choose Abram and did bring him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees." From that time for generations this family was often spoken of as the chosen, the elect

of God. (Deut. 4.37 and 7. 6-8; 1 Chron. 16.13, 14; Psa. 32.12, and in many other places.)

5. God also exercises His choice as to the heirs of salvation. They are called “God’s elect.” (Rom. 8.33.) Christ calls them “the elect.” (Matt. 24.22,24,31; Luke 18.7.) Paul says: “God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” (Eph. 1.4.)

How any man can dispose of all these texts without rejecting God’s Word, and yet refuse to admit decrees, predestination and election, it is not easy to tell. Is anything more fixed than the events of death, judgement and eternity with all that shall be done therein? Every man plans, purposes, predestinates, before he acts or builds. Has the Builder of the universe no plan, no purpose? As to whether we first chose Christ, or Christ us, what Christian can have a doubt, when he remembers his own vile wanderings, and Christ’s explicit teachings? “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” (John 15.16.) Indeed what is a decree but a purpose not revealed, not made known in prophecy?

### **THE TESTIMONY OF THE EARLY FATHERS**

The consent of the people of God in all periods of the Christian Church has been remarkably in favour of the doctrine here maintained as in regard to any other. Formal opposition to it by those who otherwise stood fair in God’s Church was unknown to the ancients. How clearly this doctrine was taught by **Augustine** all well-informed people know: “Intra mundum facti sumus, et ante mundum electi sumus.” “We are made in time, but we were chosen before the world began.” “Before He made us, He foreknew us, and He chose us in His foreknowledge when He had not as yet made us.” “Out of those to whom the righteous Lord had adjudged punishment, according to the unspeakable mercy of His hidden dispensation, He chose out vessels, which He might fit for honour.” Augustine also quotes the following from **Ambrose’s book on Predestination**: “Whom Christ

has mercy on, him He calls. Those who were indevout, He could, if He would, have made devout. But God calls whom He pleases, and makes whom He will religious.”

**Augustine** took the right view of this doctrine when he said: “Do you wish to dispute with me? Rather unite with me in admiration, and exclaim, O the depth! Let us both agree in fear, lest we perish in error.” More explicit statements he could not make.

**Fulgentius says:**

“God, who has made man, did Himself prepare, in His predestination, both the gift of illumination to believe, and the gift of perseverance to profit and persevere, and the gift of glorification to reign, for those to whom He pleased to give it; who also does not any otherwise perform indeed, than was ordained by His eternal and unchangeable will. The truth of which predestination, whereby the Apostle witnesseth, we were predestinated in Christ before the foundation of the world.”

**Prosper says:**

“Predestinationum Dei nullus catholicus negat.” “No catholic denies the predestination of God.” “The belief of predestination is confirmed by abundant authority of the Holy Scriptures.” “From the punishment of the sin of our first parent none is freed but by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, prepared and predestinated in the eternal counsel of God before the foundation of the world.”

**THE REFORMED CONFESSIONS OF FAITH**

**The Latter Confession of Helvetia says:**

“God hath from the beginning, and of His mere grace, without any respect of men, predestinated or elected the saints, whom He will save in Christ,” and quotes Eph. 1.4 and 2 Tim. 1.9,10. “Therefore, though not for any merit of ours, yet not without a means, but in Christ, and for Christ, did God choose us; and they who are now engrafted into Christ, the same also were elected.”

**The Confession of Basle says:**

“We confess that God, before He had created the world, had chosen all those to whom He would freely give the inheritance of eternal blessedness,” and quotes Rom. 8.29,30 and Eph. 1.4-6.

**The Confession of France says:**

“We believe that out of this universal corruption and condemnation, wherein by nature all men are drowned, God did deliver and preserve some, whom, by His eternal and immutable counsel, of His own goodness and mercy, without any respect of their works, He did choose in Christ Jesus; and others He left in that corruption and condemnation, in whom He might make manifest His justice, by condemning them justly in their time, as well as declare the riches of His mercy in the others. For some are not better than others, till such time as the Lord doth make a difference, according to that immutable counsel, which He had decreed in Christ Jesus before the creation of the world.”

**The Confession of Scotland says:**

“That same eternal God, who of mere grace elected us in Christ Jesus His Son, before the foundation of the world was laid, (Eph. 1.11,12) appointed Him to be our head.”

**The Confession of Belgium says:**

“We believe that God . . . hath showed Himself to be both merciful and just: merciful, by delivering and saving those from condemnation and from death, whom, in His eternal counsel, of His own free goodness, He hath chosen in Jesus Christ our Lord, without any regard at all of their works; but just, in leaving others in that their fall and perdition, whereinto they had thrown themselves headlong.”

**The Synod of Dort says:**

“Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, by which, before the foundation of the world, according to the most free pleasure of His will, and of His mere grace, out of all mankind (fallen

through their own fault from their first integrity into sin and destruction) He hath chosen in Christ unto salvation a set number of certain men, neither better nor more worthy than others, but lying in the common misery with others.” In subsequent sections many explanations are given, as that this election is not manifold, but one; that it was not made upon the foresight of faith or good works, but was unto faith and holiness; that the true cause of this free election is the good pleasure of God: that it cannot be interrupted, changed, revoked, or disannulled; that this doctrine is to be reverently received. etc.

**The Church of England in her 17th Article says:**

“Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) He bath constantly decreed by His counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those, whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God’s purpose by His Spirit working in due season: they through grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: the be made like the image of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works: and at length, by God’s mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.”

“As the godly consideration of predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, (as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God;) so, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God’s predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the

devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.”

“Furthermore, we must receive God’s promises in such wise as they be generally set forth to us in Holy Scripture. And in our doings that will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God.”

**The Church of Ireland has made up her Article on  
“Gods eternal decree and predestination,”**

From three sources: 1. The Confession of Scotland. 2. The 17th Article of the Church of England; and 3. The celebrated Lambeth Articles. That the reader may have a conception of the strength and clearness of these last, a few of them are inserted.

**The Lambeth Articles.**

They were agreed upon at Lambeth, the 20th of November, A.D. 1595. Archbishop Whitgift and Bishops Bancroft and Vaughan were among the able and staunch friends of these Articles: “By the same eternal counsel, God hath predestinated some unto life, and reprobated some unto death; of both which there is a certain number, which can neither be increased nor diminished. The cause moving God to predestinate unto life, is not the foreseeing of faith or good works, or of anything, which is in the person predestinated, but only the good pleasure of God Himself. But such as are not predestinated to salvation, shall finally be condemned for their sins.”

**The Westminster Confession says that**

“God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.” Much more is said to the same purpose, but quite coincident with what has been already quoted from the same and other symbols.

## THE TESTIMONY OF GREAT WITNESSES

The great lights of the Church in modern times have also spoken with much force on this subject.

### **Luther,**

In commenting on the words “who separated me from my mother’s womb,” (Gal. 1.15), says: “This is a Hebrew phrase; as if he said, Who had sanctified, ordained and prepared me. This is, God had appointed. when I was yet in my mother’s womb, that I should so rage against His Church, and that afterward He would mercifully call me back again from the midst of my cruelty and blasphemy, by His mere grace, into the way of truth and salvation. To be short, when I was not yet born, I was an apostle in the sight of God, and when the time was come, I was declared an apostle before the whole world.

Thus Paul cutteth off all deserts, and giveth glory to God alone, but to himself shame and confusion. As though he would say, All the gifts, both small and great, as well spiritual as temporal, which God purposed to give unto me, and all the good things, which at any time in all my life I should do, God Himself had before appointed when I was yet in my mother’s womb, where I could neither wish, nor think, nor do any good thing. Therefore this gift also came unto me by the mere predestination and free mercy of God, before I was born.”

### **Calvin says:**

“We shall never be convinced as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the fountain of God’s free mercy, till we are acquainted with His eternal election, which illustrates the grace of God by this compassion, That He adopts not all promiscuously to the hope of salvation, but gives to some what he refuses to others. Ignorance of this principle evidently detracts from the divine glory, and diminishes real humility.”

**Beveridge says:**

“If God hath elected us, it is in vain for men or devils to accuse us; if He be our friend, it is vain for any one to be our foe.”

**Charnock says:**

“Conformity to God in purity is the fruit of electing love. He hath chosen us that we should be holy. Eph. 1.4. The goodness of the fruit evidences the nature of the root; this is the seal that assures us the patent is the authentic grant of the prince.”

**John Newton says:**

“Admitting the total depravity of human nature, how can we account for the conversion of a soul to God, unless we likewise admit an election of grace? The work must begin somewhere. Either the sinner first seeks the Lord, or the Lord seeks the sinner. The former is impossible, if by nature we are dead in trespasses and sins. Let me appeal to yourself. I think you know yourself too well to say that you either sought or loved the Lord first.”

**Flavel says:**

“God hath chosen some to salvation and passed by others.” “God’s choice was not on foreseen works, but merely of His grace, and good pleasure of His will.”

**Leighton says:**

“The foreknowledge of God is no other than that eternal love of God, or decree of election, by which some are appointed unto life, and being foreknown or elected to that end, are predestinate to the way of it.” “That thus He chooseth some, and rejecteth others, is for that great end, to manifest and magnify His mercy and justice: but why he appointed this man for the one, and that man for the other, made Peter a vessel of this mercy, and Judas of wrath, this is even so, because it seemed good to Him. This if it be harsh, yet is apostolic doctrine. Hath not the potter (saith St. Paul) power over the clay,

of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour? This deep we must admire, and always, in considering it, close with this: O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.”

### **The Conclusion**

A class of honest but timid people, who embrace these views, yet ask, Should this doctrine be preached? The answer is the affirmative.

1. Because Christ and His Apostles preached it. Their example is safe.
2. It is conducive to holiness when rightly understood and sincerely loved.
3. It is full of comfort to the humble.

But then it should be preached as Christ and His Apostles preached it. **Augustine** says: “Both the grace of free election and predestination, and also wholesome admonitions and doctrines are to be preached.”

## ***Sovereign Grace Union***

This pamphlet is published by the Sovereign Grace Union, which was founded in 1875 and re-organized in 1914 for the Proclamation and Defence of the Doctrines of Free and Sovereign Grace.

The Union is undenominational and welcomes all who love these distinguishing doctrines into membership.

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  - (c) The Deity and Personality of the Holy Spirit.
- III. The Total Depravity of Human Nature since the Fall of Man.
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