

PRACTICAL, SHARED MINISTRY STUDIES, 2005

Rev. Geoffrey Bingham

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Viewpoints from Trinity Journal
Douglas Moo, General Editor
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CHAPTER TWELVE

PREACH THE WORD - GRIPPINGLY

Victor L. Walter

Preachers listen restlessly to the proclamation of the Gospel in tones other than their own. A preacher listens most critically to any homiletical practitioner other than himself. So a charge against contemporary evangelical preaching by someone who both preaches and teaches preaching begins with two strikes against it. Let me get the charge off my chest anyway: there is an enormous and inexcusable amount of dull and mind-numbing preaching going on in evangelical pulpits today. Evangelical laymen point this up in the often-heard lament, "Our pastor just does not feed us"; and equally evangelical preachers defensively re-join, "At least I am biblical" or, somewhat more negatively, "This television generation just is not interested in the Word of God!" But there you have it my growing gripe and conviction: a lot of honestly biblical sermons are honestly boring.

1. RAMIFICATIONS OF THE PROBLEM

When the pulpiteer falls into a dull routine behind his local version of the sacred desk, the faithful pew occupant is in for a rough time, because in evangelical circles "faithful" means "present every time the sanctuary door opens." That means that the hapless pew occupant trapped under a dull pulpiteer has the opportunity to be bored in the name of Jesus 104 times per year. Should the same layman prove especially faithful and meet the same preacher at midweek service also, one can increase that count of dull interludes per annum to 156. In our more free evangelical call systems of placement one can hardly blame such laymen if they begin to think in terms of calling a different pastor, hope springing eternal in their faithful breasts that this time God will send them a modern Elijah and Isaiah rolled in the same M.Div. diploma.

Given the fact that the Bible is seen by everybody—whatever their doctrine of inspiration—as the most interesting book ever authored, it stands as a strange contradiction that any dedicated to its proclamation should be charged with enervating dullness. Add the evangelical's clear assertion that every word of Holy Writ was inerrantly prompted by the eternal God and the practice of enervating dullness in its proclamation becomes a sin as monstrous in one bracket as pastoral adultery is in another category. Let any other orator of history prove boring, hut never the preacher of the Word:

He lights his torch at all their tires, and then has a torch lit not by their flaring lamps, hut at the sun, which sun is Christ. The preacher has all they had, and

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more—and more, aye, gloriously more! No interest vital to the world which he does not touch. He stands at the center of a circle whose entire rim is fire. Glory envelops him. He is a prisoner of majesty. A dumb man would stumble into luminous speech on such themes as the gospel grapples with. We dare not be ineloquent when we have themes which do as Aaron's rod did, burst forth into perfumed bloom. We must not be insipid. There is not a dull page in all this age-long story of the redeeming of the race. The minor prophets leap into eloquence which silences Demosthenes; and the major prophets take the thunders for a trumpet on which to blow their universal summons; and the apostles stand in the highway where the peoples throng and exact a tribute of a hearing from the unconcerned; and the evangelists forget bookkeeping and fishing, in eloquence which time has not had the effrontery to dim.¹

Even more damaging to the church than the bored layman, however, is the bored proclaimer—the pulpit craftsman who finds his preparation routine, his sermons all ringing the same in his own ears, and his parish assignment about as long lasting as a pair of good shoes. With his preaching pattern in familiar wrinkles and creases and the sole of his content worn thin through much treading of the same terrain, his ears are soon cocked for a “new call,” hope springing eternal in his breast for a more appreciative people or new preaching vitality through “a new challenge.” Constant shuffling of preachers among churches fueled by auditor hope for an interesting proclaimer and proclaimer hope for a challenging auditor leaves auditor and proclaimer alike dispirited. The answer to the charge of dullness in evangelical pulpits lies in the recovery of urgency, depth, power, and appeal in sermon preparation and delivery. Once again we must come to the point where

[t]he making of the sermon is actually a moment of revelation, a trip into the holy mountains, for ... (preachers), and the delivery of the sermon is such a moment for their congregations. Their preaching galvanizes men—upends them, probes them, haunts them, follows them into their most remote hiding places and smokes them out, drives them out coughing and sputtering and crying into the open light of new grace and new freedom and new love. The withered are made whole, the lame leap for joy, the dumb find articulation, the confused discover direction, the harried find resources for slowing down—in short, there is an apocalypticism about such preaching, an immediate grasp of what is yet distant and still to come, a taste of what is promised.²

Recovery of this kind of proclamation is inevitably the responsibility of the evangelical proclaimer. Recovery of this kind of sermonizing will inevitably interrupt our contemporary shuffle of pastors with the bonding of a proclaimer to a local people in the delight of the shared preaching experience. Establishment or recovery of this kind of preaching is a worthy goal for any pastor who finds himself in a postseminary, midcareer crisis that features boring preaching, whether in preparation or delivery, as a major ingredient. To add to the brashness of a charge of dullness in evangelical preaching the audacity of a claim to cure can only be folly, hubris, or both. But it' drown we

must in such a sea of homiletical folly, let us, before expiring, at least attempt a life raft constructed of planks of observation and suggestion.

II. HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

The history of preaching can rapidly be epitomized through its so-called great centuries. In the almost twenty spans of one hundred that separate the modern Christian from the cross, the first, fourth, twelfth, sixteenth, and nineteenth centuries are generally considered the highlights of proclamation. During that first century the seed of the Gospel was broadcast to the ancients by the apostles. Peter and Paul represent the force of that pristine preaching. The next century of outstanding preaching, the fourth, postdates the triumph of the Christ over the Caesar, and amidst the collapse of all things classical, Augustine of Hippo and Chrysostom of Antioch and Constantinople represent, respectively, the passing Latin and Greek patristic orders. As the scholastics froze the church in useless and endless debate and the mass totally supplanted the sermon in the worship of the congregants, preaching burst again upon the world in the brilliant twelfth-century work of St. Francis and St. Dominic. Growing fires of reformation made the sixteenth century great in preaching power, and Luther and Calvin were followed by a phalanx of only slightly less luminous pulpiteers of reformation. Where the fruit of this reformation grew most profusely, the English-speaking segments of Christendom made the 1900s the fifth century of great preaching, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Alexander Maclaren, though both British and both Baptists, can perhaps best represent that epoch.

Such a quick survey of the history of preaching yields an instructive observation when confronted with the question, "Where did preaching occur?" The difference two thousand years brought is immediately apparent. As the infant church took its first steps into pagan culture, preaching largely occurred outdoors and in often furious interchange with auditors caught up in street, forum, or on the riverbank. Now as the aged church totters toward the end of the age, preaching among English-speaking folks at least is almost inevitably indoors and in the context of the worship service. When you cage the sermon behind mortar and stained glass, sustaining and surrounding it with the whine of organ-electronic or pipe, when you tame the sermon to twenty minutes tailored to the latest fashion in liturgy, when you display the sermon only to those who voluntarily come into the cage to behold it, the domestication of preaching has been completed.

None can deny the benefits of domestication: sermons are well mannered (no Petrine prying), shortened (no Pauline length), to the point (no Chrysostom circumlocution), apolitical (no Luther needling the state), and scholarly (no bosom-heaving Spurgeonic flights of oratory). Indeed the sermon has been domesticated; but dare we deny that we have lost some things in the transition? What has happened to the trigger tension, even excitement, of the proclaimer when he never knows the challenge of a shouted rebuttal, to say nothing of a well-aimed stone or wielded club? Where has the electricity of the mixed audience gone that had the sermon carried to it in two sandals via loud voice when that audience is replaced by all those sufficiently in agreement to come to the sermon in a thousand shoes?

Let it be suggested in passing that one thing that might assist in reinvigorating

preaching would be the resolution on the part of every twentieth-century pulpiteer to preach at least twelve times a year to a secular audience, a congregation latently or openly hostile to the Gospel. Reverse the drive-in church rage of hyperaffluent suburbia and drive yourself to the nearest park or campers site and set up a preaching situation. When the weather is too had for that, be enough of a man in your world (not (i, you will note) to be invited to give a P.T.A. devotional, the high school baccalaureate, the county medical association ethical discussion, the town council Christmas emphasis, or the jail sermon. Every preaching year, carry some of your proclamations back out of the sanctuary cage and into moments untamed by worship.

III. TWENTIETH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS

Several concomitant developments make the domestication of preaching especially debilitating to modern seminary graduates. One is the loss of status accorded the pastor by his community. When the pastor was an authority figure respected by village friend and foe alike the sermon could afford a certain amount of domestication. A second is the rivalry offered the learning of the rector by every field of endeavor. As long as the rector was the most educated man in his hamlet his preaching could face domestication without total loss of clout. Naturally the vigorous competition afforded the preacher by the entertainment media readily available in every home and town square is a third factor that has imperiled the totally domesticated sermon.

A little more sober consideration needs to be given, however, to the fourth and fifth factors concomitant upon this domestication, factors that are threatening the vitality of preaching. When Phillips Brooks, that warm-hearted Episcopal bishop from Massachusetts, stood before those Yale classes of 1877 to lecture on preaching, none perhaps realized that his distilled thought would come to be seen as some of the best in that distinguished series. His classic definition of preaching, great for its very simplicity, took the American homiletical world by storm.

What, then, is preaching, of which we are to speak? It is not hard to find a definition. Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be preaching. The truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God's will, communicated in any other way than through the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth.³

Everywhere English-speaking homileticians of all stripes were happy to chorus, "Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men"

Since those heady days of ecclesiastical and political optimism in American public life the higher criticism battles reaching our shores expressed themselves in the practical realms of churchmanship in the liberal-fundamentalist clash. In the light of these twentieth-century tensions the word truth in connection with preaching became suddenly suspect. Fundamentalists were not interested in preaching truth for that word could be and often was abused by many varieties of relativism. Fundamentalists were interested in preaching Bible and saw Bible.

interpreted in orthodox fashion, as the only valid expression of truth worthy of the pulpit.

Today evangelicals and fundamentalists both would rather speak of biblical preaching than preaching; and they favor, in practice, the expository sermon as the only (or best) expression of biblical preaching. If the sermon is biblical and expository it is assumed that truth is presented by virtue of the message's "biblicalness"

One need not quarrel with the conclusion drawn by evangelicals and fundamentalists alike as to the value of biblical preaching to observe that this attitude, this approach, adds a certain narrowing to the already domesticated sermon. If a man preaches only in an expository pattern considering the major and subsidiary ideas of a biblical paragraph largely in the order of the text, that man is set to traverse the domain of Scripture year in and year out in ways largely familiar to the faithful and thoughtful layman. If that "preacher man" finds himself so busy that his devotional life is arid and his sermon preparation a hurried and cursory exercise, this narrowing of the understanding of preaching is tilted doubly toward the enhancement of boredom.

Fortunately thoughtful voices in evangelical homiletical materials are reminding us again of our rich heritage as preachers, for the history of preaching and the study of sermons suggest forcefully that there are two modes of preaching and both can be powerfully biblical. One mode is to present the content of the Bible Itself (the "ranger-on-the-text" oral exegetical pattern, however stylistically adapted); the second mode is to present truth that is in harmony with the Bible (the more topical and broad-ranging approach that has always been productive of the greatest doctrinal preaching, for example).

This total reduction of the modern preacher to a Christian scribe, expounding ancient documents in traditional ways, comes near to "quenching the Spirit" and denying the promise that He should guide ongoing disciples into all truth. . . We are led to a wider meaning of expository method than that of microscopic analysis of the words of a given text. The essence of that wider interpretation of "exposition" is. that all we preach shall be expository of Bible truth, whatever its method or approach, and shall bring that Bible truth out of the past into the present in the power of the Spirit Who first gave it.⁴

All of this suggests that if evangelical preaching is going once again to seize lethargic congregations by their ears and thereby fire their imaginations and hearts toward active service for God the evangelical preacher must not only take apart every text exegetically but also must learn to put the pieces together again in bombshells of truth. One does not dish up a grenade in components to an enemy or in support of compatriots. Devour the text, preacher; but do not be content just to regurgitate it. Rather incarnate it in example and message of luminous truth using the full range of preaching types, expository, textual and topical.

The sixth factor concomitant with the domestication of preaching that must be considered at some length is the relationship of the sermon to modern studies in communication. Probably no one has done this more succinctly than Clyde Reid in his provocative little volume, *The Empty Pulpit*. Studies in

communication about chin deep in any library these days. To put it summarily there are seven stages to full-fledged communication. They are

1. transmission, the preacher articulating his message;
2. contact, the auditor actually hearing the message;
3. feedback, the return process by which the auditor reflects what he heard to the preacher for verification;
4. comprehension, the auditor genuinely understands what the preacher articulated and the preacher knows he does;
5. acceptance, the auditor's personal decision to receive or concur with the message (if the auditor chooses to reject the message the communication process stops here);
6. internalization, the time and quiet needed by the auditor to turn initial, superficial acceptance into profound personal determination; and
7. action, the common, shared understanding and action or response of the auditor to the message in concert with the preacher.⁵

Communication specialists now know that no significant change of thought or action occurs without feedback and internalization. Dialogue changes lives; monologue reinforces the status quo. When the sermon was domesticated out of the street and into the worship service it became a monologue. And while a good shepherd can view his calling, counseling, and small-group ministries as opportunities for significant feedback, the fact remains that some of the frustrating futility in preaching may very well be the result of the loss of meaningful dialogue.⁶ Hence most sermons tend to be an exercise in stroking those who already agree with the message, as far as communication theory goes. This cannot help but be exacerbated by the modern spirit which announces, "I am going to be a preaching pastor." "This strange contradiction in terms means that the nitty of visitation and the gritty of counseling are going to be left to underling or accident. Such a man, enthroned in the solitary splendor of his exegetical study, cuts off all significant feedback or dialogue with his people and cannot expect seriously to affect thought or action by thrice weekly delivered expositions, how-ever polished.

Short of inviting street gangs to come with rocks to stone us or encouraging differing brethren to pepper our sermons with shouted abuse, how can we modern preachers recapture some feedback, some dialogue, without abandoning worship'? Here are five suggestions:

1. Use some pre-or postsermon discussions. Appoint selected speakers for live minutes of rebuttal before you conclude.
2. Try interruptive preaching, accepting reactions and questions as they come. Of course it follows that the content would need to be worthy of a reaction.
3. Follow up a sermon with an I-tried-it-report-back a week later.
4. Instead of a closing hymn, break into small discussion groups or let people move around the sanctuary sharing a response while the pianist plays. The old-fashioned altar call or seeker's room is pointed dialogue.

5. Set up one month a year to address controversial issues biblically and invite a different, carefully selected group into the parsonage for coffee and a free-wheeling discussion each Sunday evening of that month. You will discover that feedback need not dislocate worship and worship context does not need to stifle feedback. Every sermon need not be a monologue.

IV. THE REVIVIFIED SERMON

When the evangelical sets out to speak of the recovery of gripping, trans-forming preaching he assumes rightly that the preacher is a born-again man, growing in the likeness of Christ, under the call of God to the proclamation of the Gospel, filled with the Spirit, evidencing the Spirit's gifts, fruit, wisdom, and immersed daily and reverently in the study of the Scriptures. These are at once the spiritual foundations, armor, and disciplines of the preaching process without which any discussion of preaching is a presumptuous futility. It cannot be asserted too strongly that these are the other-worldly givens of our trade. No man can grasp for them; no homiletician dare think he can deliver them through training.

Any great sermonic moment is made up of six components. There is the power of the Spirit of God present to convict, bless, intercede, and lead preacher and hearer alike. This is the primary factor in sermonic greatness and it rests upon the givens just discussed. As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones so rightly reminds us, it is displayed in the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon people, preacher, and sermon in its delivery. You can plan only 50 percent of the sermon situation; the other 50 percent is up to God.⁷ An old-fashioned term for this mandatory ingredient is unction. Secondly, there is the excitement of discovery, which rests in the pastor's study and in the pastor's discipline of careful, prayerful, faithful daily devotional scriptural study. When he has been gripped, changed, compelled by his own work in the Word, even though the preacher may be dealing with a truth as old as Adam, he communicates freshness and enthusiasm in powerful and intangible ways to his hearers. In homiletics this quality is technically termed originality.⁸ The third component in a great sermonic moment is the compelling application of the truth proclaimed and the appeal made to the audience to respond. One can apply the term relevance to this component. Structure is the word for our next component, and that involves clarity and matters of logical organization. Fifth in our list would be the matter of style gripping language full of imagination, narrative, and color. No mastery of this has ever surpassed the Master's parables. The sixth and final component in the great sermonic moment is the full and free use of attention-holding factors. The very abused term charisma can be assigned this factor. A great sermon thus has unction, originality, relevance, structure, style and is delivered with charisma. Not only must the homiletician realize that he dare not think he can deliver the other-worldly givens of his calling; he must candidly and humbly admit that of the six components of the great sermonic moment he can only moderately affect the last and least significant four—*relevance*, *structure*, *style*, and *charisma*. Let this chapter conclude by way of a quiver full of arrows of suggestion to be drawn across the how of homiletical practice in the studies of those pastors concerned with avoiding dullness in proclamation.

V. SUGGESTIONS FOR RELEVANCE, STRUCTURE, STYLE, AND CHARISMA

Genuine relevance is born in application with bite. Application involves focusing the truth being dealt with on the hearer, expressing explicitly what the hearer is to do in response, or how he or she is to do it, and motivating the hearer to do precisely that.⁹ As every preacher knows, the third of these applicational factors is the most difficult. Motivating a hearer involves a clear plea so that he or she knows exactly how to “obey” the truth; it involves the speaker’s own heightened feelings so the hearer senses the speaker’s urgent concern; it involves the use of pungent, moving material so the auditor’s emotions are stirred to fire his or her will to act; and motivation finally involves the technical element of appeal, which refers to the speaker’s tug on the legitimate desires of the hearer so that he or she will will to act. A suggestion for revivifying preaching: “bibilicize” the psychological desires of a hearer and check to see that every main point of your sermon incorporates one to three of these elements of appeal. ‘Take any psychologist’s list of basic human drives you wish and translate them into legitimate biblical desires or drives and you will obtain a list something like this:

Psychologists say every man has a drive for	The Bible says every man legitimately desires . .
entertainment, distraction	freedom from guilt fellowship understanding of God’s program knowledge of’ godly character insight into prophecy
preservation of life	eternal life hope in the midst of a despairing world perseverance to avoid death and hell
status	Lord’s “well done” healthy operation of the church self-control self-acceptance and respect confidence and approval of brothers
food and water	Lord’s provision fulfilled promises of God knowledge of the Word’s content
shelter	caring family of the church security joy and peace in crises

Love	fulfilling marriage sound home love of God holy sex winning of others to Christ worship and adoration of God
power	leadership in the church rulership in the kingdom to come triumph over social evils

By the prayerful use of a battery of appeals in every message the preacher can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, move the man off the cultural street toward the heavenly path, and even though he may have entered the church giving no credence to biblical authority, that man off the cultural street is brought to the place of obedience to God and the great discovery of every secularist: “This is what the Bible has taught all along.”¹⁰

A further suggestion for revivifying preaching: identify your present, most-used outline organization (*structure*) and deliberately set yourself over the next few months to learn and use two or three new contrasting ways of structuring a sermon. Outline organization can be chosen then in terms of what will best project the particular Bible content or Bible truth to the particular audience, and with an eye to variety in structure, the preacher does not bore himself with his methodology. If your organization is ragged and you feel the need for a clear, clean beginning in structure building, the best step-by-step instructions in all of homiletics are those by Lloyd Perry in *Biblical Preaching for Today’s World* (Chicago: Moody, 1973), 42–62. Begin here. On the other hand, if you have a solid basic structure, turn to the ninth and tenth chapters of H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958) and learn his five forms of a subject-subject discussed, thesis supported, message illumined, question propounded, and a story told. Demonstrate for yourself Davis’s theme that form of subject determines structure by writing main points according to his rule for each of the types of messages he envisions springing from biblical materials. If you want to challenge yourself with a keenly persuasive structure, the most cogent organization in public address is that clearly developed by Alan Monroe (which he calls the motivated sequence) in *Principles and Types of Speech* (New York: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1962), chapters 16 and 17. Preach to persuade under five points (Monroe’s adaptation of man’s thought process): attention, need, satisfaction, visualization, and action. Begin now to cultivate challenging structural variety.¹¹

If one is to improve style—the matter of language that is full of color, narrative, and imagination—one must begin in a kind of devotional meditation that walks in the sandals of the biblical characters and sits in the catacomb seat of an epistle recipient and then comes from that meditation able to make the hearer have that “you were there” experience.¹² This demands an integrity in the treatment of the biblical materials that goes beyond mere fairness to the content. It makes mandatory the preacher’s handling of that content while

doing full justice to the biblical mood. Thus if the biblical content is exuberant in spirit, the preacher does not give it a judgmental mien; if the passage breathes a somber and reflective air, the preacher should not give it a lighthearted and humorous thrust.¹³ These two demands of style meet; for if the preacher in meditation has lived the scriptural passage, he is well enough acquainted with its mood to be fair to it. Beyond the qualities of imagination and fairness to the mood, style also involves clarity, clear thinking.

Miracles apart, a muddled sermon cannot well be sound in theology, interesting to listen to, effective in persuasion, memorable as an experience, or make any useful contribution to worship. Unclear speaking dissipates attention, destroys persuasiveness, defeats the intention of the speaker from the outset. To any man in earnest about communicating truth, the necessity of clarity is clear enough.¹⁴

Suggestion for revivifying preaching: at least once a month write out a sermon verbatim (or have a secretary transcribe it from a tape after it has been delivered). Compare its mood to the mood of its lead Scriptures and adjust accordingly. See that at least one imaginative description or application occurs in each main point. Next turn your attention to each word in the sermon. Replace every ambiguous word with an unequivocal one; turn every abstract term into a concrete one; check for emotive, prejudicial expressions and remove them; and finally replace every negative turn of sentence with a positive unless the negative is absolutely essential for your meaning. This discipline corrects obscurity inherent in message language.¹⁵ On the third time through your verbatim message confine your attention to the sentences and their logical pattern. Replace selective observations with statements that are fair to all sides; remove exaggerations ruthlessly and discipline yourself to follow the purged text; correct false or unfair analogies; think about your assumptions and modify those which are unwarranted; and remove all sloganeering or lazy clichés. Such a sentence check will remove fuzzy thinking.¹⁶

From the human level charisma is the ability to rivet attention on the message, messenger, and the whole communication process. 'three things are involved in this: controlled, expressive gestures with variety in level; abundant use and variety of supporting or illustrational materials; and the conscious attention paid to writing attention-holding change factors into the sermon itself. Suggestion for revivifying preaching: Round up three or four trusted and sympathetic friends who listen to you preach regularly and dare to submit a sermon to their critical analysis once every month or two. Set one of them to monitoring your gestures. Have them note down mannerisms and constantly repeated or awkward gestures. In practice preaching sessions, work to remove or bring these under control. Remember that meaningless sameness, repetitious gesturing is more distracting to attention than no gesturing at all. Ask this person to keep track of the number of times you gesture into the upper and lower levels. Belt line to shoulder is the middle level where most gestures must occur: variety depends on movement runs that go above the shoulder or below the belt line. If this individual is a perceptive observer set him to checking the number of emphatic gestures (those that express your feelings) as over against the number of

descriptive gestures (those describing scenes or objects). There should be a balance in these.

Set a second person to recording instances of supporting material. On a sheet of paper range the types of supporting material down the left hand side: figures of speech, comparisons and contrasts, parables, historical allusions, biographical incidents (from others' lives), personal testimony, anecdotes or stories, poetry or hymn lines, quotations, and building hypothetical situations.¹⁷ Across the top of the paper march the Roman numerals for the points of your sermon. This individual just needs to place a check mark on the paper opposite the type of supporting material used under the column for the point of your sermon in which it occurred to establish a visual representation of your supporting material effectiveness. The check marks should be evenly distributed over the entire sheet, for adequate variety demands many types of supporting material in all points of the sermon.

Set your most perceptive volunteer friend to check the attention-holding factors in your sermon, for these are the most technical and difficult to recognize. The essence of holding attention is delivering sufficient stimuli to the listener to keep him from becoming aware of the passage of time. When stimuli drop low enough for the auditor to become aware of time's movement he is apt to become bored.¹⁸ The essence of keeping stimuli impinging on the consciousness of the auditor is change. An unbroken shout will lose attention as quickly as the unbroken, soft monotone. Attention is seized by change when one sentence is vigorous and the next a whisper. So this person is monitoring *changes*: changes in content—let him list the persons, activities, conflicts, basic wants, curiosity items, suspense moments, unusual things, and very familiar items you mention; changes in direct appeal to the senses—the ears through silence, rate changes, volume changes, tone changes, and the eyes through visual aids (someone else is already checking the gestures); *changes* through indirect appeal to the senses remembered things seen, heard, smelled, tasted, felt; *changes* in types of material—solemn, grim, earnest, shocking, surprising, amusing, ludicrous, satirical; changes in emotional tenor—anger, anxiety, contempt, disappointment, fear, gratitude, grief, hate, hope, jealousy, joy, love, pity, pride, regret, relief, remorse, shame; and *changes* in type of sentence structure—long, short, declarative, exclamatory, interrogative.¹⁹ One can simply place these areas of change down the left side of a sheet of paper and the main points of the message across the top of the sheet and have the monitoring individual put a mark down in the proper area every time he detects a change. Three monitors ought to be able unobtrusively to check the charisma of your delivery—its gestures, supporting material, and attention-holding factors—without disrupting an ordinary-sized service of worship.

Such are the areas of human skill the preacher can train in, practice, increase, relevance, structure, style, and charisma. Admittedly these are secondary and minor compared to matters of other-worldly givens and a theologically informed biblical content. Should the busy pastor spend the energy and time to improve his performance in these secondary areas? Let this question be answered by a second: given the One who called us, God, and the sublime level of the task, preaching, should we not strive to be unashamed workmen in technique as well as in content?

VI. A CHALLENGE TO US AS PASTORS

Well does this author know the busy comings and goings, the demands and privileges of the parish! If this book is something other than a respectable library decoration, if it is read, if this chapter should be read to this point, and if you feel as the author does in regard to his own preaching, that sometimes it falls into the gray-flannel area of dullness, the final question becomes: Will we do anything about improving the preaching we deliver? Might it be suggested that we trap ourselves into action? Obtain two or three copies of this book. Muster the pastoral fortitude to urge your people to candor. Invite all who sometimes find your preaching dull to meet with you after service. Pass out those book copies and let them study this chapter at their leisure, making a list of its suggestions. Let them then join us in praying and monitoring us toward more vital proclamation. Then the chips will be down and we will be under some obligation to improve, to grow in our preaching ability. "Great idea, but we might lose our jobs," the heart responds. Well ... perhaps if we do not care enough to continually improve our preaching we should lose those jobs of ours... .

Let me be as candid as possible, and address the reverend clergy directly. As a preacher in an age when preaching is widely regarded as the bogus currency of a bankrupt ministry, the best thing you can do, for yourself and your ministry, is to set the business of preaching at the very center of your life and work, and give it first claim on your time and energy.²⁰

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- ¹ William A. Quayle, *The Pastor–Preacher*, ed. Warren W. Wiersbe (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 143.
- ² John Killinger, *The Centrality of Preaching in the Total Task of the Ministry* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1969), 28.
- ³ Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 5.
- ⁴ R. E. O. White, *A Guide to Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 24–25.
- ⁵ Adapted from Clyde Reid, *The Empty Pulpit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 67–74.
- ⁶ The case for this view is ably stated by Reid, *Empty Pulpit*, 83–85.
- ⁷ It would do every pastor good periodically to ponder the chapter “Demonstration of the Spirit and of the Power,” D. Martyn Lloyd–Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 304–25.
- ⁸ ‘The best discussion of originality in all homiletical literature, in this writer’s opinion, is by W. G. T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, repr. 1965 [of 1867 edition]), 3–32.
- ⁹ Homiletics’ best discussion of application is still to be found in the century–old text, John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (re–print; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), 211–21.
- ¹⁰ Donald Coggan, *Stewards of Grace* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), esp. 61–64.
- ¹¹ Another whole approach to this matter of variety in outline structure is suggested by Ilion T. Jones, *Principles and Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 103–23. One can further stimulate his thinking by relating Andrew W. Blackwood’s fine chapters on doctrinal and biographical preaching to differing ones of these structural styles. See respectively *Doctrinal Preaching for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 184–96, and *Biographical Preaching for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 150–68.
- ¹² This quality of imagination is one of the “most godlike capacities of man,” Whitesell insists. Imagination in preaching is the picture–making faculty of the mind always under the control of reality; and without its disciplined use, all preaching is dull: see Faris D. Whitesell, *Power in Expository Preaching* (Neptune, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 103–17.
- ¹³ See Donald G. Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957), 142–53.
- ¹⁴ White, *Guide*, 219.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 220–24.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 224–28.
- ¹⁷ W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of Sermon Illustration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1973 [of 1950 edition]), 26–45. If you have never read this little book’s first chapter, “The Place and Use of Illustration,” now would be the time to do it.
- ¹⁸ Webb B. Garrison, *The Preacher and His Audience* (Neptune, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1954), 79.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81–85.
- ²⁰ Killinger, *Centrality*, 28.

STUDY ONE: THE MATTER OF POWER FOR MINISTRY

Introduction: A Change in the Mode of Our Studies

I have been considering how I ought to go about the Ministry Studies for the year 2005. I have also asked the help of close friends on the matter. I am now convinced that I will not use the mode of teaching the ministry studies which I have used for many years, whatever its value may have been. We have all been aware that the second sessions of the Monthly Ministry Studies have always been of great interest as we discuss our subject from the floor. Likewise the discussion sessions at our annual Ministry Schools have been rich times. When I have dealt with subjects in the evening sessions of those schools without notes, as such, they have made their impact. This is what I am told, not what I deduced.

I am sure the time has come at this end of my life to present studies with the minimum of notes and maximum participation and discussion with folk in the classes. I feel that to this point in time I have written and published materials which can be profitable as a body of teaching. Now I would like to see us being at that place where we can say, with the Lord Jesus Christ, 'The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life', a wonderful claim to make but I believe that is how our utterances are intended to be as we 'are in the Spirit' (cf. Rev. 1:10; Acts 2:41; plus many other quotes).

I believe that in His grace I may well be taking up many themes which we have dealt with throughout so many of our classes, schools and missions over many years, and from time to time will suggest we go over them in a preparatory way which will help us in our Monthly Ministry meetings on the Saturdays and the Mondays. Our sharing will not be only in a theological way but also in the way of being the living *ecclesia*, and so in the way of the apostles' gospel (*kerugma*), teaching (*didache*), fellowship (*koinonia*) and exhortation (*paraclesis*). These four elements constituted much of the life of the early church as they ought to do so today. Sad to say, much of our ministry today can be informative and descriptive without the Holy Spirit bringing personal confrontation through it, and all kinds of powerful action among us; i.e. signs and wonders following and confirming the word. The fault of 'holding the form of religion but denying the power of it' (2 Tim. 3:5) is a great one.

We are in the last age (the *eschaton*) and much going on around the world can be seen as apocalyptic. The final fulfilment is close at hand, but some of us go in traditional ways, looking upon the church as an organisation to be managed by its human members and not as the body of Christ; not as *the* organism of the Holy Spirit with the only word of power which will deal with all the nations until the new creation, the new heaven and the new earth, are created and appear to us as they usher in the new and completed Kingdom of God.

For our part we are not living in the days of the initial creation. We are not living in the days of the primal humanity, days of the patriarchs, nor even the days of Israel. Again, we are not living in the days of Christ's incarnation and his saving works. We are not living in the apostolic days which followed, nor the ages of the Roman Empire and empires which followed, but we have the *fact* of living at the 'end of times'. Of course this age began at Pentecost as shown by Acts 2:14-21 and is one to the end—when apostolical. We, then, have

the full-orbed biblical view from Genesis to Revelation of God's purpose and plan and so can richly understand His plan and participate in it in apostolic mode and power. I propose then that we try to build each other up in the faith as we discuss the Scriptures and our ministry of 'the word'. To have any competition in knowledge would be deadly.

Without 'the word' our minds would know nothing. We would be left to puzzle and speculate, being unable to be certain. Faith, hope and love are the three virtues by which human beings live; without them we are unmanned. We are bereft of relationship with God and so we are *non est* in the creational reality as creatures of God. So then all history, all acts of God, are significant. Persons of faith anticipated God's *telos* for them and lived their lives accordingly. This is the message of Hebrews chapter 11—knowing and believing God's end from the beginning (cf. Eccl. 3:11). Our personal identity is being in God, in His creation, being redeemed and being changed from one stage of glory to another whilst anticipating full glorification, sanctification, and perfection within the ecclesia of God, i.e. the community of love.

It can be that some Christians are immature, stunted as to growth, and fleshly as to intent. Such cases are spoken of in 1 Corinthians 3:1–4 and Hebrews 5:7–14. If this is the case they are not hearing and obeying the apostolic words of truth. We have indicated that it is possible to be 'holding the form of religion but denying the power of it' (2 Tim. 3:5). Paul tells us, 'All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

The Studies Ahead of Us

Those of us who are teachers and preachers, theologians, scholars, seek to be skilled in teaching the text of Scripture, trusting that hearers and readers will develop principles in living out the Christian life. This does not always happen although 2 Timothy 3:5 (see above) tells us the text is plain and simple enough to 'the man of God'. As we share in heart and mind the text we are teaching, it must surely be the word which God has spoken, and still speaks through the Holy Spirit who is our Interpreter and Compeller of proclamation. What came to me for our primary study were Paul's words to the Corinthian church, in 1 Corinthians 1:17 – 2:5, especially 1:18, 'For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God', and 2:2, 'For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified'. These statements will lead us to our first shared study.

The Nature and Power of the Cross

Some Points to Consider and Discuss

1. In what way was/is/will be, the cross the power (*dunamis*) of God and how does this power relate to that of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)? When Paul talks about the power of the gospel in Roman 1:16–17 does this mean the same as 'the word of the cross' in 1 Corinthians 1:18?
2. How does it relate to the power (*dunamis*) of the resurrection (Phil. 3:10; Rom. 1:4)? Check with Romans 6:1–10; Colossians 3:1–11.
3. How does it relate to the power (*dunamis*) of the word (Acts 6:7; 19:20; Eph. 6:17; Rev. 1:9)?

Note: Let us keep in mind the Pauline letters of Romans and Galatians where the power of the cross is seen in what is the nature of the cross in forming the gospel.

ADDENDUM TO MONTHLY MINISTRY STUDY FEBRUARY 2005

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

Note. The Addendums with each monthly study are to be given out at the end of the second session and to be used when we return home. Their use following the monthly study is essential to substantiating our themes.

Introduction

The doctrine of Creation makes Man in the image of God (Gen. 1:26f.; 5:2; Ps. 8:3f.; 1 Cor. 11:7; cf. Eccl. 3:11; 7:29). Man thus has affinity with God.

The Nature of Man

He is a son (Acts 17:28; Luke 3:38), a creature (Jer. 10:23; Ps. 104:29–30), and a servant of the King (Gen. 1:28ff.; cf. Ps. 8:3f.; Gen. 9:1–7; 11:1–9; cf. 2 Thess. 1:5; Matt. ch. 13). These elements are correlative with God's Fatherhood, Creatorhood and Kingship. We must keep stressing the contingent nature of Man (Jer. 10:23).

Fallen Man and His Dilemma

Refusal to live in dependency is at the heart of the Fall (Gen. 3:1–10; Rom. 1:18–32; 5:12ff.). Man is thus at odds with himself, God and the creation, including mankind. Refusing to be son, creature and servant, he is thus malfunctioning, disoriented, disjointed, dislocated in all parts of his personality. He is outside the plan and will of God. This is being a sinner, in original sin.

The Nature of God and Fallen Man's Dilemma

- (a) Man is wholly in need of God because of the nature of creation (Jer. 10:23).
- (b) God's holiness brings His wrath upon the evil of Man (Hab. 1:13; Rom. 1:18ff.; cf. Isa 6:5; Ps. 7:11; Ezek. 7:3ff.).
- (c) Man is in the bondage of sin (John 8:34; Prov. 5:22–23; 2 Pet. 2:19). Sin's elements are:
 - (i) its power (John 8:34; Prov. 5:22–23; 2 Pet. 2:19); (ii) its penalty (Rom. 6:23 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:55–56); and (iii) its pollution (Prov. 4:23; 25:26; Jer. 17:9; Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Mark 7:20ff).
- (d) Man is in the bondage of many enemies, such as Satan (1 John 5:19; Eph. 2:1–3; Heb. 2:14–15), the world powers (Col. 2:14–15; Rom. 8:38; Eph. 6:12), the world-system (Gal. 1:4; 6:14; 1 John 2:14ff.), sin (John 8:34), death (Heb. 2:14–15; 1 Cor 15:55–56; Rom. 5:12ff.), the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18; 1 Thess. 1:10), law (Rom. 7:1; 6:7, 14; Gal. 3:10), the flesh (Eph. 2:1–3; Rom. 8:5ff.), idols (1 Cor. 8:5; Gal. 4:8), and conscience (Heb. 9:14; cf. 10:2, 22; Titus 1:15).
- (e) Man can do nothing to extricate himself from his dilemma, i.e. he cannot atone for sins, or do works pleasing to God (Eph. 2:8–10; Phil. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Ps. 143:2; Gal. 2:16ff.; Rom. 4:1ff.; Isa. 64: 6). Man is weak (Rom. 5:6) and incorrigible (Rom. 8:5f.). He is also said to be

dead to God (Gen. 2:15–17; cf. Rom. 5:12–21) and dead in his sins. He is therefore doomed, being under wrath (Rom. 1:18 – 3:23; 1 Thess. 1:10; cf. 2 Thess. 1:5–9).

The Nature of God and the Cross of Christ

- (a) God has planned Man's redemption before creation (Eph. 1:3–14; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Cor. 2:6–10; cf. 1 Pet. 1:18–20; Rev. 13:8).
- (b) Following the Fall, God has prophesied the coming of the redeeming Messiah (Gen. 3:15; cf. 49:10; Isa. 7:14; 53; Matt. 1:20–21; Jer. 31:31–34; cf. Matt. 26:28; Ezek. 36:24–28).
- (c) John the Baptist and the prophecies (Luke 1:67–79; John 1:29).
- (d) Jesus and the redemption of God (John 1:29; Luke 2:10–14; 4:18; cf. Isa 61:1f.; Acts 10:38).
- (e) Jesus' predictions of the Cross (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32ff.).
- (f) Jesus' statements concerning his own death (John 3:14–16; 6:51; 12:32; Mark 10:45; Matt. 26:28; cf. Luke 24:25–26, 46; cf. Matt. 26:31 = Zech. 13:7).
- (g) Satan, darkness and the Cross (Luke 22:53; John 12:31; 14:30–31, cf. Jude 9; Heb 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15).
- (h) The seven words of the Cross revealing the sufferings of Christ.
- (i) The Cross is propitiation for sins, and the averting of wrath from sinful, wrath-deserving Man (Rom. 3:24f.; 4:25; Gal. 2:16f.; 3:13–14; 1 John 4:9–10; Titus 2:11; 3:1–7; etc.).

Man and the Fruits of the Cross

- (a) Man is freed from all his enemies by the removal of guilt from him through the guilt-bearing work of the Cross (cf. Luke 1:73–75; John 8:31–34; Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15; Gal. 1:4; 2:19–20; 3:13–14; 5:24; 6:14; Rom. 5:1 = 8:1; 1 Cor. 15:55–56; 1 John 4:9–18; Heb. 10:14–22).
- (b) Man is forgiven and justified. This liberates him from the bondage of sin and the fear of wrath and judgment. It also liberates him to love and serve God (Rom. 5:1; 8:1; Gal. 2:16ff.; 3:10–14; Acts 13:38f.; 1 John 4:9–19; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13–14; Rom. 4:1ff.; Rev. 1:4–5; etc.).
- (c) The Cross is the basis for New Birth, Regeneration, Sanctification (John 3:3–14; Gal. 6:15; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Titus 3:3–5; 2 Cor. 5:14–17; Rom. 6; Col. 3:1–13; etc.).

Conclusion

Titus 2:11–14 with 3:1–7 sums up the work of grace in the believer and through him/her:

- (a) God in His unmitigated liberality sets out to redeem Man in bondage.
- (b) He does it through the work of the Cross.
- (c) His act of love brings love to birth in the human heart (Rom. 5:5f.; 1 John 4:7–19), and so obedience from love (1 John 4:19; 14:15). Redeemed Man returns to dependence upon God (Jer. 10:23), and the dependencies of sonship, creaturehood and servanthood are now the realities of his new life. Grace teaches him obedience (Titus 2:11–14).

STUDY TWO: THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—2

Introduction: Sharing a New Mode of Teaching-Learning

In February's Monthly Ministry Studies we talked about taking a partly different tack in our teaching-learning method of participation. Over many years we have had basic studies in all Schools and our Monthly Ministry days. I felt that it would be good for us in these latter studies to try to work on the principle of 'The words that I speak to you, are spirit, and they are life', i.e. that our words should be of the Spirit and communicate life—from life to life—on the basis of Hebrews 4:12: 'For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart'. It is good to develop thoughtful and well-rounded studies, but the materials *per se* may not always be dynamic in the teaching for it is the evangelist/teacher who is responsible for writing and speaking what is 'spirit and life'. I believe that as we participate in a sharing way the word of God is known to be living. I had also trusted that out of my vintage years I could pass on helpful sharing of wisdom, which could enhance our words for being spirit and life. For me it would be a ministry of opening up the doctrine/s I have already taught. Years ago younger men in ministry urged me to write all I knew for their benefit and the benefit of others. This I have tried to do, hence the body of writing, which has developed. How often I would have called them together to share verbally new insights in a fellowship way, and this is what I seek to do. In those early days we had regular meetings without notes and they were rich. Now in our Saturday and Monday meetings I would like us to have more time, even beyond reading notes with little time for bringing out the insights or important teaching.

Our first venture into this way of teaching-learning was of course an experiment and we had to be patient with one another as we began to tread the path. I suppose we have had a tradition of having a monthly study of some substance—usually 10 to 12 pages—and the change to what at first sight appears to be 'less substance' may have seemed to some of us to be too radical. I am hopeful that we can trust one another for a good outcome as we pursue our way in living seminars even if we seem to hasten very slowly.

The Coverage of Our Studies

In the February 'Introduction' we began to speak on 'The Matter of Power for Ministry'. No one would object to examining this matter for churches are aware there must be power in their communities—the power of God, of course, and not just of human devising. Many churches lack power for salvation and holiness of living. Many of us are alert to certain churches—especially those in the USA—which are being copied because of the success they are having. They appear to have power in our last decade or two. It must be determined that it is the power of God.

The Four Words Are the Living Word

We noted that the church of the apostolic age was linked with four very important words—*kerugma* (proclamation of the gospel); *didache* (teaching of 'the whole counsel of God', of 'salvation history' etc.); *koinonia* (fellowship of all members of the *ecclesia*); and *paraclesis*

(exhortation, advice, correction, encouragement). Over this year we will have reason to study these four words which give us the apostolic picture of the church. What we must see clearly is that the four *words* are the **word of God**.¹ It would be fair to call it 'the apostolic word' which covers 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:26–27). It includes all the Old Testament as the basis for the New Testament scriptures. When we ask, 'Whence comes this word?' we discover it is the word of God brought to the disciples and others by the Holy Spirit. He alone is the Spirit of life and he teaches all things (John 14:26) and leads into all the truth (John 16:12–15). He is sent to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7–11), and he enables his people to speak words, which are spirit and are life. This is what is meant by, 'you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you' (Acts 1:8). The word is the power of God (cf. Rom. 1:16–17; 1 Cor. 1:18; Phil. 3:10) and **it is that word which is given to God's servants when the Holy Spirit comes upon them**. That is why we should continually be being filled by the Holy Spirit.

The Eschaton and the Word

We also noted that our age—as described by Peter in Acts 2:14–21—is the eschaton, i.e. the last or fulfilment age of human history, the history that is wholly in God's hands. If we can see through biblical prophecy and predictions that it is a startling age, then we will understand why it calls for great power: (i) to live in it; and (ii) to be the living church of the living word of God. Being in this age requires that we know the mind of God and live in the power of God. The point at which the apostolic messengers penetrated the world and its empires was the message of *the* Christ's cross, as also this message as it included the resurrection, the ascension and the reigning of the Son at the right hand of God. It was all one message which led to a revelation of Jesus as Lord of the universe (cf. Ps. 2:6–9; 110:1–4; Matt. 28:18–20; Eph. 1:19–23), the King–Messiah ordained by God the Father to rule the whole creation. This word of the *kerugma/didache* was the saving word (see Acts 4:12; 16:30–31).² We note: (i) the word of God was proclaimed with signs following, as in Mark 16:20; Acts 4:29–30; 5:12; 14:3; 19:11–12; 20:32. This is immensely important. We might ask ourselves what it means, especially for us today; and (ii) love was the keynote of the fellowship which made true community/*koinonia* (Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 13; 1 John 4:7–20; 1 Tim. 1:5; 1 Cor. 16:14) so that the witness of the word was powerful for God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) and the gospel is the gospel of that love (1 John 4:9–10). Again we might ask what this means for us today. We need to note, also, that the apostolic church of the early days was lively. The apostolic word brought apostolic understanding via the proclamation (*kerugma*), true community living (*koinonia*), via teaching (*didache* and *paraclesis*). Those who had gone through co-crucifixion with Christ, who had come into new birth (regeneration) via the cross and resurrection, and who lived in the three virtues of faith, hope and love in expectancy of the triumphant *telos* (the fulfilment of God's plan in time) were, as we have said, a lively people, open to discipline, and alive to saving men and women of all nations. By comparison many churches today lack such living. Of course churches were attacked but they were open to exhortation and were not seen as communities of authoritarian clergy—and so on.

THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH

In our last study we brought this point to the fore in the following manner, we now quote:

STUDY ONE: THE NATURE AND POWER OF THE CROSS

Some Points to Consider and Discuss

¹ The substance of this can be found in the little book *Pastoral Dynamics for Pastors and People* (G. Bingham, NCPI, 1999, pp. 19–41).

² I recommend the book *For Pastors and People* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1989) for the subjects we will be presenting. The present one of 'The Word of God' can be found in section 2, 'The Doctrine of the Word of God', pp. 47–136.

1. In what way was/is/will be, the cross the power (*dunamis*) of God and how does this power relate to that of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)? When Paul talks about the power of the gospel in Roman 1:16–17 does this mean the same as 'the word of the cross' in 1 Corinthians 1:18?
2. How does it relate to the power (*dunamis*) of the resurrection (Phil. 3:10; Rom. 1:4)? Check with Romans 6:1–10; Colossians 3:1–11.
3. How does it relate to the power (*dunamis*) of the word (Acts 6:7; 19:20; Eph. 6:17; Rev. 1:9)?

Note: Let us keep in mind the Pauline letters of Romans and Galatians where the power of the cross is seen in what is the nature of the cross in forming the gospel.

We will now put the material relating to the questions and the discussion which ensued, in somewhat better order.

Question 1(a) was aimed at showing the word of the cross to be the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18). Some of the class went immediately to the fact that they had known the power of God in their conversion which was a power they had not known before conversion, but which brought to them the forgiveness of sins, purification of their sins, and justification which freed them from the wrath of God and the judgment of the law. They experienced this reality, and it was a testimony to God's transforming power; something to be marvelled at as it brought joy, release from bondage, new life, etc.

Question 1(b): We did not get fully to this point but, yes, the power of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18) and the gospel (Rom. 1:16–17) are the one thing. This can be seen from Romans 3:21–26 which shows the power of the cross to be that righteousness of God by which He provides by setting Christ forth as the propitiation of humanity's sins (cf. 1 John 4:9–10). Having said this we need to see whether this 'word of the cross' is what we preach and whether it is being preached today. If it is being preached in the apostolic way then we say there is immense power in the church. In fact there is both wisdom and power. Paul is adamant about this in 1 Corinthians 1:17 – 2:5 along with 3:18–23. This is seen in the following:

In 1 Corinthians 1:17 – 2:5 the essence of the matter is that the word (*logos*) of the cross is the power of God. To the Jew the cross is a *skandalon* (offence, stumbling block) and to the Greek *morian* (folly). By contrast to scandal and foolishness, Christ crucified is the wisdom of God and the power of God. Jews do not think the way Greeks do. The Jews who oppose the scandal of the cross would not do so if evident signs and wonders pronounced Jesus to be the King–Messiah of the OT. The Greeks rely on human ability to work out what a cross means in terms of a saviour figure and as Paul presented it, it did not compute. The apostolic message is that Christ crucified comports with the wisdom of God in the salvation of men and women of the human race (so see Rom. 1:16 – 3:26; 5:1; 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 2:19–21; 3:1, 10; 5:24; 6:14; Col. 2:13–15; Heb. 2:9–10; 10:10–18; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 4:9–10; Rev. 1:5). Note that the wisdom of this world is attacked by God (1 Cor. 1:19–21; 3:18–20) and the so-called 'wise' are destroyed. God destroys the worldly wise, those who despise the wisdom and power of God in the gospel.

This means that where the church is spiritually weak as we see in five of the seven churches who, later in the first century, receive letters from Christ in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, for in them the power of the cross has been diminished. The life is not in accordance with Acts 1:8 where the Spirit empowers the proclamation of the word of the cross, i.e. the *kerugma*. The *kerugma* sketches the facts of Israel's history from the time of Abraham to the coming of Christ. God acts with and in Israel by the Abrahamic covenant, the Sinaitic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant and the promised New Covenant. Then come the events of Jesus as the true Messiah, his works and the saving work of the cross, death, resurrection, ascension and reigning at God's right hand. On the basis of Jesus being the Son of God, the Son of Man, Messiah–King and the ultimate judge, men are exhorted to believe. One example of the *kerugma* is Acts 2:14–36 which ends with Peter's exhortation, 'Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has

made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified'. On being convicted many cry out involuntarily, 'what shall we do?' and Peter replies, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'. Those who hear and believe the *kerugma* receive salvation and become members of the new community, the *ecclesia*. In regard to Acts 2 we need remember this was the first time the proclamation was presented and it was presented in the power of the Spirit. It would be good for us to read Paul's presentation of the *kerugma* in Acts 13:16–41. Do we today declare the gospel after the Petrine and Pauline order?

The Heart of the Matter of the Cross

What we need to investigate or come to know as the heart of the message of the cross is the working of God in Christ as Paul sets it out in his theology of the cross in Romans 1:16 – 3:26, as John gives it in his Gospel and Letters, and Peter in Acts and his first Epistle. Our understanding of the cross is one of the cross–resurrection doctrine. Luther once said that in order to understand the cross we had to be theologians of it, not just have a theology of it—as such. That lies ahead of us but is not to be dealt with until we understand 'the power of his resurrection' (Phil. 3:10). We may mention in passing that unless we are theologians of the cross we will not be able to deliver 'the word of the cross'. Being theologians of the cross is shown in a statement such as 'I have been crucified with Christ' and the material of Romans 6:1–10 and 2 Corinthians 5:14–15. Luther opposes what he calls 'the theology of glory'. The need to be theologians of the cross must be emphasised in these days when the scandal of the cross is being replaced by 'another gospel' (Gal. 1:6-9). These are 'gospels of glory'. To the extent we know the truth of the cross we can proclaim it. If we do not know its 'scandal' and 'foolishness' then we will not comprehend the love of God as shown forth effectively in Christ as the propitiatory sacrifice.

The Cross and the Resurrection

In our questions of the February study we did not deal with question 2: 'How does it relate to the power (*dunamis*) of the resurrection (Phil. 3:10; Rom. 1:4)? Check with Romans 6:1–10; Colossians 3:1–11.' We know that the cross and the resurrection are really one act and yet are two separate events. So what does Paul mean when he speaks of 'the power of his [Christ's] resurrection'? Is it a separate power, a different power? That is what we want to discuss this morning. We want to see what it means to us, what it has meant in our lives and what it can mean in the lives of sinful humanity.

I think the matter is dealt with to a good degree in the NCTM Monday Pastors' Study of August 1999, headed 'The Person and Work of Jesus Christ: The Incarnation —4', and proceeds with Christ and his resurrection. The study takes up 13 pages of A4 paper. The Addendum for this month takes the section from pages 9–13. The 1999 studies have been put into a book published under the title of *Christ and the Triune Glory* (G. Bingham, NCPI, Blackwood, 2001), and the August study is on pages 113–143, whilst the material in the Addendum is on pages 132–143. Having shared as a class today, we will look forward to our next session in April, going on with the theme 'Power in the Church'. I would like to point you to Ian Pennicook's book *Power in the Church* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1997) which covers our subject from various angles.

Let us now take up the questions stated in our February study, and commence sharing our knowledge and experience of 'the power of his resurrection'.

2. How does it relate to the power (*dunamis*) of the resurrection (Phil. 3:10; Rom. 1:4)? Check with Romans 6:1–10; Colossians 3:1–11.

3. How does it relate to the power (*dunamis*) of the word (Acts 6:7; 19:20; Eph. 6:17; Rev. 1:9)?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESURRECTION FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN IT

The Union of the Believing People with the Resurrected Christ Means Moral Power for Holy and Righteous Living

The body of Christian believers is not merely an aggregate of believing persons. It is a living body, the Body of Christ, the *ecclesia* of Christ, just as Israel was the *ecclesia (qahal)* of Yahweh. This is brought out in the words of Hendrikus Berkhof:

In the way of obedience and self-surrender, Jesus' humanity is taken up into the sphere of God, the sphere of 'glory' (Heb. *kabod*; Gr. *doxa*), which thus far had been the exclusive sphere of God himself. Not that thereby he changes from human into divine, but as man he receives the most intimate union with God, as the capstone of his whole preceding way. The same is meant when it is said that Jesus is in 'heaven,' ascended into heaven, or was taken up into heaven. This is not so much a designation of place as one of form of existence. The same is intended with his 'sitting at the right hand of God,' thus in the place of the viceroy, of the rightful representative. And that implies still more: from now on God is essentially united with man and his divine existence is forever inseparable from man. And because God's right hand expresses his exercise of power, Jesus' glorification guarantees that God will rule in the spirit of and after the will of this man. God and Jesus in one place, on one throne—those bold expressions indicate a reality which had not entered the human heart: the covenant between God and man which had failed for so long, has now in one man eternally succeeded.¹

Whilst this quotation links the Resurrection and Ascension as one, it also tells us that the human race in Christ is one with him. That is, because he is the Risen One therefore his Church is a risen people.² There is Christ and so there is the community belonging to him and finding its origin and its life in him. Berkhof hearkens back to the eternal covenant with Man which was in being even before creation, but the wonderful fact is that Christ's Death, Burial and Resurrection are those of his followers. We do not mean that Christ's Death, Burial and Resurrection are imputed or accredited to believing Man but that Man was taken up into the Cross, Burial and Resurrection of Christ. He was made a participator in them.

At least three passages attest to the fact we have just set forth: Romans 6:1–10, Galatians 2:19–20, and Colossians 3:1–4. What we gather from them is what is stated in II Corinthians 5:14, 'we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died'. Christ gathered up all humanity in the Cross, and suffered not only *for* them but *as* them. Likewise he suffered the Death humanity should have suffered for sin *as* them. He also rose not only for them but *as* them. All of this fits with the doctrine of Christ as the New, Second—Final—Adam in the New Testament. Romans 5:12–21 shows that Christ is one who is 'much more' than Adam and all he did. Adam lost the glory God had given him, but Christ has regained it for Man. Paul in the three passages just quoted makes moral value from them. What has become foremost in our

¹ *Christian Faith* by Hendrikus Berkhof (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, pp. 310–11).

² The actual resurrection at the end time, spoken of by Christ in John 5:19–29, and referred to in other parts of the New Testament, is dependent upon Christ's Resurrection. We can speak of a 'spiritual' resurrection with him, so that the benefits of the Cross and Resurrection now come to believers. Their physical resurrection will come on the general resurrection day, but both the moral power of the Resurrection and the dynamic hope of resurrection to come work in the believer as a stimulus to hope and a resurrection-life experience here in time.

understanding of God's glory—and Man's glory, for that matter—is the moral nature of glory. If we ponder the matter then we see that in accordance with God's glory shown in Exodus 34:6–7 the work of Christ on the Cross was a work-out, practically speaking, of that moral glory of God. Christ had to suffer the guilt of Man—Man's guilt before the holy law and the Holy God—and so the work of justification on which God's forgiveness is based was no mere forensic manipulation but the painful working out of sinful Man's condemnation before a Holy God so that humanity's acquittal from eternal judgment could be effected in the truly moral way. This moral work-out we must see and realise was in the vicarious suffering of Christ for guilty, sinful humanity.

Now, in Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection, Man is wholly set free. He 'was delivered for our sins and raised for our justification'. Romans 6:1–14 shows that he who has died with Christ has been justified from sin (v. 7), so that now the power of sin has been broken because its power lay in human guilt: guilt that has to do with the condemnation of the law.³ Thus the one who has died, been buried and raised with Christ now has moral glory, for sin shall no longer have (the right to have) dominion over him (vv. 12–14). He is no longer under (the condemnation of) law but he is under grace. The life he now lives he lives by the faith of the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for him (Gal. 2:20). This is part of what Paul calls 'the power of his resurrection' (Phil. 3:10).

Jesus' Resurrection from the Dead Brings His People under His Living Lordship

The power of God which raised Jesus from the dead was the same power that:

. . . made him sit at his [God's] right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:20–23).

Christ is glorified at the right hand of God, and the power of his moral victory is over all things, and this is, among other things, 'for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all'. In this sense we can speak of moral power for his people in the task of proclaiming the gospel of grace and living as a community in grace. Because Christ is Lord nothing can prevail against his Church.

In practice it means that the members of Christ—his Church—can know peace amidst the conflicts that go on in the world, in history, and even in their own hearts. Christ has overcome Satan, the world and its evil powers. What is more, he is sharing his Resurrection authority and power with his people. The Church as the Bride or Wife of Christ is his helpmeet. She uses that power to assist him in carrying out the plan of God for all history. It is when we realise this freedom from bondage and oppression that the majesty of the Resurrection grips our minds and hearts. We are the beneficiaries of his Cross–Resurrection work. We are one in union with his person.

³ That the power of sin lies in guilt and that guilt is linked with the law is shown in Romans 6:16 and I Corinthians 15:56. Christ, by bearing the sting of death—sin—withdrew that sting, and thus, forever, the guilt of Man. Justified Man is thus free from the power of sin (cf. John 8:31–36).

Christ's Resurrection Secures for His People the Fruits of the Cross

We keep noting that Romans 4:25 links the work of the Cross and the Resurrection together as though the two were the one work for salvation. He 'was delivered for our sins, and raised for our justification'. Isaiah 53:11 has, 'he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied'.⁴ The fruit of the Cross is the forgiveness, justification, sanctification, perfection and glorification of God's elect, won by it—by Him—as also the fulfilment of the covenant, and the victory over all evil powers so that they were defeated for ever. These are monumental matters, worthy of our continuous contemplation and understanding, since they influence our lives so deeply. Again we note this is wholly the moral glory achieved by Christ's work of the Atonement. We may not see radiance, light and Shekinah glory but we are living in it.

The Resurrection of Christ Makes Christ Intercessor for God's People

In Romans 8:33–34 Paul shows that without the Resurrection God's people would have no intercessor for them. They would be defeated by Satan:

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, *who was raised from the dead*, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?

Hebrews 4:14–16 and 7:23–25 link with this idea in that it is the victorious Christ, raised to God's right hand, who is our Intercessor. Whilst it is by him as our Intercessor that we come to God (cf. Isa. 53:12; Heb. 2:14–18) it is also by him that we are continually preserved from the Evil One and his powers every moment of our lives. He guards us in all our moments, and his presence at the right hand of the Father is the guarantee that through him we are more than conquerors.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE RESURRECTION

All theologians, whether they believe in a physical resurrection of Christ or not, agree that the *euaggelion* or *kerugma*—the good news or the proclamation—always included the Resurrection of Messiah. In fact it was the first matter preached apostolically. This can be seen when reading the sermons in Acts.⁵ It was an astounding claim and, by nature of the case, difficult for the enemies of the gospel to refute. We have seen that the early preachers did not seek to prove that Christ had risen from the dead. They saw their task was to witness to it as fact. The Epistles have rich teaching regarding the work of the Cross and the work of the Resurrection and set them forth as being the one work by which human beings can be saved; but it is the Resurrection which not only shows that the Cross is essential for saving Man, but also that the gospel, when it proclaims that 'Jesus is Lord' because of the Resurrection, is

⁴ This is one of those scriptures which can be clearly seen to relate to Christ's Resurrection, but it must not be seen or used as a 'proof text'. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52:14 – 53:12 must triumph in the end, and so it is.

⁵ In looking at the sermons in Acts and other statements in it we see the emphasis on the Resurrection: 2:24; 3:15; 4:2, 10, 33; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 37; 17:18, 32. Emphasis on the resurrection at the Last Day is seen in 17:32; 23:6; 24:15, 21. We note that there are not many references to the Cross, but when 'the whole counsel of God' is expounded in the Epistles, the importance of the Cross comes to the fore, and that without detriment to the emphasis on Christ's Resurrection.

the means of salvation through that Lordship. Romans 10:9 makes this clear, 'because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved'. How difficult a thing in the natural to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead! It was when Peter spoke on the Resurrection and then concluded, 'Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2:36), that the listeners were cut to the heart and cried out to be shown how to receive salvation.

In Acts 4 the Church, being gathered together to pray for the apostles when they had come from the Sanhedrin, knew that the thing the apostles must do was 'to speak the word with all boldness'. Having prayed this the whole Church was filled with the Holy Spirit, one result of which was that 'the apostles *gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*, and great grace was upon them all' (Acts 4:23–33).

When it has been proclaimed to innumerable tribes, nations and cultures down through two millenniums that this man, Jesus, went through the pangs of death and rose again, then it is seen that he has outshone the greatest religious geniuses in human history, for he alone has borne the sins of the human race and he alone has risen triumphant. 'I died', he said, testifying to his experience of death, 'and I am alive again'. When the reality of this mystery breaks through to men and women by the power of the Holy Spirit, then those who comprehend want to belong to this one, this Last Adam. They want to be part of the new, living people of God. They want to rise to new life, now, and then join the countless multitude who will rise again at the Last Day, cleansed by the Cross and given life by his Resurrection, realising the inheritance of eternity, wearing the body of glory as a kingdom of priests unto their God.

Summary of the Glory of Christ's Resurrection and Its Effects

We have seen that the fact of this one Man risen from the dead is the basis for all who believe in Christ. It is to have implanted in themselves the whole matter of hope. Hope is based upon the work of the Cross and its fruits. It is also based on the Resurrection of Christ, his Ascension and Reigning in glory. In fact, the apostolic believer could see nothing but glory ahead of him. We suppose he knew the doctrine of 'the new man', that is, Christ. The New Man is the True, the Second, the Last Adam.

If we think that the repentant, believing sinner is given back his being as it was in Adam prior to the Fall, then certainly we would seem to have something here. However, he is not just fallen Man reprimed. He is the fallen Man redeemed and taken into Christ. He is in the New Adam. As unfallen Adam he had all the elements of a true human being, but Paul says this Adam was but 'a living being'; he was 'of the earth, earthy'. He was not limited as Man, and all that God had for him as Man, but his origin limited what he could ever achieve since he was ever 'of the earth, earthy'. That was at best his future. The Last Adam is 'the man from heaven'. His origins are not limited to earth. He is 'a life-giving spirit', even as he takes on the earthy entail of humanity. He is the Adam beyond Adam, whether that Adam be fallen or not. So there is a glorious prospect for every man of Adam born, but in Christ reborn to a living hope—a hope beyond any hope he had ever had—*because Christ rose from the dead!* Christ is himself the Resurrection and the Life, and none other is this. He is the fountain of living water, which if anyone drink of it he shall

live. Every one of Christ reborn shall rise from the dead. Christ was the first fruits, 'the first-born from the dead'. It is into this glorious humanity that Man in Christ now enters. Christ's future is his future! Thus we say that true hope is born in all its elements from Christ's Resurrection (I Pet. 1:3). He is the One who has broken through the death barrier, as our Adam, our Prophet–Priest–King Adam, and so all the glories set forth to be attained by the first Adam are now set out for us. The various kinds of hope, or, shall we say, the various aspects of hope which are named below, are fruit of him who is the 'first fruits' of the Resurrection.

The following quotes, then, link all New Testament passages concerning hope. If we examine these objects of hope in their several contexts we will find they all link with glory and are to do with the eschatological glory planned for God's elect. First Peter 1:3–4 shows that the living hope we have comes through the Resurrection of Christ:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

Likewise Paul can say, 'awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:13). The references to the objects of hope are:

'the hope of glory'; 'the hope [of] the resurrection'; 'our hope of sharing the glory of God'; 'the hope of righteousness [justification]'; 'the hope of salvation'; 'Christ Jesus our hope'; 'our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ'; 'the hope to which he has called you'; along with 'his glorious inheritance in the saints'; 'the hope of the gospel'; 'the hope of eternal life'. It is because God is 'the God of hope' and our hope is 'laid up . . . in heaven' that hope 'hopes all things', and even 'in hope believes against hope'. As Paul says, 'If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied'. It is hope that is for here and eternity—how could it be otherwise and be hope?—for Christ himself is our hope, and within us (among us) he is the hope of glory. That is why we are enjoined to 'seize the hope set before us' and to 'hold fast the confession of our hope'.⁶

It is clear that without the Resurrection of Christ the matter of hope has no basis at all.

Conclusion

We come back to the fact that all humanity has a fear of death. Death is not actually part of our life unless, of course, we are thinking in terms of moral–spiritual death. Everything in our lives moves towards death. The Apostle John wrote, 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.' We saw in Hebrews 2:14–15 that men and women are in fear of death all their lives, and hence come under the bondage of the Accuser, Satan. Fear of death is really fear of judgment, and John's perfect love is that love which worked on the Cross and through the Resurrection to take away guilt

⁶ Because we wished this particular paragraph not to be interrupted by references so that straight reading of it might prove more effective, we have stated the references in this footnote. They can be checked against the text. They are Colossians 1:27; Acts 23:6; 24:15; cf. 28:20; Romans 5:2; Galatians 5:5; I Thessalonians 5:8; I Timothy 1:1; Titus 2:13; Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:18; 4:4; I Thessalonians 2:12; II Peter 1:3–5; Colossians 1:23; Titus 1:2; 3:7, cf. I Peter 5:10; Romans 15:13; Colossians 1:5; I Corinthians 13:7; Romans 4:18; I Corinthians 15:19; Colossians 1:27; Hebrews 6:18; 10:23. The quotation and footnote are taken from the August 1998 study of the NCTM Monday Pastors' Group, 'Glory Proclaimed and Pastoral'.

and so fear of punishment. Thus people believe and come into the freedom of love which is no fear of death. It may be natural to have trepidation about growing old, and to have a certain dread of the act of dying, and even here we have the assurance that death has no real sting, the grave no real victory. Faith helps us to face what is ahead, knowing that although we die as regards the body, yet we will never meet death itself. We shall certainly meet life, the life into which we move. When the paralysing fear of death is overcome by Christ's perfect love, then faith knows the power of present, resurrection living (Phil. 3:10). As we have already seen, Christ, on the cross, bore the sting of death—sin. The power of sin was (is) by the law, its guilt and its threat to human peace.⁷ The sting has gone, and the sweetness of peace through grace has come to us from our Covenant God and His Covenant Head, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have been raised with Christ in regard to our former moral–spiritual death. This is the proof to us that we shall be raised from bodily death and be equipped with a body of glory. The first Resurrection which was Christ's includes all the elect in that Resurrection. It has been well said that what Christ began in that Resurrection he will complete in the ultimate resurrection. It is in this assurance by faith that we now live, and for us also 'faith is the assurance of things hoped for'.

This material taken from the August 1999 Pastors' Study Group, pp. 9–13, and reproduced in the book by Geoffrey Bingham, Christ and the Triune Glory (NCPI, 2001, pp. 132–143).

⁷ We need to see continually that we cannot have his Cross apart from the Resurrection, nor his Resurrection apart from the Cross.

STUDY THREE: THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—3

Introduction: The Power of the Gospel in the Church of God

We have seen already that Jesus told his disciples in Acts 1:8, 'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth', and in Luke 24:48–49, 'You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high'. Scarcely knowing what the church would be, these statements would come to be highly regarded in the grateful, new *ecclesia*. These and other intimations of power were fulfilled by the happening of Pentecost. So we have seen the statements regarding 'the power of the Holy Spirit', 'the power of the gospel', 'the word of the cross is the power of God' and 'the power of his resurrection'. Also we see statements such as 'the power of God' (many times), 'his divine power', 'the power of the Holy Spirit', 'the power of Christ'. In 2 Thessalonians 1:11 we have the statement, 'To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his call, and may fulfil every good resolve and work of faith by his power', thus linking the power of God with the work of faith.

In Acts 3:12–16 Peter tells his audience:

Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

By his statement Peter states the principle that none of Christ's people has power, of himself, to heal. It is by the power of Jesus through his people that healing is performed. We need to see in this regard the statement of Acts 10:38, 'how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him'. Jesus by the Holy Spirit is still the healer and miracle worker in the church. The writer of Hebrews shows that in the Christian beginning experience, things such as repentance, enlightenment, 'the heavenly gift' (God's gift necessary for Christians), sharing the Holy Spirit, tasting the goodness of the word of God and the powers (*dunamis*), i.e. 'wonders or miracles' of the age to come, was par for the course. This was surely linked to the power known in the Kingdom of God such as stated in Matthew 12:28, 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you'. The Kingdom of God coming upon the folk at Ephesus is described in Acts 19:8–19 when: (i) extraordinary miracles were done; and

(ii) when, as a result of these, 'the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily' (Acts 19:20). We have already noted that such occurrences happened as a result of the word being preached (cf. Acts 10:38; Acts 14:3). The power of the Holy Spirit and of the word of God—the gospel—are one as the *kerugma* and *didache* are proclaimed and taught.

We saw in 1 Corinthians 1:18 that 'the word [*logos*] of the cross' is the power of God for salvation. This word is the equivalent of 'the gospel' in Romans 1:16–17 and is powerful as it is communicated by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:48–49). Romans 15:18–19 is especially to be noted, 'For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ'. It is all in the one—'by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit'. In the same context Paul speaks of his coming to Rome (cf. Rom. 1:8–12) in 15:29, 'I know that when I come to you I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ', i.e. with the capacity to preach and teach the word of God in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

We seem to have come to the conclusion that there is power in the church by the Holy Spirit as it is in fellowship (*koinonia*) such as we see in the apostolic action. We are helped by reading the proclamation of the gospel (*kerugma*) as we find it in Acts and the apostolic letters. Acts 4:23–33 is a good example of all this. We are also further informed by reading Acts 6:1–8. So far we have not taken up the theme of the power of God in the life of the church, especially in regard to the living of true relationships in love and holiness. Later in our series we will attend to this theme. For the moment we are speaking of the power in the church which is evident when it proclaims the gospel, the intention being 'to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all nations' (Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:25–26). Paul in Acts 20:24–27 calls this 'testify[ing] to the gospel of the grace of God', 'preaching the kingdom', and 'declaring . . . the whole counsel of God' (cf. Eph. 1:9–14). These three statements are most significant, showing that the gospel of grace is at the same time the message of the Kingdom of God, and encapsulates the whole plan of God as preset before creation and completed in Christ reigning at the right hand of his Father (1 Cor. 2:6–10; Eph. 1:19–23).

THE POWER OF GOD AND THE POWER OF MAN

We launched into our Introduction on the matter of power in the church. At this point we should make a note on the fact that all power belongs to God, as Psalm 62:11–12 has it, 'Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God; and that to thee, O LORD, belongs steadfast love. For thou dost requite a man according to his work.' Here the Psalmist puts power in the context of God's love. As for God's power, i.e. His might and strength, He is accorded all power because He has created the earth. Jeremiah 10:12 pronounces, 'It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens'. In short, the entire Scriptures ascribe all power to God. He is Creator. As for all creatures, by nature of the case they must depend on God's power for life and action. Of himself Man is but dust. Having lived, he returns to dust as the spirit, i.e. the breath (*ruach*) of him returns to the One who created him. This humanity which Peter describes in his First Letter (1:24–25), 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls',

and he goes on to contrast the power of the word with transient humanity—'but the word of the Lord abides forever', concluding with 'That word is the good news which was preached to you' (cf. Eccles. 3:18–21). Here, we are anticipating the good news of the gospel as the power of God in giving forgiveness and the eternal life which is not transient.

At the same time Man is accorded a place of honour in the whole creation. Given the mandate of God for his life (Gen. 1:26–30) he also has authority. For exercising power in the authority given him, he is blessed by God (Gen. 1:28) so that he may accomplish the task given him. His task is in this world while he lives (Ps. 115:16). Seeking his own destiny at the time of the Fall, he refused God's good will for him and his union with his Creator. Rightly understood, he is powerless, but he thinks not. Jeremiah 10:23 shows us that the way of a man, *of himself*, is not *in himself*. In a most interesting verse Paul says that the god of this world (Satan) is now working in or *energising* in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2) whilst in Philippians 2:13 he says of Christian believers that, 'God is at work [i.e. is *energizing*] in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure'. The moving power for evil is Satan, and for good—Man's true living—the moving power is God. Man without God is helpless; his proclivity for evil is aided by Satan. Even so, Satan is a creature and not a creator. The ability to energise is given to him even though he uses it against his Creator.

God is ever working in the whole creation, and is never static. He is always revealing Himself, always communicating though Man is ever repelling Him and Satan is ever deceiving the human race. Notwithstanding the wrong—i.e. the illegitimate—use of power, God is most powerful. The principle of the everlasting covenant is constantly operating, though few may know that this is the case. By it God is shown as He describes himself in Exodus 34:6–7. By covenant, God on the one hand finally redeems His elect and on the other hand destroys, through judgment, the finally impenitent. We need to remember Psalm 62:11–12 where power and steadfast love are in dynamic juxtaposition. All power is used for love's fulfilment. This, then, makes for true understanding of power as set forth in the New Testament, i.e. the gospel is the power of God, for Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17 – 2:5).

ARE WE, THEN, PREACHING AND LIVING IN APOSTOLIC POWER?

It is fair to say that we have profitably discussed power in the church with the ideas in mind of the power of the word of the cross and of the resurrection, the ascension and the reigning at God's right hand, all of which is at the same time the power of the gospel, i.e. the power of God's word. This proclamation is set forth by God's people with the intention of effecting 'obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 15:18f.). This raises the question for us, personally, as to whether proclamation as we tell it has these three important elements stated in Romans 15:18f. (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1–5). If one or other of these are lacking then I suggest that we do not know the *kerugma* in its fullness. I do not mean we do not have a good theology of the *kerugma*, but that we are not theologians of the gospel—i.e. that we are not under the gospel as the power of God personally and intimately, so that as theologians of the cross we speak out of it as it is the present dynamic reality in our own lives. Theologians of glory present the cross as a splendid and even beautiful act of God, but fail to see its scandal and its (so-called) foolishness, so that when we live crucified and risen lives and speak of

'the fellowship of his suffering' we are charged with being morbid. The theologians of glory deny the necessity for suffering.

In our last paper—the March paper—we shared together the power of Christ's resurrection and ascension. For us to peruse and meditate we had our Addendum on the significance of the resurrection for believers under the main heading of 'The Union of the Believing People with the Resurrected Christ Means Moral Power for Holy and Righteous Living'. We had other headings—as following: 'Jesus' Resurrection from the Dead Brings His People under His Living Lordship', 'Christ's Resurrection Secures for His People the Fruits of the Cross', and 'The Resurrection of Christ Makes Christ Intercessor for God's People', remembering that the meaning of intercession is personal, intimate intervention in all the actions of history. This, we saw, meant that Christ's resurrection power, which is one with his power of the cross, is here, in this world, now! What then of our title above, 'ARE WE, THEN, PREACHING AND LIVING IN APOSTOLIC POWER?'

To pursue our participating witness as a group of brethren who experience the power of God, we remind ourselves that the gospel is as much the gospel of Christ's reigning at the right hand of God as any other part of the gospel. We dare not separate the work *of* the cross from the death *on* the cross, the resurrection from the dead, the ascension in power and the reigning of the Son at the right hand of the Father. It was always the intention of God that a man—the Son of Man—should reign at the right hand of God. This would be the triumph of His Kingdom. The gospel is the good news to mankind that He, with the Son–King should be seated with him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6–7; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21). It is not by accident that in Isaiah 14:12–14 Satan in the guise of the King of Tyre says, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars [angelic powers] of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High'. This one, corrupted with his own beauty, would arrogate to himself the destiny of the Son–King of Psalm 2, and the Melchizedekian High-Priest King of Psalm 110 and other such prophecies who will subdue all the nations, for as Daniel records (Dan. 7:14), 'to him was [shall be] given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed'.

Thus we see that the work of the cross destroyed the Satanic tyranny over Man by the fear of death, and thus the power of the Satanic sham 'world' with its cohorts of evil and its foul flesh—the bloating magnification of Man by Man—was destroyed forever. Christ's resurrection 'brought life and immortality to light', whilst the ascension of the holy risen One—'delivered for our offences and raised for our justification'—brought coronation, so that the Messiah of the ages reached his place as Ruler, Intercessor and Judge. Against such no alien power can ever again rise, and no evil power can ever come to birth. It is all summed up in Psalm 62:11–12, 'Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God; and that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love'. For us, Acts 1:8 is ever our golden guide.

Questions for consideration are:

- (1) What knowledge in action do we have so that we are empowered by, and witness to, Christ's ascension and session at the right hand of the Father?

- (2) What implications are there for us in Christ's ascension and coronation in the proclamation of the gospel? In practice how is this gospel of God's grace one with the gospel of the Kingdom? What is our testimony?

NB: In addition to the Addendum it is suggested that we all look at pages 144–166 of *Christ and the Triune Glory* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2001), which is chapter 7 of that book and is headed 'The Work of the Ascension and Session'. I also suggest that over the next few months we read the books, *The Nature of Faith* by Gerhard Ebeling (Collins, The Fontana Library, UK, 1966), *The Life, Walk and Triumph of Faith* by William Romaine, (James Clarke, Cambridge & London, 1970), *The Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification* by Walter Marshall (Oliphants Ltd, London & Edinburgh, 1954), and *The Assurance of Faith* by Randall C. Zachman (Fortress Pr., Minneapolis, 1993).

ADDENDUM FOR APRIL MINISTRY STUDY

THE MATTER OF EXERCISING FAITH IN THE FACE OF INDWELLING SIN AND THE FLESH

The following is an extract from William Romaine's book *The Life, Walk and Triumph of Faith*, the details of which we have mentioned in the shared Study for today. Those who read it for the first time will be intrigued by the style of writing and may even find it difficult to follow. Romaine was born in 1714 and died in 1795. His life is an interesting one and his biography by Peter Toon is included in the 1970 edition of this book. His doctrine is what we would call evangelical and Puritan. He had a remarkable life and ministry and *The Life, Walk and Triumph of Faith* is invaluable for one's library. It has been a great inspiration for me over many years, since 1962 in fact. I trust you will give much time to pondering the truth in this extract. It out-spans much that is written today called 'evangelical'. This long passage is taken from pages 280–3.

'The true spiritual mortification, which does not consist in sin not being in thee, nor in its being put upon the cross daily, nor yet in its being kept upon it. There must be something more to establish perfect peace in thy conscience, and that is the testimony of God concerning the body of sin. He has provided for thy perfect deliverance from it in Christ; everything needful for this purpose was finished by Him upon the cross. He was thy surety; He suffered for thee. Thy sins were crucified with Him, and nailed to His cross. They were put to death when He died, for He was thy covenant-head, and thou, as a member of His body, wast legally represented by Him, and art indeed dead to sin by His dying to sin once. The law has now no more right to condemn thee, a believer, than it has to condemn Him. Justice is bound to deal with thee as it has with thy risen and ascended Saviour. If thou dost not thus see thy complete mortification in Him, sin will reign in thee. No sin can be crucified either in heart or life, unless it be first pardoned in conscience, because there will be want of faith to receive the strength of Jesus, by whom alone it can be crucified. If it be not mortified in its guilt, it cannot be subdued in its power. If the believer does not see his perfect deadness to sin in Jesus, he will open a wide door to unbelief, and if he be not persuaded of his completeness in Christ, he gives room for the attacks of self-righteous and legal tempers. If Christ be not all in all, self must still be looked upon as something great, and there will be food left for the pride of self-importance and self-sufficiency. So that he cannot grow into the death of Christ in sensible experience, farther than he believes himself to be dead to sin in Christ. The more clearly and steadfastly he believes this, as the apostle did—'I am crucified with Christ,' in proportion will he cleave to Christ, and receive from Him greater power to crucify sin. This believing view of his absolute mortification in Christ is the true gospel method of mortifying sin in our own persons.

Examine then, O my soul, the mistakes which thou hast made, and the temptations which thou art under, concerning this leading truth in thy walk. Pray to thy God for His wisdom to guide thee. Without it thou wilt be afraid where no fear is. Thou wilt be inclined to think this doctrine rather encouraging to sin, because it seems, to carnal reason, to take off thy mind from watchfulness against it, and from praying for victory over it. But be assured this is a great error. If thou art not complete in Christ, thou never canst be complete. Seek for the death of sin where thou wilt, it is not to be found but in His death. Try to conquer it upon any other principle than faith in His death, the very attempt is sinful, and proves thee to be under the law. Unless thou art one with Him in His death, there can be no pardon of sin, and

consequently no victory over it. O fear not then to lay the whole weight of thy salvation upon Jesus. Depend on Him, as dying to sin for thee, and look at thyself dead to sin in Him—as completely dead to it as He is. Read the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Study the infinite, the everlasting sufficiency of His death for thine absolute freedom from guilt and condemnation. Trust without wavering, be not afraid to view the everlasting perfection of thy deliverance in Jesus, and this will weaken the tyranny, and will crucify the power of sin. This will, and nothing else can. Read the sixth of the Romans, and pray for the Spirit of revelation to open it to thee. There thou wilt discover the true way to mortify sin. It is by believing that thou art planted together with Christ in His death; from thence only thy pardon flows, from thence thy daily victory is received, and from thence thy eternal victory will be perfected. Fight on; soon thou shalt be what Christ now is. The member shall be perfectly like the Head. O glorious prospect! Thou shalt be with Him, and like Him—spotless and fair as Jesus, righteous and holy, happy in body and soul. Thou shalt see Him as He is, and awaking after His likeness, thou shalt be satisfied with it. Take up thy cross for the joy here set before thee. Bear it in faith. It will be light and easy to thy pardoned conscience, yea, the carrying of it in patience will bring forth many peaceable fruits of righteousness; among the rest there is one which, in the sight of God, is of great price, and which is daily improved by the inward cross, namely,

Humility, which consists in the right knowledge of ourselves, not only of what we have been, but also of what we now are. The best and holiest man upon the earth has a corrupt, fallen nature: he has flesh still which is always lusting against the spirit. While he is alive to God he feels it. He is sensible of the inward conflict. Dead men feel nothing. A dead corpse has no sense of the worms that are eating it up. He that has these lusts in him, and warring against his soul, and yet does not feel them, cannot be spiritually alive. A natural man has no sense of them, because they are in him as worms in a dead body: just so it is with the perfectionist. But so soon, and so long, as he lives to God, he will perceive them. If he be in happy communion with God, indwelling sin is present to interrupt the enjoyment. If he exercise any grace, this besetting sin tries to weaken its actings. If he be set about any duty, it will hinder him from doing it so perfectly as God requires, and as he could wish. The abiding sense of these truths will keep down pride. The believer will see nothing of his own to trust in; no faith, or hope, or love, no faithfulness to grace, no holy obedience: all is stained and polluted. He is forced to cry out of his best duties—Unclean—unclean! In this school the disciple learns to walk humbly with his God. The more he knows of himself, the more humble he becomes. And as he grows in this heavenly grace, the more he is acquainted with the mercy of God in Jesus. This learning by divine teaching keeps the believer meek and lowly in his own eyes. Nothing softens and melts the soul into holy tenderness like the sense of God's mercy. A man who feels the plague of his own heart is never truly humbled until he be pardoned. But when he is justified from all things in Christ, in Him a partaker of all spiritual blessings in earth and heaven, when he sees all his salvation of grace, of free sovereign grace, flowing from the absolute favour of electing love, and bestowed upon him, as unworthy an object as ever did or can partake of it, then he becomes truly broken-hearted. These truths, taught of God, bring every high thought into subjection to Christ Jesus. The soul bows before Him, lies low at His feet, and prostrates itself before the throne of His grace, and desires to be kept willing to take all its blessings out of His hands, and to use them to His glory. This is gospel humility, the true abasement of spirit, with which a man, sensible that he is saved by mere mercy, loathes himself. And while the experience of indwelling sin humbles him down to the dust, it produces, through God's grace, the happiest effect; for it keeps him, in his strong tower and sanctuary, in which alone he is safe.'

STUDY 4: THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—4

THE NATURE AND ACTION OF FAITH—1

What, Then Is Faith?

Our last month's Addendum was titled, 'The Matter of Exercising Faith in the Face of Indwelling Sin and the Flesh' and it was an abstract from William Romaine's book on *The Life, Walk and Triumph of Faith*.¹ I believe it is a very valuable treatment of faith as a Christian believer needs to know it, especially as he is attacked by accusations of failure from Satan, and so much so that he may doubt his very being as a Christian (Rev. 12:10b; cf. Eph. 6:16). It would be difficult to gather together the various definitions Romaine gives to faith throughout the book. If we were to do so then it would surely be quite profitable. The valuable thing about the use of the word 'faith' is that it is never not personal. We trust and believe in God, in the Persons of the Trinity, in the word spoken to us, in the acts the Persons have done,² the promises they have made and fulfilled as also the promises given but yet to be fulfilled, the fulfilment which is surely coming.³ The writer of Hebrews sets the principle: (i) by having faith the men of old received divine approval, 'For by it the men of old received divine approval' (Heb. 11:2); (ii) without faith it is impossible to please God 'And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists [is] and that he rewards those who seek him' (Heb. 11:6); and (iii) all hearing of the word of God must 'meet with faith' in the hearer, 'Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them; but the

¹ I have already suggested the reading of Randall Zachman's *The Assurance of Faith* (Fortress Pr., Minneapolis, 1993), William Romaine's *The Life, Walk and Triumph of Faith* (James Clarke & Co., Cambridge, 1970), Walter Marshall's *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (Oliphants Ltd, London, 1954), and Gerhard Ebeling's *The Nature of Faith* (Collins, London, 1967). These works are mainly relating to the faith of a believer in the face of a Christian's failures and sins.

² It is unusual to speak of the persons of the Trinity singly doing works or acts since no act is done by one Member of the Trinity in which the other Members do not participate, e.g. the word and works of creation, of providence, of salvation—and so on. Even so, there are works which the Father does as also works which the Son does and those done by the Holy Spirit. At the same time all works are Trinitarian.

³ I would suggest reading my Study 4 in the *Living Faith Studies*, vol. 1, titled 'The Nature and Meaning of Faith', NCPI, Blackwood, 1981. You will receive this as the Addendum for this May study. It may not cover every aspect of faith but it has the advantage of being a kind of sketch or history of faith commencing with the need for faith from the beginning as set out in Hebrews chapter 11. Verse 3 is for us today a set principle, 'By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear'. Thus faith begins with belief in God as Creator and such grounds as creation give the knowledge of God to Man so that he may accept God as He is, worship Him, and in worship give both thanks and praise to Him (cf. Rom. 1:21–23). God being Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Isa. 44:6; Rev. 1:8; 21:6) means that faith in its firm belief reaches from the creation to the new creation. When Man refuses to believe then he comes under the wrath of God. Note also that Christ is given the same designation of 'the first and the last' in Revelation 1:17; 2:8; cf. Hebrews 13:8. The Holy Spirit is the eternal Spirit (cf. Heb. 9:14).

message which they heard did not benefit them, because it did not *meet with faith* in the hearers' (Heb. 4:1–2; cf. James 1:5–8).

To put it plainly there cannot be faith in Man until God reveals Himself to Man and this He has ever been doing by talking to Man, at creation, at the Fall and immediately following, to humanity through various media such as theophanies, through special angels, through His acts, through His law, through prophecy, through His Son, through the Holy Spirit, and through His people of faith in all ages. He speaks into Man's conscience where Man is sensitive to Him, that is, where he has a *good* conscience and not an evil one, not a seared one. What then God reveals to Man, Man is to hear, understand and believe. Since God is Spirit and so there is none of the five senses by which Man can apprehend Him, God communicates by His word, and Man hears this by the aid of the Holy Spirit, and in that sense he *sees* truth as he *hears* it (John 1:17–18; 14:8–9). He is also said to *drink* of God (e.g. Jer. 2:13; John 6:35; 7:37) and also to *drink* and *eat* of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1–5). Faith is believing God for what He has done, is doing and will do. We know nothing of anything until God reveals what it is. Faith can only be in the context of trusting God. It is also in the context of obeying God. God purposes to communicate with Man, but Man deliberately refuses to hear His word and so repels the possibility of knowing God.

Without covering the entire history of faith here, we will look at what we may call 'saving faith' and later move on to the faith which persists in the face of failure and sin in the Christian believer.

Saving Faith

What immediately comes to mind is the classic passage on saving grace and faith in Ephesians 2:1–10:

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We will not pause here to speak much about saving grace but simply observe that it is grace which brings Man to believe and be saved (cf. Rom. 3:22–25; 5:15–21; Eph. 1:7–8; 2:7ff.; cf. Titus 2:11–14; 3:1–7). Jesus sometimes said, 'Go in peace, your faith has saved you' (Luke 7:50; 18:42; cf. Matt: 9:2). So also he spoke about coming not to condemn men but to save them (John 3:16–21; cf. 9:35–41). The matter of saving faith is set forth simply in Acts 16:25–34 where the jailer cries out in fear, 'Men, what must I do to be saved?' and is given the answer, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved, you and your household'. In John's Gospel the verb 'to believe' is used and not the verb 'to have faith'—as such. Believing immediately brings eternal life to the believer. The cry of Acts 2:37 of those who heard the gospel from Peter's lips was one from hearts which had been cut by it, 'Men, what shall we do?' and the

answer was, Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'. Acts 4:4 states, 'But many of those who heard the word believed', and believing is henceforth the key to being saved, especially if we understand that repentance and believing are commanded (cf. Acts 3:19; 20:21) and are set out as saving gifts given through the Holy Spirit. Acts 20:21–25 speaks of the gospel as 'the gospel of the grace of God' and, in essence, 'the gospel of the kingdom'.

Whilst the way of being saved is by believing the gospel, that is, confessing that Jesus is Lord with the mouth, and believing in the heart that God has raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9; cf. 4:25), yet it is the *dynamic result of such believing* which assures us we have come into the realm of life which is eternal, and that we have come out of death into that life (John 5:24; cf. 10:10). We have been forgiven all sins, and have been washed, sanctified and justified in that order (1 Cor. 6:11). Romans 5:12–21 speaks abundantly of the grace which effects such results. Paul, John and Peter speak powerfully of the powerful and lasting effects of such a salvation. It would not be helpful then to speak of saving faith unless we do so keeping in mind that there is a true sense in which we go on being saved as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:18, 'For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us *who are being saved* it is the power of God'. This needs to be linked with Philippians 2:12–13, 'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure', for here one's salvation is being *worked out*, not just being *worked at*, or *worked for*. It has happened but is life's action in the present with a view to the future (cf. Phil. 3:10–14; Heb. 11:1).

'The Just Shall Live by Faith'

This is one interpretation of Habbakuk 2:4, especially as linked with the justification of believers. The RSV translation is, 'Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith'.⁴ An RSV footnote to 'not upright' reads, 'is puffed up'. That is, is proud, and not humble. The verse can mean, 'he who is just by faith shall live', that is, in the light of Romans 3:21–26 that God has a justifying righteousness exercised in Christ's death by putting him forth as a propitiation for sins, which saves persons who believe.

Paul in Philippians 3:8–10 speaks in the spirit of Habbakuk 2:4:

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but *that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith*; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

Here Paul is pointing to his faith in Christ, so that we may observe that it is not just faith in *the doctrine* of justification which, as such, justifies Paul, but initial faith in Christ and then continuing faith in Christ who is the Justifier just as he is the Great

⁴ There has been much debate over Habakkuk 2:4 and its context. Doubtless its place in the prophecy means that the Babylonians are always arrogant people. Their pride will be their undoing. By contrast God's people—the Israelites—will be saved because their faith is in God. God desired Israel to have faith in Him, no matter what their failure has been in the past. In Romans 1:16 – 3:26 Paul develops this principle of God's righteousness which justifies the sinner, whether Jew or Gentile.

High Priest after the order of Melchizedek and as such is reigning at the right hand of God as the Son-King, the Messiah of, over and for, all nations, so that he intercedes for all, and rules over all nations (Ps. 2; 110; 89; Matt. 28:18) and is Judge of those nations (Dan. 7:14, 27; 2 Cor. 5:10; John 5:25-29; Acts 10:42; 17:31): yes, he is this and then much, much more. Indeed Paul lives wholly by faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave himself up for him (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 2:12). One, then, is not only justified by faith but also lives the justified life by faith in Christ the Justifier and Intercessor, as we have said.

What, then, is this life lived by faith? In the broadest sense what does it mean, 'The just shall live by faith'?

We have emphasised before the four key words to the early church, that is, *kerugma* (proclamation), *didache* (teaching), *koinonia* (the life of ecclesial fellowship), and *paraclesis* (exhortation). These four are in juxtaposition one to another. We need now to note that the four words are inter-dependent when in operation. It is certain that if there is a weak *kerugma* then there will be an inadequate *didache*, and *koinonia* will be lacking in dynamic, so that *paraclesis* will be more moralistic than helpful exhortation. That is my practical observation and I have never seen this thought studied and enlarged when in fact it is most valuable, especially when considering the action of faith in the justified person and the ecclesia-community.

It has often been noted that the apostolic presuppositions—as noted in the Epistles—are the truth we are yet seeking to discover. One example of this would be the matter of co-crucifixion of the believer with Christ which Paul takes as a presupposition in Galatians 2:20 (cf. Rom. 6:1-10; Col. 3:1-4) but which we seek to establish in our understanding. We even seek to establish it as a fact by our efforts to be sure of it, and some by attempting to crucify themselves daily as it would appear to be commanded in 1 Corinthians 15:31, 'I protest, brethren, by my pride in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!' What, too, of Galatians 5:24, 'And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires'? Surely the meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:31 is 'for the sake of the gospel I stand in jeopardy of death every day. Would I do that if it were for nothing, if there were no forgiveness for sins?' What other meaning could there be? Luther certainly talked about a daily dying to sin and in one sense that contained a truth, but since all tenses to do with the cross speak of the past in perfect and aorist forms, then no one can make a self-death. At the most one may say, 'Every day I regard myself as one who has already died by reason of co-crucifixion, and I seek to live in the light of that truth in all my actions'. Self-crucifixion is in practice impossible. Christ had to be crucified by others. It was imperative and indispensable that Christ should take us up into his cross as 2 Corinthians 5:14 puts it, 'For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died'. See also Romans 6:1-10.

There is an even deeper problem which we must now discuss and this is one which confronts Christians continually. It is that they appear to fail so much, if not most of the time. Their biblical knowledge is that Christ died for their sins, that they have been justified before the law and that legally they are not law-breakers. They have been told on Christ's authority that they have been freed from sin (John 8:36), and on Paul's saying that they who have died with Christ have been justified from sin (Rom. 6:7) and so now have broken sin's power (Rom. 6:1-14). Even so, matters do not always seem to be this way. In fact they rarely are, for when they have crucified the flesh—by faith—as in Galatians 5:24, they find the flesh very much alive and

powerful in their lives as seems to be the case in Colossians 3:5–17 (cf. Eph. 4:17–32). Indeed Paul talks about the power of the flesh in Galatians 5:1–26, and especially in verses 13–21.

There is a scenario which goes something like this—a Christian who may even be a revered teacher or an effective evangelist, a steady person and well versed in the Scriptures, finds himself or herself in a state of misery because he dare not admit to another Christian that he feels unworthy of being well regarded in the eyes of others. Why? Because his conscience seems to tell him that he is a pretender. He knows full well that thoughts which come to his mind, pressures which come from the flesh, actions which he does and sins he commits all tell him he is far from being perfect, and indeed the claims he sometimes makes in regard to his life seem hollow. He may sincerely believe what Scripture tells him regarding himself and indeed preach the text of the Bible with strong conviction, but even at the point of preaching he may be asking himself questions such as, 'Who am I to be teaching these things?', 'I am so much a failure that it is not seemly for me even to be opening my mouth. Why is this so? I teach others in all sincerity but despair of ever being truly qualified by reason of a proper Christian life and witness.' It appears to be a bit like Paul's 'For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do' (Rom. 7:19).

What is our answer to this scenario? Do we just comfort the person by saying, 'My dear friend, you have a sensitive conscience because you are a believer, but it is in danger of becoming a morbid conscience. Sure, the things you deplore are to be deplored, but we are not yet in glory. Once there, these things which depress you will be absent. You will never see them again. Just do the best you can now, but remember we are human, and as such we do fail in the battle from time to time. We are not perfect, but nevertheless will be perfected in the end-time. I encourage you by the thought of Paul, "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Much of the same thought is in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, "He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" '.

At first sight this does seem to be a helpful answer, but examined carefully it can be shown to be unhelpful and even misleading. I believe the answer should be along other lines, and that we ought to present the following:

'You are a sinner saved by grace through faith. You have been told that in Christ's cross, along with his resurrection, all provisions have been made for you living a holy and righteous life in Christ Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit who brings the word of Christ to you both for believing it and practicing it. That is what Paul is speaking about in Philippians 1:6 and 1 Thessalonians 5:24. If you add up a number of things which have come to you because by faith you believed God for His salvation, then: (i) by grace you have been saved by faith and this not of yourself it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8f.); (ii) you have been forgiven all sins (Eph. 1:7–8; Rom. 4:25); (iii) you have been justified by grace when you believed (Rom. 3:24–26; cf. 4:5, 25; Phil. 3:9); (iv) you have been washed, sanctified and justified (1 Cor. 6:11); (v) you have been freed from the power of sin (Rom. 6:1–14); (vi) you have been cleansed from the pollution of sin (Heb. 1:3; 9:14; 10:22; 1 Cor. 6:11); (vii) you have been born again (1 Peter 1:3, 22–23; cf. 1 John 2:29; 3:9); (viii) you are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:16); (ix) you have been sanctified (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 6:11; Acts 20:32; 26:18); (x) you have been made a child and a son of God (John 1:12–13; Gal. 4:4–7); (xi) you are being conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom. 8:21, 30; 1 John 3:1–3; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18); and (xii) you have been given the gift of eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24; 1 Tim. 1:16).

This is what you are before God, and you must keep this in mind—'before God'. All of this is believed so that by faith all we have said above—and more—is what and how you are. All the time we walk by faith and not by sight. You must always see—by faith, and never by human sight. Your faith can never make anything to be. The whole range of the things in the above paragraph are so by God's work. You have faith that all we have said is so—before God.

In this paper we have set the grounds and basis for our deeper enquiry into *why it is* that a Christian is led into despair, bewilderment that he is in such a state, and so questioning all that he now sees himself to be or not to be! Has he lost the key to it all, that is, 'The just shall live by faith' is not limited to being justified, but having been justified we now live as forgiven, righteous and holy people in spite of our innate moral and spiritual weakness?

Questions for consideration are:

- (a) Are there such persons who, being saved by faith, do despair of themselves, feeling unworthy to be counted as 'good' Christians?
- (b) What is it that leads us to such conclusions and what answers do we find that help us to be 'the just' who live by faith?
- (c) Do you think it would be a good thing to bare our lives to one another, confessing our failures—and so on—so that there would be no hypocrisy?

ADDENDUM TO MONTHLY MINISTRY STUDY MAY 2005

A SHORT STORY OF THE LIFE OF FAITH

INTRODUCTION

It is not difficult to give a definition of faith, or to explain what it is. For example, Hebrews 11:1 says it is 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'. Yet this description—with others—is difficult to understand unless we trace the history and action of faith. Then the above—and other—definitions can be understood. Nevertheless, we can state here that faith is seeing God as He is and what He is doing, and so trusting and obeying Him. Faith is comprised of elements of knowing the true facts, seeing these as related to God, and so trusting Him. God with the facts being dynamic actually grips us, so that we then obey Him, as He is, and in accordance with these facts and acts. Yet, as we have indicated, this description will not be wholly intelligible until we have seen the history of faith.

THE HISTORY OF FAITH

By the history of faith we do not simply mean an account of men and acts of faith, but the history which is God and His action, especially as He has involved men of faith—His people—in those actions. A glance at Hebrews 11:4–39 will explain this point. However, more particularly, we mean that the history of faith is that course of action of God which issues out of His nature, being and plan, which can be recognised by faith, but from which men of faith cannot stand apart, since faith is both a personal union with the living God, and obedience to His will.

For this reason we develop our history, although not exhaustively, on the following lines. Whilst we give the general trend of the history, our actual treatment of it will need to have many appended notes, so that this study will not keep strictly to the headings given here.

HISTORY OF FAITH

Creation: The Faith of Man

The Fall: Loss of Faith

Abel: First in Faith; Others

Abraham: The Father of the Faithful

Israel: The Fruit of Faith:

(a) The Covenant People

(b) The Covenant Breaker

(c) Prophets: Men of Faith Promising:

(i) Judgments

(ii) Fulfilment of the Plan

Jesus: Originator, Completer of Faith:

(a) Jesus and Israel.

(b) Jesus and the Gentiles

(c) Jesus and the Completion of the Plan

(d) The Faithful People of God

We now proceed to examine the history of faith.

Creation: The Faith of Man

Man, made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26ff.; 1 Cor. 11:7), must have had complete affinity with God, as a man may. Hence he knew God. The gift of creation was sufficient to see God as 'a faithful Creator' (1 Pet. 4:19) and a faithful God (2 Cor. 1:18), but such trust was not tested until Satan's seduction of Eve. Man chose not to trust God; for example, the statement that he would die if he disobeyed (Gen. 2:17), that is, he refused to fear Him in reverence and so to obey Him. Hence what trust he had turned to slavish fear when he sinned (Gen. 3:19ff.). Two Corinthians 5:15 infers that Man lives to himself, that is, he trusts only himself. It also infers that he died to God.

The Fall: Loss of Faith

Romans 1:19ff. accords closely with Genesis 3:1–6. When Man rejects the nature of God as He is, he also rejects his own nature and the nature of the universe. He is reduced to idols—the objects of his self-projected trust—but fears life and death. He lives in the context of fate since his world is not God's true world. God, to him, is not a faithful Creator nor a faithful God, but is his Enemy, that is, Man is in conflict with creation because of his own rebellion. He refuses to obey, essentially, the authorities which operate as part of the God-created universe. Hence he sees God as alien, hostile, uncaring. He sees no great destiny for himself. In other words, he is out of faith! Man cannot be sure of himself, since he is not a faithful and obedient existent in the harmonious creation of God. He does not know what God is about: hence he cannot discern the true nature of God. He is dead to God. He does not wish to retain God in his memory. To know God is to accede to the demand for godly obedience.

Abel: The First in Faith; Others

Abel is the first in the list of the faithful (Heb. 11:4). He believed God. Hence, as a person, he was justified. He knew the nature of God and offered his gifts (sacrifices) accordingly. The promise of Genesis 3:15 was known. He knew God would triumph over evil, redeem Man, and vindicate Himself. *Enoch* also pleased God, being a man of faith. Either because he believed he would be taken up, or because he saw this was God's purpose, Enoch was translated. *Noah's* faith expressed itself in obedience (as doubtless that of Abel and Enoch) by building an ark. This was because he knew and believed God about the judgment of the Flood. We can begin to adduce the principle that these men knew what God was about, as also they knew Him as He is.

Abraham: The Father of the Faithful

It is not to the above men of faith, or others of their time, that God gives the covenant of grace. This covenant is to prove universal, and the people of God are to spring from the faith of this man, Abraham. His faith is described well in Romans 4:16–22. The essence of this passage is: Abraham is the father of many nations because he believed God in what He promised, as also in His ability to fulfil what He promised. This belief did not spring out of the natural things of creation, since Abraham was over 110 years in age, and his wife Sarah was both barren and old. He believed in the God '*who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that do not exist*', and in his belief, 'No distrust made him waver *concerning the promise of*

God . . . fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. All this in contrast to Romans 1:19–32 where the God-rejecters are called 'foolish, faithless', amongst other similar things. Galatians 3:8–9 clarifies the principle we have been seeing: 'And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, *preached the gospel beforehand* to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are *men of faith* are blessed with Abraham who had faith.'

Abraham, as a man of faith, knew who God is, what He was (is) about, and was one with Him in His plan, and obedient to it. This is seen clearly in Genesis 26:1–5, where Isaac is told that God will fulfil His covenantal oath promised to Abraham, and that Isaac will share in it. He says He has given it to Abraham, 'because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws'. We see from this that *there is no such thing as faith without obedience*. Hence Jesus denies the claim of certain Jews to be the (true) children of Abraham, for they do not do as Abraham did (John 8:37–44).

Israel: The Fruit of Faith

Whatever Jacob's faults were, he nevertheless highly prized the family birthright and the covenantal blessing. Hence his own blessing of his children (given in Gen. 49) is deeply significant and mostly because it indicates he knew what God was about, particularly in the case of Judah: 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until *he comes to whom it belongs, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples*' (cf. Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

To trace the history of faith in Israel, in all its aspects, would be an enormous task. We are referred to detailed study for this. However, some points emerge clearly: (i) God's revelation to Moses as the I AM WHO I AM was a revelation of the nature of God; (ii) this revelation is expressed in the *acts of God* in delivering His people from Egypt, leading them through the wilderness and bringing them into the promised land; and (iii) the prophets continually revealed the will of God by the Word of God. It then remains to see what is the response of the people.

The Covenant People

Israel, in receiving the covenant of law (in fact, grace), promised to obey: 'Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances: and the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do . . . All that the LORD has spoken we will do and we will be obedient"' (Exod. 24:1–8). Deuteronomy is mainly concerned with telling the people what the Lord requires, and its latter chapters tell of judgments which will come upon the people if they break the covenant. Failure to live at covenant level is covered by the offering of the various sacrifices, but flagrant rebellion (e.g. idolatry) will bring judgments, and their being taken to alien lands and peoples. Israel, from time to time, reverted to idolatry, and so came under judgment.

The Covenant Breaker

The writers of the Old Testament understood the history of faith and disobedience as follows:

- (a) Creation to Abraham
- (b) *Israel and the Covenant*

(c) *Israel Breaks the Covenant and Is Chastised*

It reveals the fact that from Solomon's reign onwards Israel dabbled in idolatry, rebellion and apostasy. Yet they could not understand the judgments of God. This was often when the Book of the Law was lost or hidden. To have faith in God is to obey His laws (cf. Isa. 5:8–30) and to disobey is not to have faith, and to receive judgment—'Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as the dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for *they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel*'. Judgment is also seen in Isaiah 8:6–8. Israel should fear the Lord, and not depart from Him: 'the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; *let him be your fear, and let him be your dread*'. This disobedience is the same as *faithlessness*: 'If you *will not believe, surely you shall not be established*' (Isa. 7:9). Where there is true faith (covenantal) then there is no panic: 'He who believes will not be in haste' (cf. Isa. 28:16).

(d) There is a day of restoration to come for Israel

(cf. Jer. 31:31–34, Ezek. 36:24–28; ch. 37; Joel 2; etc.).

The Prophets: Men of Faith

The prophets, by the word of the Lord, continually speak to Israel to bring that faith which is at the same time trust and obedience (cf. Rom. 10:17). Whenever there is covenant-breaking they speak against it, and tell the judgments of God, both present, coming, and eschatological. When, however, the people are under judgment, they also speak in encouragement of the mercy of God and His plan of love for them. In both cases their task is difficult. In the first case they must awaken repentance and obedient faith: in the second they must awaken the faith of trust and anticipation, i.e. anticipation of the fulfilment of God's promises. They always have their eyes on God, His nature, being and plan. What others do not see, they see, *by faith* (cf. 1 Pet. 1:8–9).

Jesus: Originator and Completer of Faith

God's actions and plan are all related to His promises (cf. Rom. 4:1–16; Gal. 3:16–19). His promises are His oath (Gen. 26:3–5; Heb. 6:13–17). What God has promised in history He contains and completes in Jesus Christ. Hence when Jesus comes he comes to fulfil God's plan, spoken of beforehand by the prophets (cf. 1 Pet. 1:8–12; 2 Pet. 1:21), and in fact there can be no real faith in God unless these are fulfilled. Faith 'comes to life' in what Jesus is and does, since it is in fact God the Father doing the same (e.g. John 14:6–10). The following shows us the truth of this:

(a) *Romans 15:8–9*: 'For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness to *confirm the promises given to the patriarchs*, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy'.

(b) *Matthew 15:24*: 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'.

(c) *Acts 3:26*: 'God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning everyone of you from your wickedness'.

(d) *2 Corinthians 1:20*: 'For *all the promises of God find their Yes in him*. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God'.

That he is the fulfilment of the promises and plan of God is seen in such passages as Luke 24:26–27, 44, and 1 Corinthians 1:30. This is why Israel must believe in him.

Jesus and Israel

When Jesus comes, he comes in accordance with the prophecies and is preceded by the greatest of prophets—John the Baptist. Hence faith is informed. He comes demanding belief in himself and the Gospel, as the fulfilment of the plan of God, for he is its continued action. Mark 1:15 reiterates that the Kingdom is at hand. Men must repent, because they have strayed from God. They must believe the Gospel. In John's Gospel, Jesus is saying continually that men must believe *in him, in fact as they do in God* (cf. John 14:1f.). He and the Father are one in action (John 5:17ff.; cf. 8:28; 14:6; 10:30). Nevertheless Israel decisively rejects him, both at the crucifixion and later, representatively, as the Sanhedrin (cf. Acts 5:33, 40; cf. 22:18; 7:54ff.). Romans 9 – 11 speaks of this rejection showing Israel is in a state of *unbelief*. It predicts the ultimate faith and obedience to which all Israel will come.

Jesus and the Gentiles

Romans 15:8–9 indicates that Jesus came for a dual purpose—to confirm and fulfil the promises made to the fathers, showing these things to the circumcised (Jews), and also to bring mercy to the Gentiles. Paul quotes 2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49; 117:1; Deuteronomy 32:43; and Isaiah 11:10, to prove that the plan of God had the Gentiles in mind, and because the word of God says so then the Gentiles can have faith and come to the obedience of faith (cf. Acts 15:14–18). Jesus had indicated in Acts 1:8 (cf. Ps. 2:7ff.) that the Gospel would be preached to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles, obviously with a view to Genesis 49:10 being fulfilled. Hence *in regard to the Jews* who have believed in God there must now be *faith in Jesus Christ* (Acts 20:21). In regard to the Gentiles they must *first come to believe in God* (Acts 26:17–20; 14:15; 17:24–30) and *then to believe in Jesus Christ* (Acts 10:42–43; 16:31; cf. 20:21). It is clear that all must believe in both the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son. *Christ is the new object of faith*.

Jesus and the Completion of the Plan

The plan which God has for history was known generally, from the beginning. Note that some of its aspects were hidden (cf. Eph. 3:9; Rom. 11:25–26; cf. Rev. 10:7; 19:10; Acts 3:21), since Abel was the first prophet. God's action in history, through the judgment of the Flood, the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants was all dynamic and significant, and explained by the Word and the prophets. Faith could be 'the assurance of things hoped for, the reality of things unseen'.

Christ, of course, as Son and the Word, was the Creator–Mediator, as is seen from John 1:1–3, Colossians 1:15–20, Hebrews 1:3, and 1 Corinthians 8:6. It is without doubt that he has always worked with the Father (John 5:17; cf. 17:5, 24) and the triune work of the Godhead in the Old Testament shows us that the Son was equally operating with the Father (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4; Isa. 6:1–10; John 12:37–41; 8:56; etc.). His incarnation was to fulfil the Abrahamic Covenant (Luke 1:68ff.), which demanded that he should be the mediator of a better covenant (Heb. 8:6ff.; 9:15; etc.), the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–34 (cf. Ezek. 36:24ff.; etc.), and this he was as we see from Matthew 26:28 (cf. Acts 2:38; 3:19; etc.). Hence for example in the Letter to the Hebrews, Jews must see the old (Mosaic) covenant outmoded and superseded by the New Covenant. In Galatians they must not revert to law, seeing the grace of the

promises given to Abraham are fulfilled in this New Covenant, which is really the fulfilling of the Abrahamic Covenant. We mean that the Abrahamic and New Covenants are essentially the same thing.

Hence we see that Christ, as the Son and the Word, has ever been in history. Now, as Jesus, he is Lord (see Acts 2:36; 10:36; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rom. 10:9; etc.). He is the one who outworks the plan of God to the end (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 11:15; Phil. 2:9–11). Thus he initiates faith for the believer in the Gospel, since he comes to enact, make real and make permanent, the good news of redemption and sonship. He, however, does not cease at this point. Having effected redemption he now has to work out the plan of God until the end of time (cf. Acts 1:8; Ps. 2:8; etc.). Because he is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, he is the originator of faith, the one who, as its object, continually sustains (encourages) faith, and faith relates to hope which is concerned with the end things, that consummation of the plan. That is why we must always look to Jesus—Lord over all.

The Faithful People of God

Whilst the Gospel is for personal redemption, yet it also has in view the 'obedience of the peoples', the gathering together of the nations to himself, the Messiah (Gen. 49:10). Hence the command of Acts 1:8 (cf. Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:44ff.; John 20:19ff., Mark 16:16ff.), which relates to Psalm 2. Revelation 21:3, and 21:22 – 22:2 shows the people of God before Him, and He in their midst (cf. Rev. 7:9–10). The plan of God is completed! See also Ephesians 1:4–12.

This people of God is the purpose of the Abrahamic Covenant, and the plan of God (cf. Eph. 2:8 – 3:11). Also the people of God, the church, work with the Son who is its Lord and Head, to fulfil the plan and purpose of God. However, they cannot do this without faith, as we will see, that is, unless they are men of faith. Faith and obedience are so closely linked as to be the one. Hence we have the statements of Paul in Romans 1:5–6, 'through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the *obedience of faith* for the sake of his name among all the nations'; Romans 15:18, 'For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to *win obedience from the Gentiles* [i.e. the nations]; and Romans 16:25–26, 'Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, *according to the revelation of the mystery* . . . now disclosed and through the prophetic writings *is made known to all nations*, according to the command of the eternal God, *to bring about the obedience of faith*'.

Thus the faithful people of God are co-workers with God (1 Cor. 3:9) to bring the nations to Him, so that the nations will have faith, and be one with the people of God (cf. Acts. 6:7, 'a great many of the priests *were obedient to the faith*').

FAITH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The use of the noun, adjective and verb to indicate faith in the New Testament is so profuse as to be beyond this study. Briefly, faith is the act by which one believes. One can believe the fact, the truth, or on the Name, or the Person of God or Christ. To believe *on or in* generally denotes personal faith, or faith-union with that one. Faith is sometimes the act by which one believes, and sometimes what one believes, or the instrument by which one acts or does something.

Paul uses the noun almost without exception, whilst John uses the verb. Sometimes the verb is used in the aorist form, meaning a completed action. One has believed, and

that is that; it is committal which is completed. Sometimes the present continuous tense is used in which case believing is a permanent state, one which continues. We would do well to study these various emphases, and see the contexts in which they are employed. If, however, we divorce our understanding of faith from its history we will be preoccupied with its elements and immediate contexts and miss the general view of faith, that is, that it is believing the acts of God, believing in God and His Son, and receiving the benefits of faith, namely the fruits of the works of God, and personal understanding of God, as also the relationship of union with Him.

The Objects of Faith

In John 14:1 the sense is 'You believe in God—equally believe in me'. Hence:

(a) *The objects are God the Father, and also the Son.* What Jesus said is to be the object of faith; 'you do not believe me' of John 8:45 means they do not believe what he says. 'But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me', means that they neither believe what he says, nor him.

(b) *The object of faith is the truth.* In John 5:30–47 Jesus speaks of the witness to himself by John who bore witness to the truth. Jesus bore witness to the same, but primarily by his works. Then the Father bears witness to Jesus, as also do the Scriptures, yet the Jews believe none of these things. As against this faithlessness the Samaritans believe on Jesus 'because of his [own] word' (John 4:41).

(c) *The object of faith is the work done.* The truth spoken or done, and the works done, are not to be separated from the person saying or doing them, yet because of them one believes in the person. Hence in John 5:24, 'he who hears *my word* and believes him *who sent me*, has eternal life'. Likewise, 'if you . . . believe in your heart that God *raised him from the dead*' (Rom. 10:9). In John 2 the disciples witness the miracle of the water being changed to wine so that *they saw his glory and believed on him*. In John 2:22 the disciples see what Jesus has done in cleansing the temple, but only after the resurrection do they truly believe '*the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken*'. In John 2:23 there is a kind of belief in *seeing the miracles that Jesus has done*, and again in John 8:30–31 there is a kind of belief *from the very utterance of his words*. More strongly in Acts 9:36–42, the people believe on the Lord when *Tabitha is raised* by Peter. In Acts 16, the *earthquake at Philippi* and *the manner of Paul and Silas* move the jailer to believe in Christ, whom he must have heard *preached previously*. In Acts 10 the Gentiles believe Peter when he calls for faith because *the prophets have said* that they will receive remission of sins if they believe. Such instances could be multiplied. Most powerfully John says that the signs which he writes concerning Christ, are written that the readers might believe. At the same time he suggests that not only do we believe when we see (cf. John 2:11; 4:48; 20:29), but rather we see when we believe (John 11:40; 20:24ff.). We conclude then that the *preaching, teaching, the truth, the acts* are believed, but that in fact it is *the one from whom they come* who is really believed, that is, the Father or the Son, or both. This is why Jesus can ask for belief in himself, or belief for the very works' sake (John 14:11).

Coming to Faith

In Ephesians 2:8–10 and Philippians 1:29, faith is described as a gift. It 'is given to us to believe'. This accords with John 6:44–65, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him', yet at the same time Jesus says that the Father teaches those who come, so that 'Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me'. This is very close to Romans 10:17, which tells us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. Romans 10:14 asks how one can believe without hearing, whilst 1 Corinthians 1:21 says it is by the foolishness of the proclamation (which one hears) that men are saved. Faith then comes when one accepts what one hears. What one hears is not acceptable to the attitude described in the fall of Man, and the rejection of God (Gen. 3:1–6; Rom.1:19ff.). Therefore when one accepts, one in fact 'obeys' the Gospel. This is clear from Romans 10:14–21. Verse 16 says, 'they have not all obeyed the gospel', so that believing is really coming to obedience. That the Gospel is a command is clear from 2 Thessalonians 1:8, where unbelievers are said to not obey the Gospel, and so will be punished. Likewise John 16:7–11 speaks of the world being convicted of *sin* because it does not *believe* in Christ. Those who *hear* what the Father teaches come to the Son (John 6:45). In Galatians 3:1–3 the Gospel is known by 'hearing with faith'. This accords with the 'obedience of faith' of Romans 1:5, 15:18, 16:26, and Acts 6:7. *Why* one *reacts* to the Gospel, and another *responds* is the mystery of election, but cannot be explained psychologically. It is debated as to whether: (i) Man has the power to respond; (ii) whether the power to respond is given to some or not to others; or (iii) whether response is evoked by the *innate power* of the *word*, or by the *Spirit*, or *both*. This is a mystery. What is clear from Romans 10:14 (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2) is that the word has to be uttered and heard before faith is born and exercised. When it is seen that repentance, faith and forgiveness are gifts, then it could be said that such gifts are pointless unless exercised.

The Content of (the) Faith

It is *what* one believes which matters. What one believes must be so for faith to have value, benefits and fruit. One believes in God, one believes He is the faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:19), Redeemer (Isa. 63:16), the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:1–2; etc.), and one in believing in Him believes in His Son (John 14:1). One believes the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14), that is, to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). Confession of the mouth ('Jesus is Lord') is dependent upon belief of the heart ('believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead') as Romans 10:9 indicates. The other elements of the faith—that God is Father, Jesus Christ is Lord—relate to repentance and conversion (Acts 2:38; 13:38; etc.). The above may be stated in many ways, and has many concomitants, for example, 'Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' (1 John 4:2). The 'most holy faith' (Jude 20) is constituted of the 'apostles' teaching' of Acts 2:42, or the deposit of faith.

The Fruits of Faith

Salvation as a whole is the full fruit of faith. It comprises the forgiveness of sins, justification, sanctification, new creation, regeneration and adoption (sonship) (cf. John 5:24; 3:16–18, 36; 1 John 4:9–10; Acts 2:38f.; 3:19f.; 5:31; 22:16; 26:18–20; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13–14; Titus 3:3–7; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 2:16; 3:26; John 1:12–13; Rom. 5:1; etc.).

It also means deliverance from the powers of sin, Satan, the world powers, the world-system, death, the flesh, the wrath of God, and conscience (Rom. 6:1–14; Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15; Gal. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:55–56; Gal. 6:14; 5:24; 1 Thess. 1:8–10). By faith Man is delivered from idols (1 Thess. 1:8–10).

The fruit of faith is union with Christ. Christ dwells in the heart by our faith (Eph. 3:17) as also we abide in him (John 15:1ff.). We also receive the Spirit by faith (Gal. 3:13–14; but especially 3:5; Eph. 1:13; Acts 11:17). The 'obeying' of Acts 5:32 is really believing the Gospel. One cannot be obedient before receiving the Spirit.

Living by Faith

Habakkuk 2:4 says, 'the righteous shall live by faith'. This has been translated as, 'He who by faith is justified shall live', which doubtless is the thrust of Romans 1:16–17. It is, nevertheless, a principle for all Christian experience. The various aspects of this are detailed below. However, it is difficult to classify the wide range of these aspects. *Walking by faith* in Hebrews 12:1 is spoken of as *running*. In 2 Corinthians 5:7 we are told that we walk by faith, and not by sight. Since walking is simply living, Galatians 2:20 says that 'the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me'. He means that he sees himself constantly as justified, the one for whom Christ died. This is similar to Philippians 3:9 where he is found having 'the righteousness of . . . Christ'. To have such faith is to reckon oneself dead to sin, and so free from its power (Rom. 6:10–14). One must always live in that faith. One has constantly, then, the fruits of justification, which are in fact the basis of true sanctification (Rom. 6:7, 'He who has died is [justified] from sin', that is, sin's penalty having been taken, one is free *for* obedience).

In Habakkuk 2:4 there is the contrast of the proud man (his soul is lifted up in him) who is akin to Satan in pride. The man of faith must 'take heed lest he fall'. He does not have an undue estimate of himself, but a high view of what God has done.

Weak Faith and Strong Faith: Conscience

The strength of conscience, as also its wellbeing, is related to the strength of faith. This is seen in Romans 14:1 – 15:6 (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1–13). One Timothy 1:5 speaks of 'love that issues from a *pure heart* and a *good conscience* and *sincere faith*'; 1:19 speaks of 'holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith'. Romans 14 shows that the man with weak faith is the equivalent (as in 1 Cor. 8) of the man with a weak conscience. Obviously weak faith and a weak conscience are the result of not having seen the totality of the saving work of Christ. One still 'eats . . . judgment' when the conscience is not clear, if one eats against one's conscience. The truly forgiven, liberated conscience arises from strong faith in the total work of Christ. Love demands that the one with strong faith exercise such faith before God, and not before his brother who can be thus stumbled by his uninhibited actions.

The Obedience of Faith

When one obeys the Gospel, one has not earned salvation by works. Nevertheless when one believes, it leads to doing the works of God (Eph. 2:8–10; cf. John 9:4). James says that faith without works is dead. One's justification brings forth fruit as also one's repentance (cf. Acts 26:20). Obedience, however, is not giving satisfaction

to God for one's own sins, but doing the will of the Lord; nothing more and nothing less (Eph. 5:17; Rom. 12:2; etc.). This will of God, as we saw above ('The Faithful People of God'), is the outworking of God's plan by Christ and his church—the people of God—until history is consummated. The *labour of love* is always alongside *the work of faith* (1 Thess. 1:3). Faith works through love (Gal. 5:6), that is, its works spring from love, for one has faith in the love of God. All true obedience springs from love (John 14:15; 1 John 4:19), but faith grasps the fruits of the Cross, by which love is engendered.

Faith and the Enemy

We will shortly see that there is no life for a believer without faith, and since faith is essential to life, it is attacked by the evil one. Faith is union with God, and so the attack will be to seduce one from trust in God, so that one will trust oneself before God. To do this the work of God in His love must be attacked. If one can be moved from this simple trust—the belief in truth, and this steady obedience to the will—then one is undone. Hence Satan's attack of accusations directed at the Christian. A study of Ephesians 6:10ff.; Revelation 12:10f.; 1 Peter 5:8–9; James 4:7; 1 John 2:13; 4:4; and 5:4–5, shows that by faith we overcome. We overcome the fiery darts of the wicked one by using the shield of faith; we resist Satan steadfast in the faith, knowing that he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. It is by faith we overcome, and our faith is that Jesus is the Son of God.

Faith and the Gifts

Gifts are received by faith, such as forgiveness, the Spirit, and eternal life. In Romans 12:3ff., Paul speaks of having a proper estimate of oneself. Each has been given a measure of faith, which accords with the gift (*charisma*) given to him. He ought then not to exercise this gift beyond that measure of faith. An example of this is in verse 6 where prophecy should not be 'strained' but according to the measure of faith given. One Corinthians 4:7 says that all we have is gifts, and there is no room for boasting. Pride is the opposite of faith, which is primarily trust in God and not in oneself.

FAITH: THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN

We now come to the final but significant things in regard to faith. The writer of Hebrews tackles the matter of faith from a slightly different perspective to that of Paul and John. To Paul, faith is the believing of and in the things which God has done to redeem, justify and sanctify Man, and by which he is made a son of God. To John, faith is the act of believing which is at the one and same time the act of knowing. To know is to believe and vice versa. For the writer of the Hebrews letter, faith is seeing what is unseen. There are parallels in John and Paul. In John we saw them in 4:48, 11:40, and 20:29. One sees and believes, but it is better to believe and see. Likewise Paul says we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7) for he has just been talking about looking at 'the things which are unseen' for they are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18), and he says in similar vein to Hebrews 12:1–3 that we look at the glory of the Lord, as in 'a mirror dimly' (2 Cor. 3:18; cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). However, for the writer of Hebrews

the life of faith is 'as seeing him who is invisible'. Paul has a similar thought in Romans 1:20 where he says that the invisible things of God are made plainly known by the visible things.

Sometimes the Hebrews' concept is made to appear as Neo-Platonic, that is, that the writer thinks this world is not the true one, and the true one is an invisible one. It is doubtful whether the New Testament writers thought of the entire universe—terrestrial and celestial—as the one creation. So, certainly, does the writer of Hebrews, but he means that the world as we see it with the eyes of 'faithless reason' is not that of 'things as they essentially are'.

All the time the true man of faith sees what God is about. He knows the plan. He knows what God is doing. He knows what he should be doing in all this, and so he lives accordingly. If the Kingdom is invisible, it is nonetheless real, for the things which men did in regard to that kingdom ('which cannot be moved') were very much of this earth, and in this world, *yet they pertained to that Kingdom*. Abel offers actual gifts, Noah builds a ship, Abraham thinks in terms of this world being peopled by his descendants and, as we shall see, others gave themselves to very real efforts in this world's sphere. *It is what happens here that is significant*. If there is a New Covenant, then it is here amongst God's people in this mundane sphere, whatever its eternal significance may be. It is here that the effect of the heavenly sanctuary reaches and obtains, and whilst one is here one can draw near to the throne of grace.

How, then, do we understand faith? The answer is: Faith has ever seen God as He is. Faith has ever known the nature of God, His being, His plan, and His acts and operations, and faith has ever been in the plan and work of God. Fallen Man cannot understand these things. He has devised his own false theology, cosmology, and anthropology. He is not simply in error. He is in pride; hence what he understands in the moral and spiritual realm is actually false. Indeed it is opposed to the truth. Until he renounces unbelief he cannot come into faith, for faith is the opposite of unbelief.

Faithless Reasoning: Reasoning Faith

The 'real' world of the natural man, the man who uses faithless reason, is different from the world of the man who uses reasoning faith. They are two different systems. The so-called real world of the positivist or the rationalist or the natural man can be felt and seen and handled, and by empirical deduction can be understood. That which is in the world of the man of faith is by contrast insubstantial and stupid. It is in fact seemingly non-existent, the religious concoction of a fanciful imagination. Yet to the man of faith it is other. It is the real world. The natural man reads his universe and is dreadfully deluded. Satan has blinded his eyes (2 Cor. 4:4), and in fact Man is constantly deceived by the devil. His pride causes him to have his clever and intellectual views and rationalisations. The true man of faith sees an action which, commencing at creation, is wholly purposive—God-initiated, God-controlled, and God-operated. The end is purposed from the beginning, and the entire action is one concerted whole.

Hence faith is able to participate in the action. In a moment we will read what faith does, but first a practical caution. Paul says he has fought the battle or fight of faith. It is one we fight continually. We have warnings about being vigilant and sober, about withstanding the attacks of the evil world-system. We must be constantly renewed in the spirit of our minds, lest we fall back into worldly ways of understanding, and worldly ways of operation. How many know that when we revert—for some reason—to reasoning about the things of faith by the modes of faithless reason,

the world of faith disappears like a chimera, a mental mirage, and we are left with nothing but the unattractive and deadly derelict of faithless reasoning. Hence we must go on fighting in faith; go on being renewed in our minds; go on 'enduring, as seeing him who is invisible', and knowing that what we see has been made out of the things which do not appear, and that God *is*, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

So let us read now from Hebrews 11:4–40, and see the incredible dynamic of faith to accomplish those elements of the plan of God which He has put into the hands of His Son, His Spirit, and His church, the people of God, the true men and women of faith! With this let us realise that the invisible world is true, and substantial, and know that it is not another world. It is the true meaning of this world, the one to which God is always present, and for which and in which He is always purposefully active. Then we will understand that faith is the reality of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen.

This will bring us to our conclusion that faith is that living belief in the redeeming acts of the faithful Creator–Father–Redeemer which not only brings us back to Him, but gives us full sonship, the outcome of which is that we participate in His plan and work for His total creation. Faith then is first believing God and His acts; then it is receiving the fruit of these. It leads to union with God, and then knowledge of and participation in His plan. Whilst such faith is constantly assailed, and whilst it remains faith as we live in this world, hope—which is faith with a future look—is ours. Faith, in its totality, will one day be realised in complete sight—for we shall see him, 'face to face', and we shall know him, even as we ourselves are known.

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STUDY 5: THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—5

THE NATURE AND ACTION OF FAITH—2

Seeing Fully What Is Saving Faith

In our last Study we set forth the fact that 'the just shall live by faith', claiming that not only are we counted just or justified by our faith, but also every part of our lives is to be lived in faith. We have seen that saving faith is full belief in God as the Redeemer of sinful Man. The person who sees this is completely assured that everything necessary for Man to be redeemed has been carried out so that nothing is lacking in the work of salvation.

In his discussion of the wisdom of God in 1 Corinthians 1:17–25 this is the claim of Paul, especially as he states it in verse 30, 'He [God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption'. A paraphrase might go something like this, 'God is the source of your life—your new life—in Christ Jesus. The whole of a believer's being is now in the realm of Christ Jesus,¹ who is God's instrument in bringing us into the wisdom of God, i.e. the wisdom of Christ crucified as God's plan for Man's redemption. That wisdom is shown, and known, by God's achieving righteousness and sanctification and redemption. So, being in Christ Jesus, a person of faith does not need to be dismayed by anything: his salvation is unbreakable.² So, too, justification (here, "righteousness") and sanctification. The three elements of this wisdom—righteousness, sanctification, redemption—are actions of God.' Paul says, 'therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord"' (1 Cor. 1:31), i.e. the whole work is of God, not of us.

Saving faith is believing this. That is, God has effected this redemption and it stands infrangible, no matter what things of a contrary nature may face the believer, e.g. the continuing presence of concupiscence, the hostile actions of 'the flesh' or 'the old Adam' or Satan. When John says, 'My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous' (1 John 2:1), he is not expecting that believers will sin as a matter of course, but that *if* they do then Christ as their Saviour will stand as their Advocate. His salvation will not be destroyed.

¹ Some commentators understand 'in Christ Jesus' virtually as 'through' or 'by means of' so that '*in* Christ Jesus' is an instrumental dative and not a locative dative, not the intimate place where the believer dwells as in, say, the first chapter of Ephesians. Compare Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 3:17 for Christ dwelling in us.

² This unbreakable nature of salvation is not to be presumed upon. Discussion of it is not on the crass level of the debate, 'Once saved always saved' and 'once saved one can be lost'. This is a foolish debate, the wrong assertions are being made. See Philippians 2:12–13; Hebrews 6:1ff.

In our Addendum for April we saw that William Romaine showed us the biblical power of the cross and resurrection to defeat sin in our present living. He also asserted that there is no way of defeating sin, the flesh and the old Adam apart from the work of the cross and resurrection. At the same time he insists that we are 'in Christ', that we must 'cleave to Christ', that we remember we were crucified with him, buried with him and rose with him. In that Addendum he warned us against trying to know this defeat of sin by our own striving, then:

If the believer does not see his perfect deadness to sin in Jesus, he will open a wide door to unbelief, and if he be not persuaded of his completeness in Christ, he gives room for the attacks of self-righteous and legal tempers. If Christ be not all in all, self must still be looked upon as something great, and there will be food left for the pride of self-importance and self-sufficiency.³

So then Christians live as men and women of faith no matter whatever the continuing conflict is with sin, the flesh, the old Adam, original sin, Satan and his world of evil may be. That conflict is certainly always present. Does believing Man then revert to his former existence when he fails and sins? Is he still a sinner in the way he was? Does he not, now, have a pure heart? Does his baptism mean little because his co-crucifixion—crucifixion with Christ—as also his death and burial and ascension with Christ (Rom. 6:1–10; Eph. 2:4–7; Col. 3:1f.) mean anything in the moral and ethical sphere of life? Does justification not bring about a new set of ethical dynamics? Can we not genuinely talk about sanctification being of the full story of the new man in Christ? Indeed, what do we mean by the terms 'new man' and 'new creation' in regards to the man of faith?

All of these questions are practical and need to have an answer in order to make sense of God's salvation wrought for Man in and through Christ Jesus.

The Proper State of the New Man in Christ

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 ought to be read along with kindred passages:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

This passage makes it quite clear: the readers had been many kinds of foolish and even evil persons and they would never in that state have been able to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Now they are not as they were: they are now washed, sanctified and justified, and this is God's wisdom for Man via Christ crucified. In other words, they do not follow the pattern of their former lives. Do they not sin at all? Yes, as we shall shortly see, they do sin. They were called to be saints (1 Cor.1:2) and this they are (Phil. 1:1). Since they are washed they are pure in heart (1 Cor. 6:11) and pure in conscience (Heb. 9:14) so that the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers, 'let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water' (Heb. 10:22). They and

³ Part of the Addendum to the April study, quoted from William Romaine, *The Life, Walk and Triumph of Faith*, pp. 280–3.

their garments have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:13–15; cf. 1:5b) Jesus said that without a pure heart it is impossible to see God (Matt. 5:8). The writer of Hebrews enjoins his readers, 'Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord' (Heb. 12:14), a matter which we shall visit later.

As for the sins the saints once committed and have done since coming into faith, are they not all forgiven? We saw in Ephesians 1:7 that we have redemption through Christ Jesus' blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound. Covenantally God will remember their sins no more (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12; 10:17). The penalty of sin has been borne by Christ, so that its pollution is cleansed, its power broken, and the believer is now not a sinner under compulsion. In terms of Isaiah 1:18, 'Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool'. Of course the washed, forgiven, justified and sanctified saints live in the presence of all evil that is in this world of time.

The Argument Concerning the Saint and the Matter of Perfection

In 1 John 3:1–10 the Apostle makes it clear that 'he who commits sin is of the devil', and that 'no one born of God commits sin; for God's seed [*sperma*] abides in him, and he cannot sin because he has been born of God'. First John 3:1–10 is a greatly debated section with widely differing interpretations. One is that the seed (*sperma*) who abides in God is Christ. That would fit with Christ's sinlessness but then it would be a sort of non sequiter in regard to the believer. If it is that Christ is the seed abiding in the believer then that is a helpful thought, i.e. Christ will pervade the believer and aid him not to sin. It does seem, however, that the traditional idea goes closer to the mark, i.e. the person here discussed is one who is born again and now the nature or seed of God is powerful in him, so that the believer no longer has the thrust to sin which was once his, and now desires not to sin but to do the will of God.

This passage and others have given rise to the heresy of sinless perfection which speaks of the change in a sinful person to a person who cannot sin. We need not go into that view at this point. As we have seen, John says in 2:1 'if anyone does sin', indicating that this can happen, as against 3:9, 'he cannot sin', meaning, I believe, 'this one is not in the business of sinning because he is not linked with the devil but is born again, i.e. into a new way of life.' That seems to me to be the emphasis of 5:18, 'We know that any one born of God does not sin, but he who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him'. It is often suggested that the believer does not *practice* sin but from time to time can sin. It is better to say that he who is born of God is totally against sin and sinning because he has been born anew. Sin is abhorrent to him. It is not simply that he sins less, though this should be the case. *If* the person sins then he confesses that sin and is not carried along in it by its very guilt which would draw him deeper into sinning.

As we have seen, the writers of the Epistles in the New Testament lived in the apostolic practice and ethos of proclamation (*kerugma*), teaching (*didache*), fellowship (*koinonia*), and exhortation (*paraclesis*). So many times their Jewish converts had lived either in a self-righteous salvation in a works manner, or in the futility of their minds which was the Gentile way of life (Eph. 4:17ff.; Rom. 1:18–32). They needed to be trained in the new life of grace in Christ—the truth as it is in Jesus (Titus 2:11–14; cf. Eph. 4:17ff.).

Out of such *didache* the converts learned to discern right and wrong, for their minds had been long caught in the deceit of sin. For example, to some Greeks it would come as a surprise to be told that homosexuality is sinful (1 Cor. 6:9; Rom. 1:26–27) for many thought it was normal practice. We reiterate what has been said a number of times, namely, that if the proclamation (*kerugma*) of the gospel has been weak then so will be consequent teaching, fellowship and exhortation.

The Power of the New Life through Grace

One matter of great importance is the abundancy of life which comes to a person in conversion. Great power for the new life comes through a person being forgiven all sins. This means much the same as justification from all sins before the law (Rom. 3:19–26). Guilt is wholly destroyed in conversion. The alienation of a person from God is changed to full relationship with Him via reconciliation. The fruits of the Spirit working redemption in the life of a person are the fruits seen in Galatians 5:22, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Life lived in this way is powerful for ethical and moral fruitfulness. Calvin has showed us that, much as justification frees us from law-condemnation, it is adoption as sons which brings us into the realm of God as our Father. Created by God to be sons (Luke 3:38; Acts 17:28), and having forfeited sonship, we are adopted as sons, as Galatians 4:1–7 and Romans 8:14–17 clearly show, in the Son, that is, we are in his Sonship and the Spirit aids us to cry, 'Abba! Father!'⁴ This grace of God's Fatherhood and our sonship of Him in the Son is a great motivation to obedience. The law is the Father's law but we are no longer servants but sons. What a statement! We are holy sons of the Holy Father and the liberty of the glory of the children of God is our *telos*! What a barrier against sinning! What a powerful force for holiness of life, for living with the pure heart! We have faith that we are the sons of God and this girds us about when the fiery arrows of accusation from that old serpent the devil are aimed at us. Deftly we quench them by that shield of faith. We love our Father in Christ as much as Christ loves and obeys Him. In him we obey as much as he obeys.

The Sin Which So Easily Besets Us

Hebrews 12:1–2 needs to be read and heeded. It is speaking of the power of faith for the believers down through history:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

The author is speaking of God's people of faith from Abel to the *telos* of present history. It is all to do with faith in God, in His word, His acts, His promises. Having declared in the first eleven chapters God's great plan for Christ as High Priest and us

⁴ For a rich commentary by Calvin on God's Fatherhood and our sonship see *The Assurance of Faith* by Randall Zachman, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 91–243. For Luther's remarkable discourse on God's Fatherhood and our sonship see his *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, first published 1533 (James Clarke & Co, London, 1953, pp. 353–77). For Karl Barth's treatment of the same Fatherhood–Sonship see his remarkable *The Christian Life* (Eerdmans, 1981, section 76, 'The Children and their Father', pp. 49–109).

as the delivered ones, he exhorts those whom he has called 'dull of hearing'. 'Dull of hearing' must mean 'dull of faith', for faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17). Here he speaks of sin that 'easily besets us', i.e. 'clings so closely'. Here, because of time and space, we must resist the impulse to go through texts of the New Testament in order to show that Christians are being taught to resist the temptations to sin. That they sin at certain times cannot be denied. That they *have* to sin at these times must be denied. That they are sinners as ever they were must also be denied. That they are beset around every day by the world, the flesh and the devil, cannot be denied. That in the battle they fail from time to time is a fact but it is not par for the course! All we have said in this paper in the denial of this claim is self-apparent. The centrality of the cross-resurrection, shown in Romans 4:25, 'who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification', is what we have been speaking about. That we are the sons of God and not slaves tells us that our faith works through love (Gal. 5:6) and shows us that obedience is our life, not sin.

The author of Hebrews is telling us we can lay aside every weight including intrusive sin. Sin, when unmasked, is puny. We are not in a desperate battle with massive odds against us, even if we include concupiscence as a pervasive enemy. We can put off all elements which are hindrances to running the race. In this respect the statements of Paul in Colossians chapter 3 are most relevant, i.e. 'put off', 'put on' and 'put to death'. Let us consider some statements—'if God be for us who [can be] against us?' 'Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them [the false prophets and spirits of error]; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.' 'Sin will not have dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.' 'No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.' 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me.' 'Resist the devil and he will flee from you.' 'And they have conquered him [that old serpent the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.' 'If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you shall live.' 'The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Of course we must see these wonderful statements in their several contexts.

Conclusion: Kept unto Salvation

There is another series of quotes which is quite helpful with the proviso that we also see them in their local contexts. The first is that of 1 Peter 1:3–5:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Here we see that our inheritance is kept in heaven, and we 'by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time'. We will have cause, shortly, to come back to this verse.

The next quote is 1 Corinthians 1:7b–9,

... so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul is saying that 'we will be guiltless to the end'. This reminds us, then, of Philippians 1:6, 'And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ'. In fact this verse may be the key verse of all, supported as it is by 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24:

May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Jesus had something similar to say in John 10, the essence of which was:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall 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 the Father's hand. I and the Father are one (vv. 27–30).

What we see is that the faith by which we conquer in the face of all that confronts us is always the faith which works through love and is never not in hope. God's promises of our perfection are certainly operating in this present time but they are with a view to the end-time, the *telos*-fulfilment. We must accept all promises as true, but their fulfillment is not wholly in the now-time but in the completion-time. This will be of great benefit in the now-time. It is not that the fulfilment will be another and separate work completed in a moment but is that which is going on now and will be completed 'in that day'. '... faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen', is a wonderful word to us. So then, 'Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near' (Heb. 10:23–25).

Questions for the Asking and the Sharing:

1. Did members of the early church share all things of the proclamation, teaching, fellowship and exhortation, or did they simply listen, and add it all to their data bank to draw on it in times of necessity?
2. What are the things we reckon would be valuable if we shared as members of the one body and then as members one of another?
3. What are some of the good things which come out of perichoretic living where it is given rein?

ADDENDUM FOR JUNE STUDY, 2005

SPONTANEOUS OBEDIENCE

The substance of our study this month on faith, is that we believe what the Scriptures tell us is so. We read and we believe. We do not allow sight-reasoning to overcome what is known only by faith (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 10:17). So then, we walk by faith and not by sight. We have pondered the fact over our studies this year that faith and obedience are a natural pair. Also they are aided by love—'faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6; cf. 6:15; 1 Cor. 7:19). Our obedience rises from love, and is motivated and aided by it. Instead of berating ourselves for not being 'good' Christians we should revel in our spontaneous obedience, or that is the norm for Christian living. It springs from the new heart, the purified heart, the heart that responds to God's wonderful love. Flagellating ourselves for every failure we have brings us back under an 'evil conscience', i.e. we wait to hear conscience commend us for joyful obedience but since we berate ourselves for failure so does the conscience. It is a legal conscience acting along the lines it did in the days when it was not yet 'purged from dead works to serve the living God' (Heb. 9:14).

It seems some of the Puritans went back to 'law as law' even after their liberation from legalism. A good antidote to such thinking and acting can be found in Ernest Kevan's book *The Grace of Law*,¹ under the subtitle of 'Spontaneous Obedience' which is a subsection of the main chapter title 'PERFECT FREEDOM'. I think this will help us to overcome a severe misconception and misuse of the law of God. I have scanned it in as it is, leaving out the footnotes and not changing older English into modern spelling. To get the most out of the long quote of Kevan and his Puritans we need to contemplate the text thoroughly as we read it. We need to be patient in order to get into their minds.

THE GRACE OF LAW, QUOTE OF PP. 240–4

(ii) *Spontaneous obedience*

Love for God and His Law produces a new naturalness in obedience that amounts almost to spontaneity.

When a mans nature is changed, it must needs be active: for that which is naturall to a man, hee doth without unevennesse . . . he doth it constantly, where there are naturall principles of actions, the actions flow like water from a spring . . . a man doth it with facility and with desire; it is his meat and drink to doe the will of God.

¹ *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology*, Guardian Pr., Grand Rapids, 1976, pp. 240–4.

'You have the grace of sanctification to change your hearts and enable you to every good word and worke, so that you delight in the Law,' 'Faith makes the soule active . . . to run in the way of Gods Commandements . . . and . . . cannot run too fast.' Richard Sibbes says that a son does duties 'out of nature' and like 'water out of a spring': they are not forced, but they have 'a blessed freedom to all duties, an enlargement of heart to duties. God's people are a voluntary people.' He uses the same imagery in *Meditations*, 'Good duties come from unsound Christians as fire out of the flint; but they flow from the child of God, as water out of a spring.' The believer discovers that 'the Law of God is his Element'; Christian obedience becomes natural, and is like 'fruit brought forth.' It is 'cordial and hearty', being 'pleasant', 'delightful' and 'sweetest liberty.' 'Love makes Law easy', and 'is . . . the spring of sound obedience to Gods Law.' It constrains the child of God to a joyous and free keeping of the commandments in the 'sweet necessity of the new nature.'

The easinesse . . . and lightnesse of the Law of God is not in the proportion of it to our strength: but in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God together with the Communication of the Holy Spirit: which is with all those that love the Law of God.

Through grace the soul is 'prepared unto every good worke', and 'the duties both of piety towards God, and charity to our brethren', are 'performed with willing mindes and cheerfull hearts.' Knowledge with affection makes for understanding in spiritual duties, and the believer finds that they are no more 'a tiresome task', but rather that 'the yoke of Christ is easie to him, and his burthen light.'

You have such lively fixed intentions of God, that you can perceive that you do all, even common things, of purpose for his pleasure, will and glory; and that the love of God doth carry you about from duty to duty, and constrain you to it.

Obadiah Sedgwick has a wise comment on this spontaneity of the believer's obedience and relates it to the realities of the changes of mood which sometimes characterize the believer's experience.

Cheerfulness or uncheerfulness in the performance of duties, are not infallible symptoms either way. By Cheerfulness I mean the liberty or freedom of the spirits; and by uncheerfulness the sadness, heaviness or dullness of them . . . There is a difference twixt Affections in Duties, and Cheerfulness in Duties; as much difference as twixt life and lively-hood, twixt burning and flaming. A brand may be red hot, and burn to purpose, and yet not flame at all: so a man may bring living affections to his services, he may present them, and offer them out of the dearest love to God, and truest respect to his honour, who yet may not feel any such sparkling and flaming enlargements of his spirits in the times of disgrace of such services.

In no aspect of their religious life have the Puritans been more maligned or misunderstood than in this. It has become popular to describe Puritan sainthood as 'sombre and gloomy', and there is no doubt that heart-searching and devout desire for the mortification of sin imparted a seriousness and gravity to life, but these qualities are not to be identified with gloom. The Puritans found, as the Psalmist did, that in keeping of the commandments of God 'there is great reward.'

Such spontaneity makes it appear that believers are a law to themselves, and this is what many of the Puritans say but not in the Antinomian manner.

Hee that is got from under the Law is now a Law to himselfe, that is, he willingly submitteth himselfe to the rule and obedience of the Law: the way to escape the yoake and coercion of the Law is to become a free and cheerfull observer of the Law .

In these words Thomas Taylor carefully shows in what way the phrase 'Law to himselfe' is to be understood. Those who are led by the Spirit are not under the Law 'as if they needed thereby to be forced to obedience, but they are, as it were, a law unto themselves, willingly performing obedience to that which the law prescribeth.' They respond to the Law 'as if there were no law.'

In this new obedience, the Spirit so oyleth the wheelles of freewill as obedience, in its kinde, is as free, conaturall, delightfull, being sweetned with the love of God, as if there were not an awing Law, but a sweetly alluring and heart-drawing free love, so that the beleever obeyes with an Angell-like obedience; then the Spirit seemes to exhaust all the commanding awsonnesse of the Law, and supplyes the Lawes imperious power with the strength and power of love; if we suppose there had been no Law commanding Christ absolute obedience, yet if we suppose a meer directing light, without any compelling, to shew him what is good and agreeable to Gods commanding will, so did Christ obey perfectly from a principle of love, and so doth the justified beleever give obedience, though imperfect, yet sincere to what is Gods will.

In *Saints Treasury* Jeremiah Burroughs describes his sermon on John viii.36 as 'holding forth . . . The Naturall Mans bondage to the Law, and the Christians liberty by the Gospel', and in the course of the sermon he says that as God is now 'thy husband', the rigour of the Law is not the same.

Being delivered from the bondage of the law, this is now thy liberty, that thou art made a law to thyself. I meane thus: there is nothing now required of thee but it is written in thy own heart: God writes his law in the tables of stone: and all that is required of thee in obedience to it, is written in thy heart: so that thou doest not now so much yield obedience to the law; because of the condemning power of it, and punishment due unto it, as from a principle of love to it: For we must know, that we are not set free by Christ from obedience to the law, we are bound to obey the law still; but here is the difference, we are not servile to the law, we keep it freely: thou keepest the law now, by being a law to thyself, and having all that God requires of thee in his law written in thy heart, by the law of sanctity that he hath given thee.

G. F. Nuttall makes the observation that

Outwardly, the first Quakers were . . . at one with the earlier Puritans in observing, as Baxter admits, 'a Life of extream Austerity.' But inwardly, the spring is different . . . Inwardly . . . the early Quakers walked at liberty, as those for whom the law was no longer law, because they loved it.

In view of the evidence brought forward in the preceding paragraphs it might, perhaps, be not wrong to ask whether the inward spring really was so 'different' and to suggest that the spiritually-minded Puritan and the devout Quaker were much closer to each other than the contrast between the legalistic caricature of the Puritan and the wild extravagances of the Ranters might seem to suggest.

The Antinomians agreed with the Puritans on the power of love to sanctify the heart, and Henry Denne adequately represents them when he asks, 'What motive to obedience so strong as love? . . . What greater feare then that which proceedeth from love? . . . What greater aggravation of sinne, then to sin against love?'

A believer walketh according to the rule of the Law; yet it is not by vertue from the Law regulating him, but from another power within, renewing and disposing the heart thereunto. He is like the honest Traveller, who keepeth the high way freely of his own accord, and taketh pleasure in so doing.

When Tobias Crisp expounds John viii.36, he says, 'To be called a Libertine, is the glorioussest Title under Heaven; take a Libertine for one that is truly free by Christ.' This may not be the wisest of language, but if correctly understood it is not out of harmony with the Puritan view. John Eaton uses an extravagant expression when he writes, 'Christ living in me, I am now dead to the Law, that is He abolisheth the law to me', but a charitable construction of his words leaves no mistake about the idea of freedom which he wishes to convey.

STUDY SIX: THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—6

THE NATURE AND ACTION OF FAITH—3(A)

The Basis of Faith

As our series stretches out, and because we are seeking to understand the personal nature of our own faith, we need to remember what our goal was from the commencement of the Studies for this year 2005. It was to seek to understand the matter of power in the church, i.e. what is that power and how it is present—or not—in the church. We said that four words help us to understand the nature of faith and action in the early church, namely proclamation (*kerugma*), teaching (*didache*), fellowship (*koinonia*) and exhortation (*paraclesis*). We looked at power in the church (contra 2 Tim. 3:5) in the light of 'the power of the cross' (1 Cor. 1:17-2:5), in the power of his resurrection (Phil.3:10), and these we connected with 'the power of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 1:8) and noted that 'the power of the gospel' (Rom. 1:16-17) as 'the word of God' (Rom. 10:17; cf. Hebrews 4:12) was also by and with the Holy Spirit. We went on to see the power of evil and its attacks upon the saving work of God in the believing community and went on to see the power of faith to operate against all evil power in the light of the complete saving work of Christ. We noted in Acts 4:12-16 where Peter denied that the healing of the man lame from birth was not by 'our own power or piety' but that 'his (Christ's) name has made this man strong'. We took that to mean that faith in Christ does not mean 'faith in ourselves'. It does mean faith in God and what he has said and done.

We then went on to look at the nature of saving faith which is trust in the whole work of God in salvation. The word of God tells us what this is and hence we believe that it was and is so. We have faith in Christ and his total work and we operate in the belief that this is how it is. Without being triumphalist we believe we are more than conquerors through him who loved us, and we believe that he who has begun his good work in us will complete it right up until the day of Jesus Christ.

I believe it would be good for us to see that in all things God is ever working, that it is he and not we who takes the initiative in all things. He is the author and completer of our faith. Philippians 2:12-13 is a good example of what we mean by this,

'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.'

The Living God and His Living Powers

Quite often in Scripture God is called 'the living God'. This is not to say he *has* life—as do sentient creatures—but *is* life. He is life-giving: no other can bring to life or sustain life. He said, 'I kill and I make alive' (Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6). He is the only living God. To say he is the living God is to say he is Creator. That is to say, 'God gives life. The creation lives in its several parts only by God.' At the same time 'living' has come to mean 'is active', i.e. he does acts, deeds and works. By this he is the God of creation, ruling it all the time (Psa. 67; Zech. 14:9), communicating his will by means of created things, by prophets, his written law as also by theophanies and revelations brought to man by the Holy Spirit and by his Son, Jesus Christ. In past and present days he speaks by his people. For our purposes of knowing him these things are his word to us. We know all we need to know when he has spoken to us. Because of the fall man finds it virtually impossible to listen to God. God by his various acts and works utters his word. Man is responsible for hearing when God speaks to him. Man is reprehensible for not hearing (see Isaiah 6:6-13; Luke 8:4-21; Romans 10:12-21).

We who are in Christ, and so in the Father and thus understand all that is told us by the power of the Holy Spirit know certain things about God which he has told us. The faith of which we have been speaking has been given to us by the word spoken to us. We have already said God is Creator and Saviour so that what we are told concerning him are the objects of our faith and the basis for all our faith-action. We saw in our last Study that when God commands and we hear, then we obey because faith has come to us in the word of command. The power to obey is given us through the word of command. The more we know God, and his intention for his creation, the stronger in action will be our faith. All this pertains to his calling us to participate in his plan and intention. We need then to take a number of the things God is said to be in his actions towards us so that our life in him may be enhanced. These indicate God working in us to will and to work for his good pleasure

(i) God is the True River

Under this title we can talk of God being 'the fountain of living waters' (Jer. 2:11-13), 'the river of God' (Psa. 36:8-9; 46:4; 65:9-13). Psalm 42:1-3 speaks of God's people in Babylon panting as a hart does for flowing streams. If we were to read these passages here written for us then we would certainly resonate to the heart-cries of the people of God. They know him as the River, the River of life. Such resonance is natural to the people who know God, but we need to know certain principles when we call God 'the true River' or 'the Fountain of living waters'. In Isaiah 46:8-9 God says, 'Remember this and consider, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and *there is none like me.*' Again, in Isaiah 40:18 the prophet asks, 'To whom then will you liken God, or *what likeness compare with him?*' In Isaiah 40:25 God asks, 'To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.' On a somewhat different line the Psalmist sings and asks (89:5-6), 'Let the heavens praise thy wonders, O LORD, thy faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones! For who in the skies *can be compared to the LORD?* Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD?'

The point is that God is *not* like a river either in simile or metaphor form. He is *the* River. In the same way that he is not *like* a father, but is *the* Father. He is not one among many fathers, nor a river among many rivers. What is hard for us to grasp is that as the River of life God does not act in conformity with a created river. A created

river operates as God has made it to operate. He operates as he is God. As the River of life he acts in life according to his own principles. His phenomena—as the River—and his criteria for his own River do not have to conform to river phenomena as human beings know them. When the first couple told God, virtually, 'We'll do it our way!'—Adam saying, 'I'll do it my way!'—then they cut themselves off from knowing God's way. Now there is no way of knowing God's way.

It may be true that man being made in God's image and likeness, was, essentially, like God but God was never and is never like man. God can never be like anything he creates, and so Israel was commanded never to make a copy of anything on earth or in heaven and call it 'God' or 'Yahweh'. How can the uncreated God ever look like something which he has created? Our point is to seek to see how God as the River of life is the God who acts, i.e. the 'living God'. What we discover that man cannot live without drinking of God as the River of life. Man does not drink as after a physical manner but as after an inner or spiritual manner. If man does not drink of God then he dies. Man refused to go on drinking of God in Genesis 3:1-7 and in that moment he died—both husband and wife. Since then man has been dead (Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 1:19ff.). If we go back to the references given us about God being the River or the Fountain of living waters and if we remember that the river in Eden became four-branched and went out to water the whole earth, and if we keep in mind that God alone can kill and make alive, and that man must drink of him before he can have life, then we begin to see the significance of the River motif as it is in Scripture. Again, we see the River in Ezekiel 47 as it emerges south of the altar of the temple, and the River in Revelation 22 which flows from the throne of God. In Ezekiel the River flow deeply and widely and freshens and sweetens the Dead Sea—and so on—then we begin to see how different is the manner of created rivers and the River of life as the River of God. Just as the wind blows where it wills (John 3:7-8), so does the Wind of God blow where it will and none can direct it, manipulate it, or cause it to work for him, so, too, the River of God flows where and how it wills. Man is always subject to God as he is and as he works as 'the living God'.

A Note On God Being the Living God as Bread, Breath, Word, Wind—and So On.

I am about to say further to God being the River of life, that he is the Living Bread, i.e. the Bread of life, the Word of life, the Breath (or, Wind) of life and so on, but we know that his Son is also the River of life to which he, the Son, has called men to drink. Yet in John 7:37-39 he also says the rivers of living water flowing through us—the River of God—is the Holy Spirit. We thus enter into the nature of God as Trinity, and must accord that inner unity of the three Persons its rightful being, so that all participate as River of Life, Bread of God and so on. So in speaking of Christ as the Bread of life we will be seeing the Father as the one giving the bread of life—'my Father gives you the true bread from heaven'—as Christ being the Bread of life, and as the Holy Spirit giving the *life* of the Bread as its revelation of reality comes to man in the life of the *Ekklesia*.

(ii) Christ is the Bread of Life

Christ's special teaching on the bread he had come to be and to give, linked with his giving the bread which was his flesh for the life of the world is found in John primarily chapter six, and it follows the feeding of the 5,000. Those who received the loaves and the fishes would have taken him and made him king. Jesus later said to them, 'Do

not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal'. They asked 'What must we do to be doing the works of God?' and Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' They made nothing of this condition that Jesus set —of their having faith in him—and talked to them about the manna God had sent in the wilderness. By contrast, at this point of time, they must see that he is the bread God has sent down from heaven *which gives life to the world*. The River gives life; the Bread gives life. We cannot here go into the long dissertation Jesus gives in regard to this. It is all in this promise of 6:35, 'Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.' If they eat of Christ and drink of him they shall never hunger or thirst. They must drop the idea of literal eating of his body and drinking of his blood. The verse 63 tells it all, 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.' He is the bread of life in himself. Yet he is not the bread of life if he will not give his flesh for the life of the world.

Before we leave this rather limited treatment of 6:25-69 let us note that the words Jesus has spoken are 'spirit (Spirit?) and life'. The words of Jesus and the bread are one. That is why Peter says, 'Lord, to whom shall we go: You have the words of eternal life and we have believed, and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God'. Note, then, the bread comes to us and we must eat it. We cannot make it come, or go, and we must believe the very truth the words bring as 'spirit' and 'life'. We repeat, when the bread comes to us we must eat it for 'he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst' (John 6:35). Likewise in 7:37-39, 'If anyone thirst let him come to me and drink'. To thirst is to believe on Christ and to drink of him.

We reiterate: the bread the baker provides is bread other than that which God provides. God provides bread as Life-giving to the soul and spirit of man. Man may bake his own bread, but it is to food as a man-made cistern of water is to one who has rejected the River of God. A man will make provision to eat the bread which comes to him and will desire that it will keep him alive. Fair enough, but the man who goes to Christ and eats of him will find in the true bread those constituent elements which will transform him into a creature who will never die but become like the Son himself!

(iii) The Word of Life is the Word of God

We come now to look at this force—the word of God—which is ever coming to man to give him life or to bring him into the judgment of death. Like all the other life-forces we are discussing it as it is the power of God. By this word all things were created in true, pure form. It is the word which is truth—'Thy word is truth'. The entrance of his word brings light where there was darkness (Psa. 119:130). It is the word of law—the very law of God himself. It is the word by which the whole creation is upheld (Heb. 1:3). It is the prophetic word. It is the word of salvation. It is the word which consummates all history. It is many other things because *it is the word which brings life*. It is God himself speaking to us. When we have said all these wonderful things concerning the word, yet that word is known by being the command, and the commands, of God. It is for us to hear the word and believe it and obey it. It is by being commanded that we thus become engaged in the word. We know the word in the outworking of the command. We do not know it just by contemplating it, though that may be useful for Psalm 1 tells us that that the blessed man has his delight in

the law of the Lord and in it he meditates day night. Even so his meditation is not about the law as an object to be contemplated, but the revelation of God which comes to him in its commands and promises. The reading of Psalms 1, 19 and 119 tells us this is the case. Only he hears the word of God who does it (Luke 8:21). In the doing the power of faith is energised, i.e. comes to its goal.

We see in the temptation in Eden that man who was created by the word of God (Psa. 148:5-6; 33:9)—as indeed were all things so created—was to live by the word of God. When because of the cunning of the serpent man abandoned the pure word of God for the deceitful word of the serpent then terrible death came that to first couple and passed on to the entire human race. Man will do it his way! We know that when Satan sought to deceive Christ into turning hard stones into humanly-baked bread, he appealed to the strong, natural hunger that a man has after forty days of total fasting—'And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' The answer came in the form of the word of God, as Jesus said, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."' (Matt. 4:3,4, cf. Deut. 8:3). Jesus was saying—as indeed was Moses in his day—that man must live by the word of God. We might well say that only by the word of God did life come to Israel in the wilderness. 'Give us this day our daily bread,' is not a despairing cry of physically starving suppliants but the peaceful request from God's people who witness to God's care for his people as is indicated in the Sermon on the Mount in Jesus' words of Matthew 6:31-33). We conclude then that life comes to man through his obedience to the word. At the end of his time with Israel Moses taught them that the word of God is life to them.' (Deut. 8: 1-3; 30:11-16; 32:44-47).

'Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people, he and Joshua the son of Nun. And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, "Lay to heart all the words which I enjoin upon you this day, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no trifle for you, *but it is your life*, and thereby you shall live long in the land which you are going over the Jordan to possess.' (Deut. 32:44-47)

(iv) The Breath of God is the Life-giving Spirit

Genesis 2:7 tells us, 'then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.' This is one of the places where we see the breath of God (here *neshemah* but in other places *ruach* as a synonym for breeze, wind, cyclone and spirit as in the NT *pneuma* has a similar meanings). So see Psalm 104:29-30, 'When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed; when thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground.' In 2 Corinthians 3:6 the Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of life'. In creation this is so, and in his work of reviving that which is about to die.

In regard to life in the creation the Holy Spirit is the one who gives life as Psalm 104:29-30 indicates and is the one who sustains it. His various titles such as 'the Spirit of the Lord', 'the Spirit of God', 'the Spirit of life', 'the Spirit of Christ', 'the Spirit of the Father', all tell us much of his character and work. In John 7:37-39 he is spoken of as the River of God. He is the Spirit by which the word is spoken and witness made to Christ (Acts 1:8; 4:27-33). He is the one who empowers believers for witnessing, for the life of the church in love, fellowship, unity, prayer, worship, are the fruit of the Spirit, as he is also the eschatological Spirit.

CONCLUSION TO 'THE NATURE AND ACTION OF FAITH 3(b)'

In our next Monthly Ministry Study we will pursue more of the powers of God that work in us 'to will and to do of his good pleasure', such as the Tree of Life and the Blessings of God. In understanding them we feel moved to cry, 'If God be for us, then who can be against us?' God is always for us, hence he is in us. In this paper we have considered the powerful thrust of God's action for life. There is however the other side of the matter, namely what happens when we persist in unbelief. We will see that God who makes alive is the God who kills where man refuses to hear and obey. His intention is to destroy all that is evil and unclean. This action is all part of the action of the River, the Word, the Breath, the Bread.

Again we will need to see that these life-giving elements all have their power from the work of Christ—the work of the cross, of the burial, the resurrection, ascension and reigning at the Father's right hand. For example, Christ cannot be the bread of life unless he gives his flesh for the life of the world. This, too, will be of immense importance.

Questions and Suggestions for Consideration and Participation

1. In what ways and to what degrees do the elements we have discussed above figure in our understanding and practice of life?
2. What do we understand to be some of the meanings of the word 'life' as the actions of God affect us? What do we see is the relation of faith in that we are commanded to do certain things?
3. Would it be helpful to share our understanding of the way we should seek to comprehend the action of God towards us and in us against death and for life?

ADDENDUM TO THE JULY MONTHLY MINISTRY STUDY, 2005

THE CHURCH PREACHING THE WORD OF GOD

In our July Ministry Study we have dealt with the matter of 'life' (*zoe*) under four headings, 'God Is the True River', 'Christ Is the Bread of Life', 'The Word of Life Is the Word of God', and 'The Breath of God Is the Life-giving Spirit'. I thought it best to concentrate in this addendum on a view of the word of God, especially on its power in the early church. This quote is from *For Pastors and the People*¹ and mainly concerns the Book of Acts:

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE WORD

We know that *logos* means *word*, but then so does *rhema* (cf. Acts 2:14, 22), although *rhema* is generally taken as an utterance or saying, 'the things that have happened', even as Acts 10:37.

What is 'the word'? Probably we do not need to think that the word is something quite mysterious, meaning one thing in one place and another in another context. Paul speaks of 'the word of faith we preach' (Rom. 10:8 *RSV*). The *Jerusalem Bible* has 'the word, that is the faith we proclaim'. This must mean 'the Gospel, as commissioned by God and which was communicated through messengers by the Holy Spirit' (I Cor. 2:4-5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:10).

Paul tells Timothy, 'Preach the word [*logos*]' (II Tim. 4:2). This is the only word he has known (cf. II Tim. 3:14-17), i.e. the Scriptures, but then as they pertain to the Gospel, the word in which he was nurtured by Paul.

In Romans 10:17 we read of *rhemos Christou*, i.e. the 'word of Christ' (*NEB; JB; NIV*), or 'the preaching of Christ' (*RSV*), which must mean (i) the word Christ has given to be preached; (ii) the word which brought into being the Gospel by his incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and heavenly session (although Galatians 3:8 can say 'the scripture . . . preached the gospel *beforehand* to Abraham'); (iii) the word Christ preached by his messengers.

Peter speaks (Acts 10:36-38) of 'the word [*logos*] which he [God] sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word [*rhema*, i.e. 'the things which had taken place'] which was proclaimed throughout all Judea . . .' This all must mean (i) the Gospel, and (ii) the word of Christ, i.e. what he did then in Palestine and which now saves the hearer (Rom. 10:8-9), often called the *kerugma* (proclamation). Thus we conclude that 'the word' and 'the Gospel' are the same.

¹ *For Pastors and the People*, NCPI, 1989, pp. 54-61.

THE PREACHED WORD IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

This should be of great value to us. If we trace the preaching and effects of the word, then that should be of value to us in proclamation and pastoral use of the word.

2:14 *'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem . . . give ear to my words [ta rhemata]'*. Peter speaks of the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28.

2:22 *'Men of Israel hear these words [logous]'*. Peter speaks of the events of Christ, so that when they heard this word (2:37) they asked how they could escape judgement. Peter added other words (2:40). The word was effective for salvation.

4:4 *'many of those who heard the word believed.'* The word was effective.

4:29 *'grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness.'* This prayer of the church was answered: *'they spoke the word of God with all boldness'*.

6:2 *'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables . . . we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry [diakonia] of the word.'* The result of this was:

6:7 *'And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.'* Note the phrase *'the word of God increased'* (cf. 12:24; 19:20; cf. 13:49), i.e. it is a living thing growing—reaching into the hearts of many—or the seed bringing forth a harvest.

8:4 *'Now those who were scattered abroad went about preaching the word'*, cf. 11:19, *'those who were scattered . . . speaking [telling] the word'*. The effects of the word are seen (i) in the Samaritans coming to Christ (cf. 8:14, Samaria had received the word), and (ii) in the new church formed at Antioch in Syria.

8:25 *'Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.'* Here is the effective preaching of the word of God.

10:36 *'You know the word which he sent. The word which was proclaimed.'*

10:44 *'The Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.'* The word was what Peter had preached, including the promise of forgiveness of sins. This was acceptance of the Gentiles by God (cf. Acts 15:8–9), *'the Gentiles had received the word of God'* (11:1).

12:24 *'But the word of God grew and multiplied'*, i.e. in spite of Herod's persecution and because of his death. The dynamic of the word knew no restriction by anything else.

13:5 *'At Salamis they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogue of the Jews.'*

- 13:7 *'Sergius Paulus sought to hear the word of God.'* Elymas the sorcerer was withstanding the word of God—unsuccessfully.
- 13:15 *'if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.'* This exhortation was requested in the synagogue, that *'the next Sabbath almost all the city gathered to hear the word of God'* (13:44), but some jealous Jews opposed it so that Paul said, " *'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you.'* . . . *The Gentiles heard that the Gospel was for them also and they were glad and glorified the word of God . . . and believed'* (13:46, 48). To glorify the word of God is simply to recognize and confess its innate glory: it is God's word—to be identified with Him.
- 14:3 *'the Lord . . . bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hand'*, i.e. signs and wonders were *not* the word but attested the word, and God desired to do this. It is here called 'the word of his grace' (cf. 13:43, 'the grace of God'; 20:24, 'the gospel of the grace of God'; 20:32, 'the word of his grace').
- 14:25 *'when they had spoken the word in Perga'*, i.e. preached the Gospel.
- 15:7 *'by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.'* Self-explanatory.
- 15:35 *'Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.'* The word was not confined to initial proclamation but was also to the congregation.
- 16:6 *'forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.'* The word must only be spoken by God's guidance in the place God has for it at any point in time.
- 16:32 *'And they spoke the word of God to him [the gaoler] and all that were in his house.'* The situation had been prepared by God. The word was the Gospel.
- 17:2 *'he argued with them from the scriptures.'* The word is not mentioned as such, but it was the word he expounded, i.e. the Scriptures (cf. 18:4, 5).
- 17:11 *'they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily.'* The same word Paul had preached at Thessalonica—the Gospel—so 17:13, *'learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul'*.
- 18:11 *'And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them'*, i.e. using the apostolic Gospel in conjunction with the Scriptures.
- 19:10 *'all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord'*, i.e. heard the Gospel.
- 19:20 *'so the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily'*, i.e. was growing more and more and prevailing more and more, for it was capturing hearts, and defeating evil, especially the powers of the occult. See 6:7; 12:24; 13:49.

20:32 *'I commend you to God and the word of his grace'* (cf. 4:33; 20:24; 13:43; 14:26) i.e. the Gospel of the grace of God.

Some Observations on the Preached Word in Acts

Mode of preaching

- (a) It was the apostolic word, i.e. the Gospel as formed by Christ, and brought to the apostles' understanding by the Holy Spirit (John 16:12–15). It was powerfully linked with the Hebrew Scriptures and the ministry of Christ.
- (b) It was preached with exhortation to believe it.
- (c) It was preached where the apostles were sent, i.e. guided to preach it.
- (d) Although on a few occasions signs and wonders were spoken of attending it (2:43; 3:1ff.; 4:30; cf. 5:12; 6:8; 8:7; 14:3; 19:11; 20:3ff.; cf. Rom. 15:18–19), yet the major preaching was not said to be attended with signs and wonders.
- (e) The Gospel was preached in all sorts of situations and the word took effect.

Reaction and response to preaching

- (a) The Jews who refused to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah rejected it. Their rejection was often accompanied by attempts to persecute the apostolic band.
- (b) The Jews who recognized Jesus as Messiah believed, received salvation, and espoused the faith.
- (c) Gentiles who rejected the word did not greatly persecute the apostolic preachers, unless it affected their religion or trade.
- (d) Gentiles who accepted the Gospel and believed were strong in faith and proclamation of the same Gospel (cf. I Thess. 1:5–10).

Calvin's commentary on Acts 4:1–4 furnishes a principle of acceptance–rejection that follows the preaching of the word:

Three things are to be chiefly noted in this narration. First, that as soon as the truth of the Gospel comes to light, Satan sets himself in opposition to it, by every means in his power, and uses every endeavour to crush it in its earliest beginnings. Secondly, that God furnishes His children with unconquerable fortitude, that they may stand firm and unmoved against all the devices of Satan and may not yield to the violence of the wicked. Finally, we must note the outcome, that however completely the enemy may appear to be dominant and in control of events, leaving no stone unturned to blot out the Name of Christ, and however much on the other hand the ministers of sound doctrine be as sheep in the mouths of the wolves, God none the less spreads abroad the Kingdom of His Son, keeps alive the light of His Gospel, and looks to the safety of His children.*

* *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles* (Calvin's Commentaries, vol. XVIII), Oliver and Boyd, 1965, vol. I.

STUDY SEVEN: THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—7

THE NATURE AND ACTION OF FAITH—3(b)

Further Elements of the Basis of Faith

We continue in the vein of our last Study (July). In its conclusion we said:

In our next Monthly Ministry Study (August) we will pursue more of the powers of God that work in us 'to will and to do of his good pleasure', such as the Tree of Life and the Blessings of God. In understanding them we feel moved to cry, 'If God be for us, then who can be against us?' God is always for us, hence he is always in us. In this paper we have considered the powerful thrust of God's action for life. There is however the other side of the matter, namely, what happens when we persist in unbelief. We will see that God who makes alive is the God who kills where man refuses to hear and obey. His intention is to destroy all that is evil and unclean. This action is all part of the action of the River, the Word, the Breath, the Bread.

Again we will need to see that these life-giving elements all have their power from the work of Christ—the work of the cross, of the burial, the resurrection, ascension and reigning at the Father's right hand. For example, Christ cannot be the bread of life unless he gives his flesh for the life of the world. This, too, will be of immense importance.

We will now resume our study of the elements of God which are the powerful sources of life.

(v) *The Tree of Life*

A tree of life is a tree which gives life. Indeed all trees in Eden—excepting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—gave natural life to the inhabitants. Human life was sustained by them, just as the water of the fourfold river would give life to all the garden. There was also a tree of life in the midst of the garden which may have been in juxtaposition to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To eat of that tree of life would be to live forever (Gen. 3:22). Man could not live forever simply because he was created. Innately man is not immortal: God alone has immortality. Man could have eaten of the tree of life in Eden had he moved to do so since no prohibition had been made, but his attention was drawn by the serpent to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and he ate of that to his great damage. A question: Was the serpent trying to prevent the primal couple thinking of eating first of the tree of life?

In one place at least (Hosea 14:8) God tells Ephraim that he, God, is *like* a tree, but he does not say he *is* a tree. Even so, the *principle* of the nation being fruitful lies in their worship of God—'O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am *like* an evergreen cypress, from me comes your fruit.' Many of the idols were trees such as the Asherah. Jeremiah 2:26–27 says many in Israel will

be ashamed, 'who say to a tree, "You are my father," and to a stone, "You have begotten me." ' Ephraim had had much to do with such idols, and so much so that God at one stage was prepared to abandon him to them, 'Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone' (Hosea 4:17). Man was created for worship and he must worship. Only when he worships does he believe he is substantial: even false worship gives some (false) sense of being substantial. When Ephraim was joined to his idols he was having an experience of love as does a worshipper who is joined to God. The difference between the two is the *object* of their worship. Man cannot worship his idol without doing himself irreparable harm. In Hosea 14:8 Ephraim wrongly expects his worship of idols will bring fruit, and fruitfulness is part of the demand of the commission God gave to him in Genesis 1:28—'Be fruitful'. Only God can bring fruitfulness of life in a person.

Just as in Jeremiah 2:12–13 God had told Israel that he was the fountain of living water and that Israel's cisterns—the gods and idols—could never hold water, so now he is the tree of life as against Ephraim's use of other trees to eke out his life. Such other trees, such water cisterns, such idols, can never nourish their worshippers. They are human constructs and so are not in the order of what is foundational to all creation. At best they are human and demonic alternatives to what is true creation. They give themselves out as satisfying sources of life when they are the source of death to the human race.

At this point we may compare the uses of the fountain of living water—God—and the tree of life—God—in comparison to Man. Man, as created, has to depend upon God as the fountain of living waters for he is not—of himself—a freestanding fountain. Likewise he has to depend upon the fruit of the tree of life for his life's sustenance. When he is receiving from God, then he is also giving out to others and in this sense is, himself, a life-giving river and a life-giving tree. As such he is truly a human creature in all fullness. To be truly human is to receive and then to give, i.e. give of his fruit. What he gives is not of himself but of what he has received and so by which he lives. The moment he becomes autonomous there is no flow to him or through him, for God only flows to the person whose intake is open, so that through him there can be an equal outflow. This is the principle of receiving the life of God and sharing it with thirsty mankind.

The tree of life in Eden was fed by the river of life (Gen. 2:10). When Man chose to do it his way God was not a partner to him. So God denied Man, who had died, access to the tree of life with the powerful cherubim now set to guard what primal Man had failed to guard. History is filled with the failed attempts of Man to provide the human race with the fruits of a life-tree via many ideologies and idolatries. Jeremiah is ironic about Israel's attempts to provide life-fruit by way of the idols:

As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed: they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, 'You are my father,' and to a stone, 'You gave me birth.' For they have turned their back to me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble they say, 'Arise and save us!' But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble; for as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah (Jer. 2:26–28).

In idolatrous understanding the tree was the female god, the goddess who brought birth, and the rock, the phallic emblem of the male idol. These idols had to be trees of life and rivers of life but how pathetically they had fallen short of such genuine powers.

In Proverbs 3:13–18 the writer is talking about wisdom, personifying it as a remarkable woman. Verses 16–18 describe her in the following words: 'Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.' In Proverbs 11:30 it is said, 'The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but lawlessness takes away lives', which could be paraphrased, 'The outcome of righteous persons is that they are life-giving whereas the outcome of the lawless is that they bring death to others'. In Proverbs 13:12 we read, 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life', which means that fulfilled desire is life to the one who experiences fulfilment. The *NIV* translates Proverbs 15:4, 'The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit', and the *NASB*, 'A soothing tongue is a tree of life, But perversion in it crushes the spirit'. Whilst these are references to a 'tree of life' principle, yet they do not seem to refer especially to the tree of life in Eden, i.e. something which gives life in a way nothing else can do.

Here the story in Psalm 1 presents itself. When the man is blessed because he loves and follows the law of God, he is likened to a beautiful and productive tree which has its roots in a river and so is fed by that water. Receiving life, he gives it out in the fruit he produces. Here the two motifs of the river of life and the tree of life present themselves. The note that 'its leaf does not wither' (v. 3) gladdens the heart of one who would emulate the man of Psalm 1. In Ezekiel 47:12, the leaves of the tree by the flowing river of God are said to be for healing. Likewise in Revelation 22:2 the leaves of the tree of life in Paradise are said to be 'for the healing of the nations', a wonderful cosmic provision.

We gather, then, that when we eat of the tree of life we display those beautiful characteristics of the true life which God gives to a person from his own Person as, say, in Galatians 5:22–23. This is much the same as saying that where the river of life flows, there are the fruit of the Spirit. John 7:37–39 makes it clear that the river of life is the river of the Holy Spirit. When Revelation 2:7b tells us, 'To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God', we think also of the picture in Ezekiel 47 of the river issuing from south of the altar in the temple, and increasing in volume and finally flowing out into the Arabah. On both sides of this great river which refreshes and sweetens everything as it goes are many kinds of trees, producing all kinds of fruit. They all produce food and so can be classed as trees of life, or corporately, as '*the* tree of life'. If, as John 7:37–39 tells us, the river of life is the river of the Holy Spirit, then the fruit of the tree of life on its banks must be the fruit of the Spirit, as it is named and described in Galatians 5:22–23:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.

We conclude, then, that the tree of life—whatever it may be—will give life to the one who comes to it. In the New Testament we see there are at least two conditions set down for partaking of that tree. In Revelation 2:7 it is said, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.' The first condition, then, is that one must be a conqueror to eat of the tree of life. The second condition is in Revelation 22:14, 'Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates'. Whilst we may debate what it is to be a conqueror, we know the expectancy is that he is a true

believer. The true believer is one who has washed his robes in the blood of the Lamb (see Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5–6, 12, 21; 7:14; 21:7; Rom. 8:37 etc.).

(vi) The Blessing of God

(a) Blessing from Adam to Abraham

It is clear from Scripture that God is the God who gives—'God so loved . . . that he gave'. His dearest loving—if we may use such a term—was for his Son, and yet he overleapt the love of his Son to love us by not withholding his Son for our redemption (John 10:17–18; Rom. 8:32). When we are conscious of this love in his giving then it is another power to strengthen our faith. Nothing like this happens apart from God. So it is we speak of him as the God who blesses. This blessing flowed out at the time of creation, firstly in Genesis 1:20–23 for creatures such as fish and birds—'God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters of the seas and let birds multiply on the earth"' (v. 22). He also blessed the primal couple, 'And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth"' (Gen. 1:28).

The meaning of blessing is the giving of the power required to fulfill the commands of God. So we have vast supplies of sea creatures today, alongside the fowl of the air. Man, in his created being, can fulfill God's mission from creation to the new creation where he is willing to obey. All creatures know joy in their obedience to God's commands within his high intention for all things. Tragically Man decided against sharing in God's plan and in that sense he lost the power of the blessing. Even so, God has not withdrawn the commission so that where faithful humans live by faith the blessing is still with them.

We note here, in passing, that to be in God's blessing is a most substantial enrichment to our lives. We feel at peace, feel we are loved, and have a sense of the goodness of all things. This means we are released into the worship which comes with praise and gratitude. It is then we come to bless God. To be in the realm of the curse is to have opposite feelings and sensings and so to have hatred and emptiness—a most dangerous state of being.

When, in Eden, Man committed the original sin, he lost the sense of the original blessing. The earth was cursed because of his sin (Gen. 3:13–19). In the realm of sin he faced—and faces—death. To escape that death he needs God's blessing of redemption. The promise of this began in Genesis 3:15 and has continued down through the ages. When the world became corrupt so that violence filled the whole earth (Gen. 6:5, 11–12), God sent judgment in the form of the universal flood. Even so, he reiterated his original creational blessing out of grace, 'And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth"' (Gen. 9:1).

The greatness of this event was God's establishing with Noah and his family of his everlasting covenant. The 'everlasting covenant' was not *cut* with Noah, but *established*. This indicates that God had made his covenant with his creation even before he had created all things. What we would have called his creational covenant—the covenant of love—came to be one of grace. God insisted that he had blessed Man and that Man, through faith, could be one with him. In this sense the

covenant blessing was—and is—always available for those who put their faith in him as the Covenant God!

(b) The Blessing of Abraham

Man in his intention to live his life 'his way', as he had determined to do by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, had emptied himself of God. It being impossible for him to remain as a vacuum he immediately resorted to idolatry, and as Romans 1:18–32 shows us he—as that rebellious stream of humanity—became degenerate in that he worshipped idols and refused the law of God. Because by creation human creatures need blessing, he sought to make cisterns of compensating love, joy and peace. He hoped the idols would be able to aid him in this. To the contrary, as Paul later put it:

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were *filled* with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. *Full* of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them (Rom. 1:28–32).

We saw the blessing God restored to Man in the establishing of the eternal covenant with and through Noah, and we know that the curse came upon Ham–Canaan, so that it is not until 'the God of glory' (cf. Acts 7:1–2; Josh. 24:2) visited Abram the idolater that there came into view what we now call 'the blessing of Abraham'. This is seen in Genesis 12:1–3 (cf. 15:1–5; 22:15–18). The blessing of the covenant cut with Abraham was to do with giving him and Sarah a son in their old age, the justification by faith accorded to them and their descendants—as many as the number of the stars. Isaac had this blessing passed to him as it also came to be Jacob's allotment through Isaac. Jacob was named Israel during a certain crisis of his life and so God's covenant came to be particularly with the children of Israel.

From Abraham until the coming of Christ, the everlasting covenant—which embraced the special covenant made with Israel at Sinai—obtained with God's chosen people. So much blessing was given to Israel in the Promised Land which was to be Israel's Eden both in its beauty, provisions and worship. Even so, as Moses had warned them, they began to take much of this for granted. When they did, tragedy followed tragedy until Israel came to its senses and was restored to the Abrahamic blessing. We look now at promises and warnings God gave to Israel as they were soon to pass into the new land. Later we will have cause to see the curses which would come upon them if they were not faithful to the covenant:

And if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways. The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you undertake; and he will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you. The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and walk in his ways.

And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of you. And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground, within the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. The LORD will open to you his good treasury the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall tend upward only, and not downward; if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day, being careful to do them, and if you do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them (Deut. 28:1–14).

(c) Blessing in the New Testament

We saw how dynamic was blessing in creation, in the renewal of the covenant following the flood and then how powerful was the covenant with Abraham as it had to do with all history or how it would reach wide to bless the nations. There was God's special calling and blessing as it had to do with the life of Israel in Canaan and the looking forward by some to a coming time when it would be all blessing in a new heaven and a new earth (e.g. Isa. 65:17–25; 66:22–23). In Galatians 3:14 Paul speaks about the 'blessing of Abraham' which, through Christ destroying the curse of sin, has now been brought not only to Israel but also to the Gentile nations. The blessing of Abraham in this context includes not only justification and participation in the everlasting covenant but also the receiving of 'the promise of the Spirit through faith'. In Romans 15:29 Paul tells his readers of his coming to them at a later date. He writes, 'and I know that when I come to you I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ'. It is that blessing Peter speaks of in Acts 3:25–26 where he links it with God's promise to Abraham:

You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, *to bless you* in turning every one of you from your wickedness.

'[T]urning every one of you from your wickedness' was similar to what Joseph was told by the angel, 'you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins' (Matt. 1:21). The sins of the covenant people over their history totalled much, which, along with their personal sins, had wrought much guilt, all of which was to be cleansed. We remember it was Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist who began his prophetic song—The Benedictus—in Luke chapter 2 as he was filled with the Holy Spirit, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people'. He also sang to his son John:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:76–79).

The angel Gabriel addressed Mary, 'Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!' (1:28). Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, in meeting that pregnant mother, herself being filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out, '*Blessed are you among women*, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?' (Luke 1:41–43). Simon, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, *blessed* Joseph and Mary and encouraged them with profound words (2:34–35).

The most prominent passage regarding blessing in the NT is that of Ephesians 1:3–21 and should be read at one sitting then pondered. The statement of 1:3–4 is most important, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him'. The term 'every spiritual blessing' is discussed exhaustively by Markus Barth in his commentary *Ephesians 1–3*:

The Greek can be translated by 'all,' 'every,' 'every kind,' 'the whole' spiritual blessing. When the Hebrew equivalent for 'all' is used in phrases similar to Eph 1:3 it gives the noun to which it belongs an intensive meaning. The same may be true of the use of 'all' in Ephesians: the interpretation has to avoid any shade of doubt that the blessing may be a composite of many parts. There is no hint that God's one full blessing should be split up into several distinct parts. The blessing given 'in Christ' and described in the following eleven verses is an indivisible and perfect whole. If any of its many aspects or dimensions were missing, it would not only be incomplete but distinct from the 'blessing [given] in Christ.' Instead of expressing joy in but one, two, or three feats of God, the author praises the one Christ (4:5) whose oneness is matched by the singleness of the total blessing. The totality of God's gracious manifestation is extolled in the blessing of 1:3–14. This part of Ephesians is a summary of the whole message the apostle wants to give.¹

We can say, then, that the gospel of grace is the 'whole blessing'. Grace restores us to full obedience and participation in the plan of God. This is, indeed, the whole, abundant gift of God. We need this understanding to look at things protological in creation and things eschatological in the new heaven and the new earth—the City of God, Paradise.

Questions for Participation

1. Can it be said that—by faith—we are now eating of the fruit of the tree of life, as we also are feeding on the living Bread, and drinking of the Water of life?
2. Does blessing form a major part of our thinking in the *ekklesia* today and does it constitute the major basis for true worship as contra to the rejection of God, and the refusal of Man to be thanks-giving as we see in Romans 1:18–32?

¹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, Anchor Bible, vol. 34, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, 1981, p. 78.

ADDENDUM FOR AUGUST STUDY, 2005

THE TREE OF LIFE

NOTE. The text of the August Monthly Ministry Study on 'The Tree of Life' should be read up to page 3 to the end of the second paragraph. Beginning at the heading just below (Can It Be Said That Christ Is the Tree of Life?) the continuing text fills out our study on the tree of life. The whole study is taken from a book being written by Geoffrey Bingham titled *The Winds, Waters and Wounds of God*.

CAN IT BE SAID THAT CHRIST IS THE TREE OF LIFE?

In his article 'Tree of Knowledge',¹ E. B. Smick says, 'If the Garden of Eden is a type of heaven, then the tree of life is a type of Christ through whom eternal life may be gained'. May we proceed on the basis of this statement to maintain that Christ is the Tree of life?

When we read John's Gospel we see it is the gospel of life. The word 'life' meaning 'eternal life' is used innumerable times. Simply by believing in Christ and the One who sent him, we have eternal life at the moment of genuinely believing. He who was the Word of God in creation came into this world to live with us, to minister to us, and then to die for us that we might know the love of God. He was buried, raised from the dead to reign at the right hand of God and, with his Father, to give to us the life-giving Spirit. It is axiomatic that Christ is the one who came to give us life. John 10:10 is one of innumerable verses in John's Gospel which tells us so: 'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly'. Then of course there is the statement in John 20:30-31, 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name'.

Do all these Scriptures give us the exegetical right to say that Jesus is the Tree of life? They give us the right to say that he is *the* man to give us life. In the Godhead we have seen that God is the River of life and that Jesus is also that River of life and no less the Holy Spirit is the River of life (cf. Jer. 2:12-13; Ps. 46:4; John 7:37-39). In Paradise the River of God flows from the throne; in Ezekiel 47 it flows from the south side of the altar. The River has the Tree of life, growing on both sides. The Temple in Revelation is God and the Lamb. So the River and the Temple are God. Why then in this apocalyptic language should not Christ the life-giver be the Tree of life? We will

¹ E. B. Smick in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, Q-Z, G. W. Bromiley et al (eds), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1988, p. 902.

now see that the tree on which he was hanged is the Tree from which flowed life by the death of Christ, linked as it was with his burial and resurrection.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST A/THE TREE OF LIFE

It is undoubted that because of the behaviour of the primal couple in Eden at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they died. It is also undoubted that had they, after that event, eaten of the Tree of life, they would have 'lived' for ever. We say 'lived' because Genesis 3:22 says that, but it would be best to say that they would not have 'lived' in the purity and abundance of eternal life as it is set out in John 10:10. Christ came that we might have abundance of life through believing in him. Even so, there could be no salvation apart from Christ's death on the cross. The curse which was on Man for sinning had to be removed. Galatians 3:13–14 tells us this, 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree"—that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith'. 'The blessing of Abraham' at the very least means the justification brought to Abraham. At most it means the gift of the life-giving Spirit. Galatians 2:19–20 spells this out:

For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

This is spelled out in another way in 2 Corinthians 5:14–15, and John 6:50–51:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.

All these verses tell us that Christ died, giving up his life for us, and without this sacrifice of propitiation we would have had to remain in our sins and death. Nor could Christ have brought us to life—eternal life—without the work of the cross, his burial and the resurrection. I think we can say without doubt, that the cross proved to be the tree of life. The Greek term *xulon* is used in Revelation 2:7 of 'the tree of life'. It is used of Christ's cross in Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Galatians 3:13; and 1 Peter 2:24. In Revelation 2:7; 22:2 (twice), and 22:14 it is used of the Tree of life. It can also be used just of timber, or the wooden stocks into which Paul and Timothy were locked in prison in Philippi. The Greek word for tree—*dendron*—is never used in reference to the cross but is often used a figure for a person, such as the man in Psalm 1, and for a 'good tree' or a 'bad tree'.

Our question is, 'Is there a tree—*xulon*—which can be called the *xulon* of life and can it be referred to Christ?' I believe so, but proving this is the case is another matter. My problem is that if God is the River of life in the Old Testament and the New Testament, and if in Revelation 21 God and the Lamb constitute the Temple, then why should the Tree of Life not be God, or specifically Christ? It is generally

recognised by theologians that the new heaven and the new earth are the new Paradise of God and that the elements in the proto-Eden are necessarily to be found in the Eden of the *telos*. If so, then the question remains: 'Did the Tree of life represent Christ the Word, and is the word 'tree' a name for God with all that follows?

Quite aware that many exegetes will say clearly that Christ is not the Tree of life and have strong reasons for their conclusion, I nevertheless quote other exegetes who say he is the Tree of life. I am also aware that the number of commentators who say one thing and the number of those who disagree is no proof of the meaning of any text as they hold it. On the text of Revelation 2:7, David Chilton in his commentary on the Book of the Revelation, *The Days of Vengeance* says:

The Christian overcomes; and to him Christ grants the privilege **to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the Paradise of My God**. This is not only an otherworldly hope. Although the full consummation of this promise is brought in at the end of history, it is a present and increasing possession of the people of God, as they obey their Lord and take dominion over the earth. *For the Tree of Life is Jesus Christ Himself*, and to partake of the Tree is to possess the blessings and benefits of salvation. In Christ, the overcoming Christian has *Paradise Restored*, in this life and forever [my emphasis].²

David Chilton is a post-millennialist theologian and takes his stand on the basis of the Tree of life being Christ and it is through Christ that we overcome, i.e. that Christ's Kingdom is achieved so that 'In Christ, the overcoming Christian has *Paradise Restored*, in this life and forever'. Matthew Henry simply says:

A promise of great mercy to those who overcome. The Christian life is a warfare against sin, Satan, the world, and the flesh. It is not enough that we engage in this warfare, but we must pursue it to the end, we must never yield to our spiritual enemies, but fight the good fight, till we gain the victory, as all persevering Christians shall do; and the warfare and victory shall have a glorious triumph and reward. That which is here promised to the victors is that they shall *eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God*. They shall have that perfection of holiness, and that confirmation therein, which Adam would have had if he had gone well through the course of his trial: he would then have eaten of the tree of life which was in the midst of paradise, and this would have been the sacrament of confirmation to him in his holy and happy state; so all who persevere in their Christian trial and warfare shall derive, *from Christ, as the tree of life*, perfection: and confirmation in holiness and happiness in the paradise of God; not in the earthly paradise, but the heavenly, *ch. xxii. 1, 2* [my emphasis].³

On the other hand we have R. H. Charles: who says of 2:7:

The tree of life is the symbol for immortality in our author. None can eat it save those who have proved victorious in the strife with sin and evil. The 'tree of life' [*xulon tes zoes*] is to be carefully distinguished from 'the water of life' [*hudor tes zoes*]. The latter is a free gift (xxii. 17, xxi. 6), given without money and without price to everyone that thirsteth for it. It symbolizes the divine graces of forgiveness and truth and light, etc. (cf. vii. 17). If a man is faithful to the obligations entailed by these graces he becomes a victor (*nikon*) in the battle of life, and thus wins the right to eat of the tree of life, that is, he enters finally on immortality. In the Fourth Gospel (iv. 10, 13, 14), on the other hand, only the one symbol is used—the 'water of life', and this is given a significance that embraces the two symbols used by our author.⁴

² David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Dominion Pr., Fort Worth, 1987, p. 99.

³ *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6—Acts to Revelation, MacDonald Pub. Co., n.d., p. 1125.

⁴ R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, ICC Commentary, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1979, pp. 54–55.

R. H. Charles is saying that to eat of the Tree of life, one must *first* wash his robes before entering Paradise, and *then* he must have been a conqueror and *thus* has the right to eat of the Tree of life, i.e. have immortality (cf. 2 Tim. 1:10; cf. 1 Tim. 5:17), because he has become a victor. To drink of the water of life freely has no conditions as the sentence indicates and as Revelation 22:17 confirms—'and let him who desires take of the water of life freely'. On this basis the River of life is freely available, but the Tree of life is not equally available because one has to have proved himself a victor before taking his share in the Tree of life. Charles then points out that this is not the case in the Gospel of John. In that Gospel, John is offering eternal life when a person drinks of the water of life (John 4:10; 10:10; cf. 5:24).

What then are we to make of Revelation 2:7 and the other six promises in the seven letters of Christ? Do believers first overcome, i.e. conquer, and then get their reward, that is to say when they arrive in Paradise, or do they partake of these promises here, in this world, whilst they are conquering? If we look at the seven promises we will see them as follows:

Revelation 2:7: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:11: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.

Revelation 2:17: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.

Revelation 2:26–28: He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father; and I will give him the morning star.

Revelation 3:5: He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

Revelation 3:12: He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

Revelation 3:21: He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Notice that whilst the message is being conveyed to the seven churches by the Holy Spirit, yet it is Christ who is speaking through him. All the promises are to do with Paradise, i.e. the city of God in the act of *telos* or the completion of all things. Surely in the process, now, of conquering, the believers are partaking proleptically of the *telos*. That is, they are assured of all the promises for these are now in part, in action, i.e. they are eating of the Tree of life, they are not troubled by the second death (cf. Rev. 20:6, 14) but they are now partaking of 'the hidden manna', i.e. Christ (cf. John 6:48–51), each sheep having a special name (John 10:3). In Christ, believers have power over the nations as they proclaim the gospel (Matt. 28:18–20) and their name remains firmly in the book of life (cf. John 10:27–30; Rev. 13:8). So at the present all saints are clothed in the white robe of Christ's righteousness because justified and are rejoicing in the hope of sharing the glory of God (Rom. 5:1–5). Again, they are already part of his temple (Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Pet. 2:4–10). Likewise all believers are at the present seated with Christ on his Father's throne (Eph. 2:6).

It is written of the rider on the white horse in Revelation 6:1–2 (cf. 19:11ff.) that 'he went out conquering and to conquer'. When it comes to those who conquered

receiving all of these promises, they are presently 'conquering and [yet] to conquer'. Each of the five churches to which Christ wrote had to conquer the evil that had come to be in them. The other two churches—Smyrna and Philadelphia—were overcoming the enemy attacking them from the outside. If we deny access to the Tree of life until the saints have proved themselves to be overcomers, then a doctrine of justification by conquering becomes added to the doctrine of grace, whereas all a believer's actions are said to be by grace. Conquering is an action required by God throughout one's life, and yet aided by God.

We find that the Tree of life not only continuously supplies life in the shape of fruit-sustenance and food-pleasure, but also that 'its leaves *were* for the healing of the nations' (22:2). These, undoubtedly, are the nations which bring their glory into the holy city (Rev. 21:24–27). They are the disciple-nations who are spoken of in Matthew 28:18–20. Perhaps we should not make too much of the tenses we apply to Revelation 22:1–5, since John is shown what is in the future. '[T]he healing of the nations' covers the history of the nations since the time of Babylon, if not before it. When they are healed then the prophecy of Isaiah 11 can be said to have been completed, that pacific time in all the earth. This climax or *telos* comes out of years of endeavour. It requires a study of the judgment of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46 in order to put it into its right perspective. Such healing is prophesied in John 11:49–52.

A NOTE ON THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

The nature of this Tree has notoriously evaded scholars. That it is what it is said to be cannot be doubted. All we know is that to eat of its fruit was forbidden by God under pain of death, and that the primal couple should have obeyed his injunction not to eat of it. The serpent began to tell Eve its great virtue—that by eating of it her eyes would be opened and she would be as God, knowing good and evil. The primal couple together already constituted God's image. They were in his likeness. They needed no more to be that. Content with that, they would have retained the relationship which would help them to know good and evil as *directly aided* by God. They chose to have his knowledge by applying to the forbidden tree. At the words of the serpent the woman saw that the tree 'was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise'. That was how she saw it on departing from obedience to God's word. All trees were good for food, and a delight to the eyes. She desired to obtain wisdom which as yet she thought she did not have.

It has been speculated that Man in innocence was naïve and required sophistication. It is thought that Man had to come out of a simple state to a more mature one. It has been thought by some that the Tree of this knowledge was, in fact, God's law and Psalm 19:7–8 tells us that the law makes us wise:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

Might one even quote Romans 3:20b, 'by the law is the knowledge of sin'? Law for sinners is lethal. Certainly the matter of the law cannot be dealt with in this sketchy manner, since the law is primarily the law of God Himself and the law which God had given to the primal couple in regard to the Tree, itself.

Whatever the reasoning of many, the facts stand clear: Man was changed by the event. From his Edenic innocence and glory he was transmogrified into a creature of death. The time of created life—as such—had moved into the beginning of the action of grace, as Genesis 3:15 infers. He had ignored the word of God and was changed. He died—however we may choose to explain that. Is there, perhaps, a clue in 1 John 2:15–17 where John says plainly that there are three lusts which constitute the world, namely, 'the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life'? Were these not the three elements which gripped the woman in Genesis 3:1–7? They were not elements of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil but the woman was excited to them by the deceitful serpent—'a liar and a murderer from the beginning'.

What is noteworthy is that whilst 'the tree of the knowledge' was present in the proto- Eden, it is not seen patently in Revelation chapter 22 whereas the Tree of life is clearly present and is one with the River of Life. Most are agreed that the Tree of the knowledge, was here as a test point for the primal couple who were—so it is often said—on probation. It is apt here to quote Isaac Watts's great hymn in which he says, 'In Him the tribes of Adam boast More blessings than their father lost'.⁵

THE BLESSING OF GOD

As an undergirding of this theme I have included a list of the beatitudes in: (i) the Old Testament; and (ii) the New Testament. They may be summed up under the heading of 'Blessed Are the Obedient'. Blessing enables us to obey and obedience brings the joy and peace which are known in doing the will of God. Being blessed causes us to bless God and our fellow-creatures.

Beatitudes of the Old Testament

Psalm 1:1f.: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinner . . . but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Psalm 2:12: Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Psalm 32:1–2: Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Psalm 33:12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

Psalm 34:8: O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy [blessed] is the man who takes refuge in him!

Psalm 40:4: Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods!

Psalm 41:1: Blessed is he who considers the poor! The LORD delivers him in the day of trouble.

⁵ Isaac Watts, 'Great God, Whose Universal Sway', New Creation Hymn Book, NCPI, Blackwood, no. 111, v. 11.

Psalm 65:4–5: Blessed is he whom thou dost choose and bring near, to dwell in thy courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, thy holy temple!

Psalm 84:4 Blessed are those who dwell in thy house, ever singing thy praise!

Psalm 84:12: O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in thee!

Psalm 89:15: Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.

Psalm 94:12–13: Blessed is the man whom thou dost chasten, O LORD, and whom thou dost teach out of thy law to give him respite from the days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.

Psalm 106:3: Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!

Psalm 112:1: Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!

Psalm 119:1–2: Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart.

Psalm 128:1: Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!

Proverbs 8:32: And now my sons listen to me: happy [blessed] are those who keep my [wisdom's] ways.

Proverbs 8:34: Happy [blessed] is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

Isaiah 30:18: Therefore the LORD *waits* to be gracious to you; therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who *wait* for him.

Isaiah 32:20: Happy [blessed] are you who sow beside all waters, who let the feet of the ox and the ass range free.

Isaiah 56:1–2: Thus says the LORD: 'Keep justice and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.

Daniel 12:12: Blessed is he who waits and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days.

Beatitudes in the New Testament

Matthew 5:3: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:4: Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5:5: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:6: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Matthew 5:7: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Matthew 5:8: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Matthew 5:9: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Matthew 5:10: Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:11–12: Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(*Note:* for the Lukan version of Matthew 5:3–12, see Luke 6:20–23. For Matthew 24:46–47, see Luke 7:23; cf. 12:42–43. For Matthew 13:16, see Luke 10:23–24.)

Matthew 11:6: Blessed is he who takes no offence at me.

Matthew 13:16–17: But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Matthew 16:16–17: Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'

Matthew 24:46–47: Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find him so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

Luke 14:13–14: But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

John 20:29: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Acts 20:35: . . . the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Romans 4:7–8: Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin.

James 1:12: Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.

Revelation 1:3: Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.

Revelation 14:13: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'

Revelation 16:15: Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!

Revelation 19:9: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Revelation 20:6: Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection!

Revelation 22:7: Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

Revelation 22:14: Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

STUDY EIGHT: THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—8

THE NATURE AND ACTION OF FAITH 3(c)

Yet Further Elements of Faith

(vii) The Blessings of Light

Our repeated statement is that God is the Giver, that all gifts are out of love and for the life of love. In speaking of the elements that are life-giving such as God's Water, Wind, Tree, Bread, Word and Blessing we have seen that there is a great difference between created elements and elements that are uncreated. The created things are for the life lived on this planet: the things uncreated are for living out God's own life in time and eternity. When God said, 'Let there be light', He was creating light for the created world. He created light before even the light of the sun and the moon came into operation (Gen. 1:3; cf. 1:14–18). When, as we shall shortly see, it is said, 'God is light', then God has always been light. What we must not do is to parallel what is created with that which is uncreated. This would be doing what is forbidden in Scripture, i.e. comparing the Creator-God with what has been created. Also we must allow that which is eternal to be other than that which is created and is temporal.

God Is Light, the Only True Light

We repeat 1 John 1:5, 'God is light and in him is no darkness at all'. First Timothy 6:16 says God alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light. It also says that no man has ever seen Him or can see Him. James 1:17 calls Him 'the Father of lights', meaning He has created the great lightbearing powers in creation out of His Father-being. In the same breath he talks of God as the Giver of all gifts, the Giver of the gifts we have been treating throughout this series. Light and glory are closely associated, so that when Moses asks God to show him His glory, God shows him His moral glory:

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation (Exod. 34:6–7).

Whatever James (James 1:17–18) may have meant by the 'Father of lights' is not exhausted in the lightbearing heavenly bodies, but also includes those 'lights' which are from His Fatherhood, e.g. Ephesians 5:8 where those who have been enlightened

to be 'children of light' are mentioned. Galatians 4:4–7 and Romans 8:14–30 tell us that God has brought us to be His sons and heirs. In the teaching of the new birth in John's writings and of 'the new creation' in Paul's letters it is clear that human beings cannot live properly without the gifts of life which come from the Triune God. It was never intended that human beings should be wholly creatures designed to live only in this world, but that their *telos* or *completion* should be one that would be described as 'eternal life', hence 'spring up to eternal life' of John 4:13–14.

The Book of Job—a Wisdom book—takes up many issues as Job listens to and then counters the questionable wisdom of his friends. These counsellors are later reprimanded by God and Job also is questioned by Him. In chapter 38, God appears on the scene and asks such questions of Job which show that he has spoken out of a limited knowledge although his basic point, that he is justified by God, is affirmed. God's method is to ask Job if he was there when creation took place. He asks two questions regarding the origin of light and its distribution:

Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home? You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great! Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war? **What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,** or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth? (Job 38:19–24).

These questions are asked concerning Job's ability to know and understand all the actions which happen within creation under God's creative and providential hand. The questions asked of Job are innumerable; in fact four long chapters of them and all to do with the seen world of creation. Some of these are set out in Psalm 104, which is a hymn lauding creation and showing the functions, abilities and limits of created things. We note that God is not asking Job the moral questions or what we might call 'the supernatural questions'. Job's humility is revealed in his answer to God in chapter 42:

Then Job answered the LORD: 'I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me." I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes' (Job 42:1–6).

The point we need to grasp is that Job knew so little of the workings of the great sovereign God that it was a pitiful thing that he should debate with God over the issue of his suffering and of the ethical matters of deep, moral importance. Our first quote above (Job 38:19–24) shows that Job could not even understand the literal, physical matter of light, let alone enter the field of a theology of light and darkness. To us this matter is salutary when we handle God—so to speak—as though He were some object about which we might hold debate!

Man and Light

Our humility—set by the Job questioning and its result before God Himself—should equip us to seek to know God, not only in His creatorial being, but also in Himself, in His character, in all His deity. In the Book of Job questions are asked

concerning the knowledge of God. Zophar the Naamathite asks, 'Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?' (11:7). Elihu says, 'Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable' (36:26). He states in another place, 'God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things which we cannot comprehend' (37:5), and in the same chapter (v. 23) he adds, 'The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness he will not violate' (37:23).

As we read these sage observations it strikes us that the commentators did know something of God, but their knowledge was imperfect. It seems to be apophatic. We are forced to conclude with Deuteronomy 29:29, 'The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may *do* all the words of this law'. Things that are revealed are the things that we are to *do*, not merely think about. It is enlightening to know that *doing* God's commands reveals more to us of God than textual and theological research.

Our point in taking up knowing God relates to having His light shine upon us. We do need what we may call light according to science. We need to know about our universe. Psalm 115:16 tells us, 'The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men'. In this we sense Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8, i.e. God giving Man dominion over the world. Even so, Man is not compartmentalised in the world, nor the world in Man. To know God, Man and the creation, one must first know God, and that must include knowledge of God, His law, His plan and of His very self. Otherwise God's unfailing action of showing Himself and communicating with His creation would be fatuous. Man has to dwell in light: he dare not dwell in darkness. Darkness will attenuate him and ultimately be his death.

Jeremiah 9:23–24 tells us that knowing God is Man's highest attainment, his most blessed experience of life in the present:

Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, *that he understands and knows me*, that I am the LORD who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the LORD' (emphasis mine).

It is normal for Man to know God and abnormal not to know Him, i.e. to have rejected true knowledge of Him as we see in Genesis 3:1–7 and Romans 3:19ff. Man has to work hard at not knowing since this is unnatural, anti-ontological. In Psalms 14 and 53 the so-called atheist is looked upon as a corrupt person, doing horrible deeds. Because Man was made in the image of God he has affinity with God and knowing God is essentially part of him. Not to know Him is not to be truly Man. Because God created Man in the 'everlasting covenant', Man has to strain to be against God. In the Old Testament God covers Himself with light as a garment (Ps. 104:2), and in Daniel 2:22 in a highly political situation Daniel said of Israel's God that 'light dwells with him'. The Psalmist says in 27:1, 'The LORD is my light and my salvation'. In Psalm 43:3 it is prayed, 'Oh, send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to thy holy hill and to thy dwelling!' In Psalm 36:9 the statement is made, 'in thy light do we see light', which must first mean that no one in darkness can truly see and know light. It may mean for Israel that it has God's house in its midst and God is dwelling in her, so that the nation sees true light, light it would not see in the places—and nations—of darkness. For example, it could never see light in the temples of the idols. Certainly Psalm 36:9 can be said of Christ's incarnation as when he proclaimed, 'I am the light of the world'. Certainly the principle, 'Look to him and

be radiant; so shall your faces never be ashamed' (Ps. 34:5), obtained with the ancient saints and the faithful members of Israel. Certainly it obtains with followers of Christ who see 'the light of life'. Likewise Psalm 18:28 is good news for the covenant believers, 'Yea, thou dost light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness'. It takes us down into the mystery of 'The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all his innermost parts'. Here, in Proverbs 20:27, is the writer speaking of the conscience illuminated by God?

The nations are in darkness who worship their gods. Job 12:23–25 tells us the story:

He makes nations great, and he destroys them: he enlarges nations, and leads them away. He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth, and makes them wander in a pathless waste. They grope in the dark without light; and he makes them stagger like a drunken man.

In Egypt one of the plagues was that of abject darkness, 'there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days; they did not see one another nor did any rise from his place for three days; *but all the people of Israel had light where they dwelt*' (Exod. 10:22–23). Israel, when it becomes disobedient and even apostate, knows the same darkness and blindness:

Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we look for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope for the wall like the blind, we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigour we are like dead men (Isa. 59:9–10).

This is the same case which Paul outlines in Romans 1:18–32. His words are:

... for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and *their senseless minds were darkened*. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles (vv. 21–23).

In Isaiah 58:9–10 God had already told Israel how it could be radiant in obedience:

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am. 'If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall *your light rise in the darkness* and your gloom be as the noonday.'

As against Israel's darkness and judgment for going to the gods of other nations (e.g. Jer. 2:9–19), the hour comes for Israel's time of the light God is shedding upon His covenant people:

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (Isa. 60:1–3).

The remainder of this chapter tells of the renewed glory of Israel as its light has come because the glory of the Lord has risen upon them.

What then do we make of all the uses of 'light' and 'glory'? We have suggested that there is created light which is a natural norm of creation. There is a darkness

which is also a natural norm in creation. Then there is unusual light in the Old Testament, such as the light in Goshen as against the unusual darkness in the remainder of Egypt; the bush burning before Moses and not being consumed; the pillar of fire leading Israel through its journey to Canaan; and the light on the face of Moses when he was with God on the mountain. In the New Testament there was the light the shepherds saw at the birth of Christ; the light by which Jesus was transfigured on Tabor; and then the light which blinded Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. These six or seven occasions of light appear to be supernatural, transcending what is normal light but nevertheless being recognised as light which we know, even if it is phenomenal. All of these occasions of light are significant, i.e. are special signs of something.

Then there is light which we might call 'moral' or 'spiritual'. Primarily the statement, 'God is light and in him there is no darkness at all', is intended to speak of the righteousness and holiness of God. Such righteousness and holiness presuppose God's law. Human consciousness of law is by the conscience which monitors human behaviour. If the conscience is darkened by a person's 'dead works' (cf. Heb. 9:14) then there is confusion in moral monitoring. The conscience should work by faith in God, then it will recognise moral light and darkness. All things of God are pure. This is seen in Exodus 34:6-7 and the comments we made above on this passage. God is pure truth. Truth is the action of God. Moral-spiritual light is the self-manifestation of God. Moral-spiritual darkness is the self-manifestation of evil. Man was created for good, for being God's partner in his plan for creation. When he fell from this he lost the light and in insisting on doing it 'his way' is wholly lost as a human being. What is tragic is that he has so rationalised his darkness as to delude himself by his own spin. As Isaiah warns us, 'Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!' (Isa. 5:20). Can he possibly be brought back to being a creature of light, i.e. the true image of God? Certainly no human power can bring about such a change.

Jesus Christ, the Light of the World

Jesus said quite clearly, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life' (John 8:12). John the Baptist had said, 'The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world'. No one has made this claim apart from Jesus. He claimed that he was exclusively the light of the world, and his light is 'the light of life', i.e. 'the light that gives life'. John 1:4 says, 'In him was life, and the life [of Christ] was the light of men'. These two quotes complement each other. In Psalm 56:13 the Psalmist speaks to God, 'For thou hast delivered my soul from death, yea, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life'. 'The darkness of death' and 'the light of life' are opposites. Elihu in Job 33:28 speaks of God's salvation when a person repents, 'He has redeemed my soul from going down into the Pit, and my life shall see the light'. Jesus' audience would have well known what Jesus was saying. Psalm 27:1 says, 'The LORD is my light and my salvation', and here in John 8:12 Jesus is applying this office of light to himself. Elsewhere, of course, he speaks of such things as given to him by the Father, and that he thus only acts by the Father. Indeed he and the Father are one in all matters including being the light of the world.

In John 9:5 Jesus reiterates his being and ministry as light, 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world' (John 9:5). This was said as he was bringing light

to the darkness of the man born blind. In John 12:44–48 Jesus shows how a man can receive light and salvation or fail to obtain it:

And Jesus cried out and said, 'He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And he who sees me sees him who sent me. *I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.* If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day'.

The message is clear, one has to believe on the Father who sent Christ and so, of course, on Christ, and then one will be taken out of darkness and be given the light of life and—may it be said?—the life of light.

One of Jesus' parables—as in Luke 8:16–18—describes the reason for lighting a lamp is to place it where 'those who enter may see the light'. As in all other elements we have described, Christ is that element, e.g. the River of life, and his people are to draw on that River in order to flow out the River to others. So Jesus could say to his disciples, 'You are the light of the world' (Matt. 5:14), and Paul could later write in Philippians 2:15–16, 'that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain'.

The great truth of Paradise—the new heaven and the new earth, the Holy City of God—is shown in Revelation 21:9–11:

Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal (Rev. 21:9–11).

This pure radiance, this peerless light which appears in Scripture when the throne of God is described and which is in one place described as 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ', is seen in the same chapter, verses 22–26:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations.

The Light that lightens every man was coming into the world. Then he was in the world. Then, too, he shone into the darkness and indeed, out of darkness (2 Cor. 4:6). He shone into dead men and women and brought them the light of life. Yet the cross had to be that which brought life. In the midst of the darkness he became the darkness and the darkness he suffered, he bore to death and shone forth as the light for all, for all time. Now for the time of eternity—if we may use an oxymoron—he, in and with his Father, is sheer light, wholly eternal glory, bringing life out of death, causing his people to shine as lights in the firmament forever (Dan. 12:3).

To God's faithful people—the living temple of God on earth (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Pet. 2:4–10) and in heaven (Rev. 11:19; 21:1–4, 10–11)—God now speaks in this our age:

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (Isa. 60:1–3).

Some Questions for Sharing

1. What do we understand in our life to be 'the light of life' as these words speak of Christ?
2. What relationship has the church as the people of light, to God and to those in darkness?
3. Do we see the divine light as a great *spiritual* weapon against all forms of darkness? If this is the case, then what is the action it takes?

ADDENDUM FOR SEPTEMBER STUDY, 2005

SEVEN LETTERS FROM CHRIST TO THE CHURCHES

In the second and third chapters of the Book of the Revelation we have seven letters written by Christ to the churches of Asia, namely those at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Each letter is regular in that each is addressed to the angel of the church named, describing Christ in terms of his greatness and strength which are mainly written of him in the first chapter of the Revelation. It is then pointed out that Christ knows the works—good or bad or both—of the church addressed. According to the good works of each church Christ commends it and where its works are wrong or bad it is rebuked and directions are given on what it is to do, e.g. five of the churches are told to repent and the other two find full commendation. The congregation of each church is told to listen carefully to what is read to it since the letter is what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church, or what Christ is saying via the Holy Spirit. Finally, in every letter a promise of a wonderful nature is given to those who are overcomers.

The seven letters would take much time for us to open up regarding the matters of their works, both good and bad, so that we will simply mention the descriptions of Christ, and the promises made to those who overcome the forces against them. These we will discuss.

A Note on the Word 'Repent' in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3

Where we find the word 'repent' used to the Christian congregations in five of the seven letters, then it is not the same as 'repent, and be baptised' (Acts 2:38), 'Repent therefore, and turn again [i.e. 'convert'] that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord' (3:19). If we add to these the conversion of the Samaritans (8:4–8, 12) and the conversion of the Gentiles (11:18; cf. 10:42–48) then we will see that repenting is a *gift* given to Israel (2:38; 3:19; 5:32) and to the Gentiles (11:18; cf. 10:42–48). This gift in early Acts *is to be used for coming into salvation*. It is a never-to-be-repeated act, for one repents once in the saving work of Christ, and so knows that one is part of the congregation of Christ. One's whole being is changed in mind and attitude. This transformation is of the *nous*. In Romans 2:3–5 Paul informs us, 'Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.' However, in the five letters where the command to repent is used in each case of a particular church, i.e. *the whole church—that golden candlestick*, Christ is the one who moves amongst the seven candlesticks, i.e. the churches which are the lights of their environment. For a church to be in such states as are five of them is highly reprehensible. It is not that members have to be

re-converted by repeated repentance but they have to hear the rebuke of Christ and the Spirit lest they be finished as *churches*. We emphasise this because there is an unhelpful doctrine which says that every time one sins then one must repent, as though initial repentance is not 'once for all' but has to be repeated innumerable times. The initial change of mind, change of attitude, *is* repentance. Having contrition for sinning after baptism may well be appropriate and acknowledging the sin a helpful matter for one who has previously said he/she has no sin, but we must be alert against making contrition and confession the means of salvation. We may be sure that if we reach states such as five of the churches knew then the Lord of the candles and the Spirit of the churches will sharply rebuke us, demanding this kind of repentance. In the five letters Jesus was saying, in effect, 'If you do not repent of these evils then that is the end of you'.

A Note on Overcoming or Conquering

One view taken of the term 'overcomers' in the Revelation is that they are special persons of a special class. Perhaps they are a rarer species than what we might call 'an average believer'. Certainly in each letter Christ rebukes those who have fallen out with the faith, true morality and proper ethics, so that within a rebuked church, members would have to overcome the local problems, but Revelation 12:10–11 describes overcomers, 'And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."'

Matching this is Revelation 7:14, 'And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"'. These are those 'whose names are written in the book of the life of the Lamb that was slain' (Rev. 13:8). Surely the overcomers are those who are saved and continue in obedience, as simple and faithful Christians. These see themselves as kept by the power of God—they live in the power of God, e.g. Philippians 2:12–13. The term used for them is 'God's elect' (Rom. 8:33), the ones who endure unto the end.

THE DESCRIPTIONS OF CHRIST IN THE SEVEN LETTERS (CHS. 2 – 3) AND IN THE VISION OF CHAPTER 1

By understanding the apocalyptic language of chapter 1, and deriving the full meaning from the powerful vision of Christ, we can see that the letters are intended to portray Christ as he walks among the churches. Firstly it was to strengthen and encourage them in the midst of their battle, and secondly it was to sharply rebuke them where needed and bring them back to their task and ministry as the church. To read the first chapter is to have the full and powerful vision of Christ *himself*. To read the repeated descriptions of Christ in the second and third chapters of Revelation is to bring *us* into the fullness of the apostolic life and power—i.e. the living community of the risen life of Lord of the church.

Ephesus

In the Letter: 'To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: "The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands"' (2:1).

In the Vision: 'in the midst of the lampstands one like a [the] son of man' (1:13), and 'in his right hand he held seven stars' (1:16).

Smyrna

In the Letter: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life' (2:8b).

In the Vision: 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore' (1:17b-18).

Pergamum

In the Letter: 'The words of him who has the sharp-edged sword' (2:12b).

In the Vision: 'from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword' (1:16b).

Thyatira

In the Letter: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze' (2:18b).

In the Vision: 'And his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze' (1:14b-15a).

Sardis

In the Letter: 'who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars' (3:1).

In the Vision: 'The seven spirits who are before his throne', and 'in his right hand he held seven stars' (1:4b, 16a).

Philadelphia

In the Letter: 'The words of the holy one, the true one; who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens' (3:7b).

In the Vision: 'his head and hair white as white wool, white as snow', and 'I have the keys of Death and Hades' (1:14, 18b).

Laodicea

In the Letter: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation' (3:14b).

In the Vision: 'and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth' (1:5a).

THE PROMISES TO THE CHURCHES

Church One: Ephesus

Promise: 'To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God' (2:7).

We need to read the whole 'Addendum for August 2005'. For eternity the people of God will be dependent upon Christ, the tree of life. In Revelation 22:14 we read, 'Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates'. Washing one's robes is a 'beginning thing' of salvation. It gives the *right* to enter the city. Eating isn't just needed but it is an indispensable, as also a continual, thing. So as we must drink of the River of life from the beginning so also we must eat of the fruit of the Tree of life from the beginning and 'for always'. It is difficult to speak in time of something that is out of time. We need to note that in Paradise we must drink of the River as seen in Revelation 7:16-17, 'They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne

will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to *springs of living water*; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

Church Two: Smyrna

Promise: 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life . . . He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death' (2:10–11).

John 11:25–26 tells us Christ himself is life; he is the very resurrection: 'Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"' Revelation 1:17–18 speaks in the same manner: 'When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."'

The believers at Smyrna were undergoing much persecution, even unto death. There will be a set limit—'ten days'—but there will not be a dreadful death, 'the second death', but a glorious crown of eternal life which Peter called 'incorruptible, undefiled, and unfailing'. This will be an honour such as only can be known and accessed in Paradise. The essence of the promise is that *it is impossible for a believer ever to die*. He need fear *nothing* in the present. The present is also pre-set!

Church Three: Pergamum

Promise: 'To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it' (2:17).

'Hidden manna' surely means manna which is present but which cannot be seen unless the Spirit reveals it: 'The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God' (1 Cor. 2:14). Here the Spirit feeds the special manna—Christ—as we see in John 6:31–34:

Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' Jesus then said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world.' They said to him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.'

For forty years God had fed them in the wilderness. Forever He will feed them with spiritual bread—Christ.

The white stone has been variously interpreted,¹ but at least stone is permanent—e.g. pillars in the temple—and white is for eternal purity. The meaning of 'the name' in Scripture is what we would call a person's *persona*—his character, status, power—and we have been baptised into the *name* of the Trinity (Matt. 28:19), or Christ's name (Acts 2:38; 10:48). Being baptised into Christ means they became as one with Christ in character and *persona*, with all that that means. In the case of the true believers each has his/her unique spiritual identity.

¹ It has been thought of as a good identity card—justified at law, guiltless—or as an invitation card for a special occasion, the name of the person being known.

Church Four: Thyatira

Promise: 'He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father; and I will give him the morning star' (2:26–29).

In each letter Jesus says he knows the works of the particular church, whether good or otherwise. 'Works' is a special word in the Scriptures—relating to the fulfilling of God's entire plan for creation. In John's Gospel Jesus speaks a lot about his own works which are really the works which his Father does, the ones which overcomers keep. These we do unwavering to the end. Jesus then quotes from Psalm 2, the great Messianic Psalm. Those who are overcomers will share the Christ's great Messianic, *cosmic* victory in a church in which some have been disobedient and will know only God's judgment. Christ is 'the bright morning star' (Rev. 22:16), showing the wonderful 'light of life' that only conquerors can know, as against those who are evil in this very church and who elsewhere also exist in dreadful darkness, refusing the way of light.

Church Five: Sardis

Promise: 'He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels' (3:5).

'He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments'. In 7:9–17 these are the ones who have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, who worship God in the holy temple, who are led by the Lamb to springs of living water, and whose sorrows are wiped away for ever. Jesus promises, 'and I will not blot his name out of the book of life (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; cf. Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:16; Luke 10:20)—i.e. 'as I threatened to do with Israel after their idolatry in the desert' (Exod. 32:33). In fact he whose name is written in the book of life of the Lamb shall be saved in the judgment before the great white throne (Rev. 20:11–15). 'I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels' is a glorious graduation before 'the assembly of the first-born' (Heb. 12:3), to be named by the Father and the Lamb as those who endured unto the end in holiness and hope. Jesus had said he would confess before the Father those who confessed him before men (Matt. 10:32–33; cf. Mark 8:38; Luke 12:8–9).

Church Six: Philadelphia

Promise: 'He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name' (3:12).

'He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God': pillars are strong and a special part of the temple (cf. Gal. 2:9; 1 Tim. 3:15). 'never shall he go out of it': i.e. he is forever in the temple, forever a part of God (21:22) because God and the Lamb *are* the temple. 'and I will write on him the name of my God': which is really the personal revelation of the nature of God, as also His sealing of His people as being His. In 7:1–3, 14:1 and 22:4, the name of the Father is on the foreheads of the elect. 'and the name of the city of my God: i.e. a revelation, too, of the Holy City

and the seal of eternal citizenship. 'the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven': as shown in Revelation 21 (cf. Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22)—the City that is wrought in heaven and descends to earth, but is essentially eternal. 'and my own new name': i.e. a fresh and extended revelation of Christ himself, the understanding of his person and identity beyond what one has at the present. See 1 Peter 1:13 (1 Cor. 2:10), where it is suggested that grace beyond all presently known boundaries will be revealed to believers, when he comes.

Church Seven: Laodicea

Promise: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne' (3:20–21).

'He who conquers': i.e. the now awakened at Laodicea—and, indeed, in all the churches—conquering sloth, ease, complacency, blandness, blindness and the like. 'I will grant him to sit with me on my throne': this great throne of which we read so much in this very prophecy, the seat and centre of all authority, action and judgment (cf. Dan. 7:9ff.; Ps. 2:6–8): 'as I myself conquered': i.e. the powers of darkness and of death and of the world (cf. Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15; Gal 1:4; 6:14). 'and sat down with my Father on his throne': as my reward for conquering, and my right for ruling, as the Kingdom has come to its eternal fulfilment.

STUDY NINE: THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—9

OPPOSITION TO GOD, MAN, FAITH AND THE FAITH

The Scriptures give us a good picture—an anthropology—of Man as he was created. Man in Genesis 1:27; 5:1–2 is the man–woman union in the 'one-flesh' relationship. He—they—is in the image and likeness of God. All that God is, Man is *like* that without being *that*. He is utterly dependent upon the Creator for living out his creaturely being. All the elements of which we have spoken constituting God's Being, such as the River of life, the Bread of life, the Word of Life, the Breath of life (*ruach, neshema*, spirit, breeze, wind), the Tree of life and the Blessing/s are needed for all of life, for they are what Man needs in order to be truly Man. Even if Man had not fallen, he would still need all of these 'elements'—the life-giving power of God to be a creature and yet to be the image or icon of God. Within all these life-giving elements, and only by reason of them, can Man be what is essentially, foundationally *Man*.

Something quite important flows from all this. Only God can create the universe and set up that order which we call 'ontological'—i.e. things as they are essentially—and nothing can work properly which is not ontological. When another mind seeks to determine what it wants creation to be, then it cannot be of the true, i.e. ontological, order. The word of God told primal Man that he—he/she/they—would die if he/she/they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The word of the serpent spoke to the contrary, i.e. Man would not die but in fact improve his personal situation. All evil is personal and goes contrary to what God has created. All that is good is in conformity with what God has created. That which is evil—fallen angels, principalities and powers, demonic powers and fallen human beings—seeks to be as close as possible in being and action to what is ontological, i.e. foundational to true being but without rendering such so-called obedience to God. Man must insist on his autonomy but by true nature he obeys a given law. He is structured to obey. Since, in fact, evil personal beings cannot, of themselves, in any measure be genuinely ontological—true creatures—then they have to pose as the real thing/s. Since Man can create nothing,¹ he seeks, perforce to devise.

The outcome of this is that all evil beings and their actions seek to pose as that which is genuine. They give it out that they are God or gods, that their ethics are pure, that they are the true power, so that all they do is alone authentic. Isaiah 5:18–21 shows us some of this false, double-dealing:

¹ Man is *like* God the Creator and is therefore creative, but he is not *as* God is and therefore cannot create. He 'creates', so to speak, but from substances and elements already created. If he could create, then he would be *as* the Creator.

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Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood,
who draw sin as with cart ropes,
who say: 'Let him make haste,
let him speed his work
that we may see it;
let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near,
and let it come, that we may know it!'
Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!
Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,
and shrewd in their own sight!

Another example can be seen in the whole of Daniel chapter 7. The text needs to be studied closely. There the various powers act as though what they do is what they have to do and so their actions are all right and proper. In verses 25–27 the fourth beast thinks 'to change the times and the law'. Only God can do that, yet it 'shall be given' (i.e. temporarily) to the beast to do so—'to change the times and the law'. However, the international (heavenly) court sits in judgment and so the beast is unhanded. Likewise in Revelation 13:5, the first beast was *allowed* to exercise authority for forty-two months, and in 13:7 is '*allowed* to make war on the saints and to conquer them'. Doubtless the beast is in the delusion that this is his 'ontological' position so that he is politically correct in doing what he does!

The False Emulator

Speaking on the widest level of Satan seeking to emulate God, we have been seeing that creation cannot be properly active, unless God is the One who constantly brings life to His creatures by being the River of life, the Bread of life, the Breath of life, the Word of life, the Light of life, the Tree of life. Indeed God's plan for producing the ultimate goal could never be fulfilled as the Kingdom of God and the Beloved community without God's gifts and blessings to all His people constantly flowing into them. Undoubtedly Satan understood this and sought to copy this way of ruling and working in his—so-called—kingdom. The three temptations he brought to Jesus in the wilderness are witness to this. Jesus withstood this evil testing, the heart of which was that the Son of God should fall down and worship the Devil. Satan was aware that the gift and offering of worship is of immense power. Hence his obsession for being worshipped, and his demeaning of all but himself.

We must always keep aware of the fact that Satan seeks to have creatures which he has never created become part of his wide-reaching conspiracy for power. We do not have time here to explore the vast matter of idols, principalities and powers, but Satan covets extending his power by building a wide network of sanctuaries. God's action in history is to make the heart of every believer to be a sanctuary, and in the wider corporate situation to make all His people His one true sanctuary—*naos*—by which means he dwells with them forever. Satan—that false emulator—seeks to do the same through the idols men worship, even to controlling and using nations by means of their gods and cultic sanctuaries. This is the story of the nations and of the murderous manipulator—Satan.

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The deadly mistake Satan made in the beginning was to think a kingdom built on sin, evil, hatred and division could remain integrated and powerful. In his self delusion Satan set himself up as the true King and so, in imitation as the River of life, the Bread of life, the Breath of life, the Word of life, the Light of life, the Tree of life. In reality he has ever been the River of death, the Bread of death, the Breath of death, the Word of death, the Light of death, the Tree of death. Only if he had been love itself could life have become the case. How far from love and light is this prince of death and darkness! Only when we understand the matter of Satan being God's ape can we realise the futility of all his actions and corrupt kingdom.

So much is hidden from evil powers regarding the action of history, but no one begins to understand history unless he realises that God is God, and that He will establish His Kingdom—whatever! By nature of the case evil creatures cannot know the means by which this Kingdom will be established. We say at this point, 'It will only be established by love'. Nor can we understand this assertion unless we comprehend that everything was created by love, in love and so for love. By saying 'by love', we are not saying something soft and sentimental but are asserting the strongest being and action of God, a point which we will explain in a later study.

Creation Created by Love, in Love and So for Love

'God is love' is the most powerful assertion of all regarding anything and everything. Because of our consciences and therefore our self-consciousness of being sinners, we are apt to think that God in His kindness is primarily the God of grace as though if He weren't then nothing of what was once to be could now be retrieved. So we think that creation was an act of grace when, in fact, it was an act of love. God is love and not grace, as such, so grace is His action proceeding from love which was always intended to be God's *telos* or *completion* of His plan. Love then is protological of the eschatological. This is another way of saying that the Kingdom of God always was in being and that it was the Kingdom of love (Col. 1:13). God's wisdom was that since He was ever love, then that would be His way of accomplishing His plan for the fulfilling of His Kingdom. We will be speaking much more on this matter, but our point in introducing it here is to explain my statement above, 'By nature of the case, evil creatures cannot know the means by which this Kingdom will be established'. Evil creatures do not see God as love, and all evil is of hatred and is, in fact, homicidal or 'cidal' in all forms of expression, as also it is deicidal. Hatred blinds the eyes to love. Many humans mistakenly hold the view that love is weak and not at all powerful.

We have been talking about Satanic evil being aware of the ontological, hating it and yet functioning in a way as far as possible after the order of seeming to be ontological. We mean that the pride of evil would pressure it to outdo God in all His being and doing—even His righteousness. Luther said that the devil is God's ape. That is why the religion of self-righteousness has waylaid humanity from seeing God as love. Some proud persons even argue that they have a higher view of love than God who allows all sorts of injustice to prevail, who allows deformed children to be born, and so on. God, they say, does nothing about these dreadful matters. Self-righteousness is the expression of human autonomy, the boast that Man can parallel God and even outdo Him.

Even so, the fact still remains that neither Satan nor Man can manufacture a parallel to the life of God. Let us remind ourselves that the River, Bread, Breath,

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Wind and Tree of life are what God *is*, and by means of which He gives life to Man. For to reject these means through the influence of Satan, means that Satan and autonomous Man must devise an equivalent to God's life-giving and life-sustaining power. They devise a surrogate beauty and perfection for themselves. For example, we saw in Romans 1:18–32 (cf. Jer. 2:13) that Man makes the gods or idols to be his cisterns of supply. The elements of human worship which were given in creation are now turned from God to the surrogate gods and a kingdom is devised which is in a sort of a way parallel to all that is truly godly. At the same time there is a kind of hierarchy which rules and which temporarily satisfies the troubled human conscience that the kingdom of evil is properly based. This is the ape up to his tricks. He has ever been a spin-doctor. He gives his spin on all things and how splendid it sounds to anti-God hearers. This devil-ape conscripts the human mind into believing it has lost nothing and has gained much!

In practice, Satan must devise a supply to flow into human cisterns. He must keep Man in the delusion that all is well, and that the 'supply' will flow copiously through the anti-God conduits. These imitations are not gracious and peace giving but are lusts, refined or crude as they may be. They are the lusts of the flesh, of the eyes, and the pride of life. There are cisterns of these enslaving lusts as we have seen in Romans 1:28–31—'*filled* with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. *Full* of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity . . .' As to the heart of fallen Man, Jeremiah has pronounced, 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?' As to the evil movings of the sinful heart, Jesus himself testified that, 'What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man' (Mark 7:20–23). As to the deterioration of a righteous man, we read in Proverbs 25:26, 'Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked'. Perhaps there is no book in the world and in all history which is as wise as the Book of Proverbs which we have just quoted. Its intention is to open the eyes of sinners and fools to the wonderful reality of the things of God. It seeks to unspin the deceit of evil and make plain the truth. Even so, few read it to their own unmasking and, perhaps, liberation from lethal deceit.

THE SUBSTITUTES DEVISED IN PLACE OF THE SUPPLY OF GOD TO THE NEEDS OF HIS PEOPLE

The Heights to Which the Prince of This World Can Take His World, His Creatures

Knowing Satan is a created being—a creature—we ask what he can give us, and to what heights he can raise fallen Man. Milton in his poem *Paradise Lost* depicts him as returning from the victory he achieved in Eden and yet being met by an angry hissing mass of his fellow creatures who criticise him for the outcome of that event. 'Now they cry, "What do we get out of this? Because of what you have done we are condemned all our life to go on our bellies, and forever to eat only dust."' Satan is represented as being a beautiful creature at his creation, perhaps even the most beautiful, who became corrupted by his own beauty and setting as his goal to have his

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throne above the stars of God. Certainly in fact this self-adoring one is cruel and murderous. Jesus said of him:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

Paul says that 'Satan disguises himself as an angel of light' (2 Cor. 11:14). Certainly he represented himself to Jesus as one who had all kingdoms under his command, and that he desired to be worshipped above all things. It is no accident that today the cosmetics industry is a billion-dollar industry; men and women desiring to look beautiful, and somehow to be able to stave off old age and death. No matter what, human creatures desire to represent themselves as true and righteous, yet without the River, without the Water and Bread of life, an ugliness of character creeps into their mortality. They dread death. Dread of life is really dread of death. That we cannot raise anyone higher than what and where we are is surely a fact. The serpent ever goes on its belly; ever eats dust. Its end, as we see time and again, is death, destruction and dissolution. The seeming magnificence of evil powers, their grandiose battles and wars for power, all come to dust and, in view of the lake of fire and the holocaust of final judgment, absolutely nothing eternal has been achieved.

The Substitutes for the River of Life, the Bread of Life, the Breath of Life (etc.) Are the Waters, Bread, and Breath of Death

In Jeremiah chapter 2, God asks Israel a double-barrelled question, 'And now what do you gain by going to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria, to drink the waters of the Euphrates?' We have seen that God is the River which/who gives life. Of course to drink of God means total involvement in Him. To say that they prefer the rivers of Egypt and Assyria to that of God, in spite of the thought in Psalm 46 that 'There is a river, whose streams make glad the city of God', is to say they reject God as the source of life. It was the rivers of Egypt and Assyria which were making glad the people of Israel in the days of Jeremiah. Their trust was in other nations to help them in time of need—to save them from Babylon. From this we can see what drinking means. It means participation in the flow and the idols associated with alternative waters. It means the worshipping within pagan sanctuaries. It means dissociation from God, and the making of friendship with the enemies of God. We will see, later, that the nations which were not for God were against Him, participators in an unrelenting battle against Him. The fact is that if we do not drink of God we can never be satisfied in the ontological way. Hence, we repeat, the need for all evil creatures to live under the lie of Satan. He makes his false way to be the genuine way (cf. Isa. 5:20–23). We know how dangerous impure or stagnant water can be.

Again Psalm 36:8–9 shows the reality of true water and true light: 'They feast on the abundance of thy house, and thou givest them drink from the river of thy delights. For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light do we see light.' Man, as created, expects much pleasure from God, hence, in being deceived, still expects much pleasures from his gods. We can understand why anger compounds itself in the deceived and why Satan must supply pleasure as an antidote. Such pleasure comes from drinking of that which is illicit, from imagining the false to be true—and so on. The permutations are endless. Variety must be supplied. Emptiness must be disguised as

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fullness, true fullness as emptiness. Self-deceit ultimately causes the person to crumble, the *persona* to be corrupted, the truth to become false, the generation to wither, the false 'creation'—the devised 'world'—to become lethal. There is always 'death in the pot'.

Excursus on Creational Gifts

Lest we become confused in regard to God's down-to-earth gifts and blessings, let us see, here, that there is nothing wrong in the use of them and the enjoyment of them. To eat and drink foods and fluids is the way of living in this world, 'For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving', 'by those who believe and know the truth' (2 Tim. 4:1-5; 6:17; 1 Cor. 10:26). When Jesus said to those who had been at the feeding of the five thousand, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal' (John 6:26-27), he was not demeaning bread. He was saying bread is for *this life* and that is OK, but *another kind of bread*, when eaten, gives *everlasting life*. He himself was the bread given for eternal life. At best human bread could only be a symbol of the other kind of bread. So the Water, Bread, Word, Breath, Light of life and all Blessings are the life given to the church, now! Its power is simply God—Father, Son and Spirit—working in the Community of love, now!

Whatever the case, let us never delude ourselves into thinking Satan will desist from his deadly endeavours to deceive us into thinking he is the great benefactor of Man, and that he gives better things than God gives. As we trace the history of the battle in which Satan seeks to oust God from His holy self and holy sanctuary and holy intention, we find that the more we read of the history of the human race and Satanic intention, the more we discover the relentlessness of evil, its attempts to develop a network of unholy sanctuaries and to use all means to defeat God and faithful men and angels. There are few words of Scripture which fail to inform and teach us and bring us into the way of God's wisdom.

Satanic Weakness

Satan's failure lies in the fact that he has never followed the way of truth. How then can he get Man out of his dilemma. How can he be better than God and do better than God does? The answer lies in the fact of the cross and resurrection. By nature of the case he has no cross and can have no cross in his system. This cross, Paul tells us—this 'Christ crucified'—is the power of God and the wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17 - 2:5). Satan may devise an imitation of the cross and even of the resurrection as they are portrayed in Revelation 13:1-4, but the whole action of the red dragon is against the principle of the red cross—the bloodied Saviour of the human race. For Satan and all evil to be confronted with it is far too terrifying to contemplate. Such holiness is horrific for it. To say, 'God is love', would be to unmask falsity and be the death of all evil.

THE GIFTS WHICH ARE THE POWER OF GOD IN THE CHURCH

Throughout the year we have been thinking of power in the church. We are not concerned with power for power's sake which has always wrought havoc in the world

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and its many systems. We are thinking of the life of God among His people as the Water, the Wind, the Bread, the Light of Life. How could Satanic opposites or imitations of the fullness of God ever be stronger than God's own power? We will be seeing the great elements of faith, hope and love as they work power in the people of God who at the same time are the very sanctuary (*naos*) of God in this present world.

Questions

Question One: In 2 Corinthians 2:1–11 Paul had good pastoral advice to offer to the Corinthian church. He says that this was given 'to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for *we are not ignorant of his designs*'. Do we think we think this is generally the case with us as we ponder the nature of Satan and the nature of God?

Question Two: In the sight and mind of God, are all things but a chaos which He will need to recast later? I mean, do we believe that evil is unplanned, unconcerted, and so at best a careless chaos? Can we deduce from the Bible that certainly evil has 'designs' and 'devices'?

ADDENDUM TO OCTOBER STUDY, 2005

PERSONAL ELEMENTS OF THE BATTLE AGAINST EVIL

INTRODUCTION: THEOLOGY AND THE PERSONAL BATTLE

It has come to bear on me lately that Christians can be pumped full of what we call 'theology'. This kind of teaching can be absorbed and become quite helpful in living out our lives. We can become quite knowledgeable and share our knowledge and insights with like-minded folk. In the midst of all this we develop a useful coterie of folk who, banded together, go on from strength to strength, sharing together the ideas and biblical doctrine they gain. Then it may happen that one day we feel that what we are doing is one thing and the personal reality of it all is another thing. One may have a good covering of any doctrine, but when it comes to living it out in practice we may feel quite alone and lonely and unable to apply what we have learned. Why is this so? What can we do about it?

I think it is so because we develop along noetic lines. It is worth giving ourselves time to understand the word 'noetic' by using a good dictionary, for it has come to be used in some ways beyond its origins. Simply it means 'of the mind' and 'thinking things through' even to the point of one being intellectual in one's approach to all one learns. All our gaining of theological material may be noetic. This is not altogether a bad thing, but when one comes to experience in act and fact what has been noetic to us then the gap between knowledge and experience begins to appear.

Take one hypothetical example: I can reason the nature and action of Satan and his evil aides. When Satan and his powers fasten on me then I may be unaware of what is happening. Paul claims that he is aware—and so must we all be—of Satan's devices (designs, tricks, 2 Cor. 2:11). It may happen in my case that I may not know how to deal with this 'close encounter' situation with Satan. The kind of theological understanding I have in my mind is not valueless—not by any means—but I need to be alive to it all so that I can now act properly, appropriately. We could go on forever talking like this but let me take another piece of my noetic theology, if I may use the term here. I know from the text of Scripture that I am indwelled by the Holy Trinity, the Spirit of truth, the one who indwells me right at this point with a view to being my helper, my interpreter, my teacher. I am not alone. I do not just have a text but a person to help me. God's words are spirit and life. I am exhorted by both Peter and James to humble myself, stand fast in the faith, resist the Devil and he will flee from me. What to me is noetic must become immediate and living. As Luther once said,

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'One little word shall fell him'. What then is missing in my equation, my noetic equation?

The answer must be, 'Faith is missing', or, better still, 'Obedience is missing'. We have noted before that everything that we do properly is the response to God's command. The very word of command energises and enables us to obey. We are not being coached: we are being commanded. At the same time we are in communion with God as He dwells in us and we in Him, and this communion is conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit. In other words the ability to reject Satan and cause him to flee is not a particular gift of grace given at a point of time—a gratuity we must then use—but it is the God of all life, the River of all life (etc.) who is one with us and aids us immediately in the direct need. We have to have faith that this is so. The noetic is *practiced*, as it were, in the action of life or it is noetic alone, in isolation from the word of command. Christian life works out in the relationships God and Man have in the life of abiding.

THE DOCTRINE OF ABIDING PERSONALLY AND CORPORATELY

Most of us know that the verb *meno* means 'to remain', 'to abide', 'to dwell'. So many times in John's Gospel Jesus commands his disciples to abide in him. The fruits of abiding are many as chapter 15 shows. For his part he, Christ, will abide in them and his words—which are spirit and life—will abide in them. So the power of Christ through the Holy Spirit will be working and enabling them in their obedience. This then is a powerful relationship. It is indeed the indwelling of God and Man, of the three Persons, of the members of Christ's body and those who are members one of another. This is what we might call corporate abiding.

Now we can have the things of the former paragraph noetically in our grasp, but they may evade us in the outworking of our lives. Again we say that obedience in faith—believing and acting on the word of God with His presence in mind—will show what we have grasped in mind is the living truth, e.g. 'greater is *he that is in you* than he that is in the world', and 'this is the victory which overcomes the world, even our faith', i.e. believing what is so and acting in the light of this truth.

From the outside it would appear that believers in the apostolic era simply went ahead and obeyed the truth and so were victorious over Satan. Take, for example, Revelation 12:10–11:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.'

They certainly did act, but only in the light that Satan had been defeated and would flee from them as they resisted him. They were abiding in Christ as they battled the enemy. In Revelation 19:11–21, Christ's people are one with him as he leads the battle. He is one with them as they all battle.

One of the problems we have is that we may walk only by faith and not by sight. It is what we discover in living by faith which teaches us that human sight—as such—is not profitable. We can become, as it were, loners, absorbing theology and knowing so much when, in fact, we are structured both by God's creation of us and His redemption for us into being in union and communion with Him and so walking by faith.

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If we walk by faith that does not mean we walk blindly. To the contrary: we have a sight which is true sight and that is from and of the things revealed. 'The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may *do* all the words of this law' (Deut. 29:29). What is revealed, is revealed by the Word of life. In Hebrews the faithful see what is to come, and this is the subject of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:18, 'because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal'. These are the unseen things and the seeing is promoted by faith. So, only when we see what is revealed do we do what is commanded.

LIVING IN ABIDING: THE WAY OF LIFE IN GOD

This Addendum has probably raised more questions than it has answered, but it has certainly given the material which will be useful for living the way of abiding. The truth is that we live wholly in God and He lives wholly in us. What we have not discussed in this paper is the goal God has for His creation and redemption which is that He should raise a people for Himself who will have been recreated from their fallen, sinful state to be His children in His family, and to be sanctified, perfected and glorified. How would they reach this state and status except their new life on the earth be an abiding in Him, as He also abides first in His trinitarian self and then in us so that we abide in Him.

The great factor here is worship. Worship issues in and from communion, and it further develops from its love-motivated practice. Each man is a temple of the Spirit of God, wherein true worship of God proceeds personally, continually. The whole body of Christ's people is God's temple. The intimacy with God is lived in the temple of God which is personal and which is at the same time corporate. Worship and service are the one. Not to abide in God, as for God not to abide in Man, is unthinkable and impossible. God's goal will be fulfilled: it is impossible that this will not be achieved. We ask, 'In fact, can one come to this conclusion in being only noetic?' We think not.

STUDY 10: THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—10

THE POWER OF LOVE

Love in the Church

We would expect the matter of love to be well taught in the early church, and for that matter the church down through the centuries. Properly speaking, sinful humanity can only be won in the ultimate by love. The apostolic message was that God had loved us in Christ and by means of his saving death had brought us into redemption. John put it this way in his First Letter:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so 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 expiation [propitiation] for our sins' (1 John 4:9–10).

Paul wrote, 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself [up] for me (Gal. 2:20).

John stated the principle, 'We love, because he first loved us', and meant that because of God's act of love in Christ we now love—both God and fellow-creatures. God's love must trigger off His love in us. Love is a gift. Paul wrote, 'and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us' (Rom. 5:5). That is, the gift of love has been poured into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the coming of the Holy Spirit to believers at Pentecost and all time following, the community of the *ekklesia* has lived in the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the same as saying God has gifted who and what He is wholly to the church. As He is the River, Bread, Word, Breath, Light and Tree of life from eternity, and as these powers affect His people with these all working as the one source of life, so all these powers are him in action. When John the apostle stated twice, 'God is love', then he was communicating more than just a quality or attribute of God. He was stating the very being of God—God as love. All powers, all actions of the Uncreated are the acts of love; love which is other than created human love.

True, we are permitted to know and comprehend God as the River, the Bread, the Word, the Breath and the Tree of life who, as uncreated, work towards Man and the Creation, but they do this in a manner beyond human entities, i.e. natural rivers, bread, words, breath, light and trees. To be God's community we use these natural things in and for life in the creation, but in God we go beyond what is human love, to share in God as love and to be participators in God.¹

¹ At this point we have no need to speak of grades or qualities of love, as though humans experience different sorts of love. If we take it that Man was born from God's love, then we take the various loves of fallen Man to now be fallen. Whatever terms we may use, God is uncreated love and it is that love which must bring us to know and live in God's love. It must be a gift of God, i.e. God come to dwell in us as we saw in Romans 5:5, 1 John 4:19, and Galatians 2:20.

Discovering the Hope of Love

Since Man is in the image of God it was intended that he should reflect God as true love. This was foundational to Man being Man. We may then be compelled to ask, 'What, then, is the hope of love?' We saw in Romans 5:5, 'and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us'. We take it that a paraphrase could be, 'Because God has poured His love—i.e. Himself—into our hearts, we have great hope for the future', i.e. what we are shown now of our future in God, and our present sight of it through love, and as love is so strong and so far beyond what human sight may have shown us, that we are stunned as we are delighted, awed and humbled. What love's hope has shown us has gripped us now for what will be then, and indeed is now experienced to some measure. Theologians call this 'prolepsis', which the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* describes as, '1. The taking of something future as already done, or existing . . . 2b. The anticipatory use of an attribute . . . or anticipation . . . an effect to be produced represented as already produced . . .'² Prolepsis depends upon the prophetic promise as received by faith, and surely, in the light of the love inherent in the promise, the assurance of what will be—i.e. the Holy City of love—makes it to be the living hope we experience in the present. Hebrews 11:13–16 is an excellent example of living in prolepsis:

These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

If belief in the promise of the future is weak, then prolepsis is weak and so faith and hope are weak and the love-to-be in the fulfilment of the hope will likewise be weak and so, ineffective. In the quote above, the words telling us that God has prepared for them a city would be as dynamic as their proleptic sight of that city. Let me give an example. For some reason or other it seemed I was given a sight or revelation of the nature of the Holy City, and especially as the Community of love. Below I will speak of some of the elements I perceived but the primary one was that love had made it to be such a city that in it sin was totally absent. No person could or would sin. Love ruled totally. There was no fear of death, no conflict in regard to place or position. Emulation was non-existent. It was indeed—would be—a love-city. Seeing that, my desire to be a participant in that city greatly enlarged. You might say, 'wholly enlarged'. Nothing which troubles believers in this life would be present. Proleptically I was—as it were—now wholly living in love, even though I was chronologically in a present environment of anti-love. In fact I saw that the difficulties we experience in the present-and-yet-to-be *ekklesia* will have vanished. We presently bemoan our weaknesses and wrong actions: then there will be nothing to bemoan. In fact the glory of the present fellowship of love is that we oppose what we are being tempted to do. We are wholly on the side of righteousness and holiness, even if we sometimes do wrong actions. Our prayer is, 'Don't let us fall in the crisis of temptation'.

² *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 2, Clarendon Pr., Oxford, 1986, p. 1683.

One thing we need to keep in mind is that we must have strong views of this biblical future. At the present time most of those views are pictorial, because the Holy City is presented to us in symbol language. We see a literal city, a literal Bride and Bridegroom. We see a literal city as its measurements are spelled out to us. We are given its size, its kinds of precious metals and then God and the Lamb as its light and as its temple. We see a great River and on both sides of the River variant monthly yielding of fruit from the trees which grow there. That these *symbols* convey great truths of the *actual* city we never doubt. That it is as *literal* in its symbols we do question. Symbols stimulate us to know the meaning and actions of the symbols but we are not conducted to the living realities they represent. We are conducted to these living realities by means of other Scriptures such as we have been looking at in our monthly studies. Paul taught us in 1 Corinthians 2:7–10 that to date no eye has seen, no ear heard, nor any heart conceived the nature of this future city because there are no referents which can conduct us to its nature and reality. Paul can tell us that our bodies will be like Christ's body of glory, but then what is that? The writer of Hebrews tells us that 'faith is the assurance [substance] of things hoped for, the conviction [evidence] of things not seen' (11:1). One does not see what is ahead, but one believes that the promises of God will be fulfilled and so one has hope. The actual look of these things is yet to come. Even so, one is drawn on by what will be. Prolepsis is most powerful.

When we understand in essence the story of God and Man then we can proceed in life in faith, hope and love. When we understand our place and part in that history then we know that God's River gives life, His Bread gives life and so, too all other powers of life which are God Himself in unceasing action. What we know intimately is the action of that life as God acts in us, upon us, and through us. That is proceeding in our lives through faith, hope and love. As we proceed we will see, more and more, that 'the greatest of these is love'. That is what I saw with joy—that we will be, fully, the people of love, living fully in love. I am not saying that we are not people of love, now. We are people of love now perfecting love in a hostile environment. Surely this is what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 13:8–13:

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The meaning of this passage is clear for these jewels of words are crystal clear. At the end of 1 Corinthians 12 Paul had written, 'But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.' That excellent way is the love-way which he presents in the 13th chapter. He was saying, in effect, that love-way *in this age* is essential to the use of the gifts as indeed the gifts are essential to love. When love is not pursued the gifts are worthless. In this age the use of gifts is the very action of love. In the new age gifts will not be necessary to express love. All actions will necessarily be those of love. There is nothing wrong with the use of gifts: indeed they are necessary. When we mature in heaven we will know much we did not know here. We will know even as we are now known.

Within these lines it is implicit that the whole matter of love will be fully unveiled and full in action. The *ekklesia*—the community of love—will come to completion and so form that unified and faithful group of people which was begun in Abel and will be as portrayed as in Titus 2:14, 'who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds'. At this point the reader should thoughtfully consider the reality, the intent and dynamics of Exodus 19:5–6; Deuteronomy 7:6–11; I Peter 2:2–10; Ephesians 2:18–22; Revelation 7:9–14; 19:9; 21:1–4, 22–27).

THE PROLEPSIS: WHAT CAN WE KNOW OF THE FUTURE COMMUNITY?

Our Addendum for this month sets out a brief 'History of Love' as formerly we set out a brief 'History of Faith'. What we are dealing with now is that part of the history of love which is and will be the true power of the church, and we are looking at the church now and in the *telos*. Our Corinthian passage (above) appears to say that on this earth we go through stages in which we see love in action and are developed to maturity by that love-action in the community. Ahead, in the *telos*, will be the perfection of love but there is now a proceeding maturation of love. Above, in the last paragraph on page 2, I spoke of having an experience of a heightened awareness of the ultimate love-community. This heightened awareness may have come from a post-operative effect of surgery anaesthesia. It does not matter, since it simply highlighted the fact of *telos* love, and the aspect I saw was quite biblical, i.e. that everything will be in love and nothing of human evil, nothing of spiritual pride, competition and emulation will be able to disturb the Love Community. As I said, all elements of love as described in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8b were/are extant in this present eschatological age:

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

The truth is no church could have survived without this wonderful action of love. The battle it fights is titanic. It is a matter of dire necessity, as indeed was the loving action of all gifts. In eternity all the sinful, selfish things which are found in the eschatological community will not be in the ultimate *ekklesia*. In our Addendum we see love was in faithful men and women even in spite of the Fall, just as hatred and cruelty were present because of the Fall.

We have already noted that God is love, and so love is not just a thing of abstract quality, nor prescribed ethical actions. God as love is working among His people. At the same time the believer is indwelt by God, and at the same time indwells God. As the truth of the three Persons interdwelling one another, so is the truth of believers inter-dwelling God and one another. *This is the true and basic power of the church*, as we later examine and set it forth. Romans 5:5 speaks of God pouring His love into our hearts until it is an ocean of love. In fact John shows us that when we love Christ and keep his commandments then the Father and the Son come and dwell within us (John 14:15–21; cf. 1 John 2:3–6; 4:12; 5:2). At that point the Holy Spirit also dwells within us. Paul presents it in a slightly different fashion. In Ephesians 3:14–19 he prays 'that

Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God'. The inter-dwelling of God and believing Man are the living of God in the faithful person as the River of life, the Bread of life, the Breath of life—and so on—all these elements constituting one whole and being simultaneous in action. All these elements and powers are what make Man into the love-creature he becomes as he drinks, eats, hears, breathes—and so on. We emphasize again that it is the full flow of all these elements of God acting simultaneously.

So then, we only know love in the action of life. Knowing love is what causes us to love—'We love because he first loved us'. In principle, knowing love is really knowing God. The outward actions reveal the unseen God. First John 4:12 says this well, 'No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us'. 'His love is perfected in us' can be translated, 'his love has come to its full goal, or completion, within us'. We have not come to perfection of love, but live by the indwelling perfection of God's love. Our part in this action—so to speak—is seen in 1 John 2:5, 'But whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected', i.e. God's perfect love dwelling in us who are not perfect in love is God's intention to make us perfect in love. This is His divine intention to perfect His community of eternity for eternity. On the basis of this principle we can now look at other apostolic teaching.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING AND GROWING IN LOVE

Having seen with delight that the *telos* or fulfilment determines the reality and substance of present hope, i.e. what God will have to be will be, we look at the present *paraclesis* of love. Since God's love is known only in and by revelation, it is quickly possible for us to fall away from the true understanding and practice of love. We can substitute the doing of certain actions in knowing that we should love, but those actions may not constitute love. Constant reading of 1 Corinthians 13 will keep us alert to what Paul calls 'imitation love' which is so dangerous. In 2 Corinthians 6:6 he speaks of genuine or unfeigned love as a great power, and in 1 Corinthians 13 he describes the use of gifts without love: love has been an imitation one. Peter speaks of 'Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere [unfeigned] love of the brethren' (1 Pet. 1:22). This sounds very much like John in principle. John attacks false love in 1 John 4:20, 'If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

On the other hand the apostles are delighted when they hear of the love of the brethren, for this accords with apostolic practice i.e. when the people hear the *kerugma* (proclamation of the gospel) then they are flooded with love for one another (1 John 4:19; Rom. 5:5). This new company is the *koinonia* (fellowship), seeking to be taught (*didache*) and glad to be exhorted (*paraclesis*). So Paul exhorts, 'Let all that you do be done in love' (1 Cor. 16:14). This covers all things that are done. He says in sequence, 'If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed' (v. 22), and adds 'My love be with you all in Christ Jesus (v. 24).

That 'the labour of love' (1 Thess. 1:3) is in our hands, i.e. within the personal work of obedience, is quite clear. Paul speaks of a fellow-worker who had accompanied him for some years, 'For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia' (2 Tim. 4:10). That Demas's love had grown cold and his love for the world had grown strong is clear. The apostle John had spoken against love for the world (1 John 2:15–17), for the world, anyway, is ever passing away. When Christ is writing to his people at Ephesus (Rev. chs 2 – 3, especially 2:4–5; cf. 2:19), he warns them strongly to be renewed in love and to do this they must repent for they have abandoned their first love. They are in danger of losing their place as a lampstand, shining truth out to a deceived world. 'First love' brings the first works, but continuing love brings later works which are even better (2:19).

In Jude 20 – 21 the writer exhorts, 'But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life'. One has the responsibility to keep oneself in God's love. This is doubtless in accord with an Old Testament statement in Zephaniah 3:17, 'The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, *he will renew you in his love*; he will exult over you with loud singing' (emphasis mine).

There is also a community ministry in provoking one another to love and good works as the writer of Hebrews 10:24 exhorts: 'let us consider how to stir one another to love and good works'. Linked with this is an interesting development in both the Thessalonians Epistles. We touch on this development in our Addendum to this paper.

CONCLUSION: THE POWER OF LOVE IN THE CHURCH TODAY

As we draw near to the close of our studies on power in the Church today, we begin to sense that just one more study—that for December—will still leave us a long way from covering this theme. For this reason we need to give ourselves to a wider reading of the Scriptures. What we can say in brief is that it is God dwelling in the midst of His people who brings His own power as the River of life to flow to us, and then in us, and then through us. Likewise, as the Bread, the Breath, the Word and Tree of life, He is the one God who comes to have intimate union with us, and to give us communion in that union. His presence in us firstly as Creator, and then as Redeemer means He creates the love community for that eternity of being *in*, and being *as* the Holy City. The Holy City is the outcome of God's creative and redemptive work, issuing as it does in utter sanctification, utter glorification, utter perfection. Only such a God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—can make such a people to be, and such a City to be the centre of all worship for all creatures for all eternity.

Questions and Suggestions for Participation

1. Let us share the idea of love as the power of God.
2. How was the apostolic church in the matter of love, and was love so dynamic? What is our understanding of all this today, as well as the practice of love?
3. Can we formulate something of the dynamics of love for now, and then for the Holy City?

ADDENDUM FOR NOVEMBER STUDY, 2005

A BIBLICAL HISTORY OF LOVE

A thematic study will always have deficiencies. Going through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation will yield great treasures for the explorer. Even so, it is very easy for a teacher to so write or speak that 'love' as a word has a life of its own which is so static as to be virtually lifeless, and soon becomes abstract as a thing in itself. Yet, for most of us, one incident of being loved and we will resonate to what love is. It will colour our view of love. Sometimes one is saddened by the use of many references because the theme is not palpable, not warm and living. The treatment of it is plastic, a bending it to the writer's will. When any subject is grasped noetically it may be a great help, but it needs to go further than the mind, even if the mind is essential to comprehension of the whole. Take the ancient Shema in Israel:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' (Deut. 6:45).

Again in 1 Peter 1:8, 'Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy'. I am not suggesting we try to work up emotion but what Jonathan Edwards calls 'the affections' come into play when we look at the story of love in the Scriptures.

- (i) Our history of love—if it can be called that—is based in the nature of God, i.e. in the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Late in our history has come the notion set before us of the Triune God, and we have come to see that these Three inter-dwell one another. The apostle John's twice repeated 'God is love' is the amazing revelation which came to him—and so to us—through the incarnation of God's Son, Jesus of Nazareth. Whilst later we will examine this great doctrine, we simply enter our subject with the knowledge of the Trinity. 'God is love' tells us that the only work God would be about must essentially be the work of love, however we may qualify that love, i.e. through terms such as 'holy', 'compassionate', 'elective', 'providential' and so on.
- (ii) We take it for granted that when God created He had a goal in mind. All things were oriented towards that fulfilment or *telos* as we call it. In Ephesians 1:5–6 Paul wrote, 'He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved'. The words 'in love' show us that all creation was a love creation. By nature of the case this phrase was not used, but it would have been natural for the man to love God as his creator. The creation of his wife from his side brought great ecstasy to him and becoming 'one flesh' the couple must have seen this as God's act of love. Being 'one flesh' must have been the

height of human experience. What some call 'providential love' must then—as later—have been recognised.

- (iii) The first man stated to be a man of love was Abel. John in his First Letter (3:9–18) indicates this quite clearly. Not to love one's brother is to be in league with the Devil. God's demand for love is there from the very beginning. To kill one's brother is to go against the good order of creation. To be in the image of God is to love the family of Man. God takes the initiative in love: as John put it, 'We love, because he first loved us'. Whatever the statement 'Enoch walked with God' may mean, it certainly points to a love relationship, especially when its climax was, 'Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him' (Gen. 5:24). Jude 14–15 indicates that Jude like Abel was a prophet, a lover of God. In this early stage of human history we hear of men calling upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:25-26), a wonderful matter. From that time onwards the family of Man becomes so loveless that the whole earth is filled with violence and corruption, requiring God's judgment of the Flood. The creational covenant whereby Man was brought into working partnership with God (Gen. 1:26–30) was now fully established with Noah and his family. However, there was little living by it, and Man became anti-loving towards God. Even so, he made his gods and idols so that his love became centered on them.
- (iv) It is clear that from the time of creation until the time of Abram (Abraham), Man showed little love towards God, but there was a form of love between human persons and between them and their gods. It seems Man cannot exist without loving someone or something—his idols. Abraham, from being an idolater, was called into true love of God. This was shown by the special covenant God 'cut' with Abraham, and Abraham's preparedness to sacrifice his only son, to give the priority of love to God (Gen. 22:1–19). Here he shows his love for God as being primary in his life.
- (v) It is with the advent of Jacob and his children that God sets Himself forth as the God of Israel and as the God of love. The whole matter of God's covenantal love is seen in the history of Israel. The covenant demands that the people of Israel become God's special people, that they love Him, and that they love mutually as a special people. Deuteronomy 7:1–11 is a fine commentary on God's loving His people and they obeying Him out of that love. Indeed the whole book of Deuteronomy is a marvellous commentary on God's love, out of which the people love Him and one another. The Pentateuch is filled with this matter of love and with prescriptions concerning God's love to Israel and theirs to Him and their own people.

The history that ensues from Israel until the coming of Christ is one of the refusal to be loved by God and to love Him and obey Him. So the history is one of Israel's love for the idols and not for their Creator, who now comes to be seen by the faithful remnant of Israel to be their Redeemer. It is remarkable what news and communications the prophets bring to the nation before and during the times of exile. These men speak of God's love as being spurned by Israel who has been elected by God to be His wife. Her choice of evil partners brings judgment upon her. God will not be demeaned and will judge, yet in it, all His love has been shown as beautiful, and He will rehabilitate her (e.g. Hosea 3:16–23).

(vi) It is the New Testament and Christ has come. Now there is a wealth of materials on the matter of love. Christ as the Word tabernacles amongst us and is ever showing the love of the Three Persons. It is at this point that the first paragraph (above) comes back into mind. In the words of love, love is spoken and the doctrine of love fills it out but it is only as 1 Peter 1:8 faces and confronts us that we live in the affection of love—'Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy'. I appreciate the down to earth exegesis of some of the best of our theological leaders today, but the bottom line and the top line too, for that matter, is that we *know* God's love as the most glorious of all knowledge and experience. It appears to me that the New Testament is consonant with the Old Testament and that the revelation of it—as we have seen it in this month's Ministry Study—is beyond all that human beings know and of which they might dream. Perhaps it would be helpful to read it again, especially when we think of the hope of love. The hope of love is that God has so unveiled love as we will share it in eternity, that our hearts are now set at peace because all which awaits us ahead will be love. The long battle will have ceased. There will be nothing to fear, for the perfect love of God will have cast out that fear thing (1 John 4:18). Created in love for love, we will meet nothing evil but will be in the presence of Him who is love, seeing His face continually. The redeemed will be the community of love. We will know even as also we are known. A few statements concerning love might be appropriate for our thinking at this point:

Let all that you do be done in love (1 Cor. 16:14).

Owe no one anything except to love one another . . . (Rom. 13:8).

If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed (1 Cor. 16:22).

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing (1 Cor. 13:1–31f.).

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

STUDY 11: THE MATTER OF POWER IN THE CHURCH—11

FROM CREATION TO THE CROSS TO THE *TELOS*

The Reason for the Need of Power in the Church

In this study we draw together—so far as is possible—the material we have used in our ten studies from February to November. In the earlier studies we spoke of the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), of the gospel (Rom. 1:16–17), of the word of the cross which is virtually the same (1 Cor. 1:18), of the power of Christ's resurrection (Phil. 3:10), and in our last study of the power of love (Rom. 5:5f. and other texts). I suppose we took it for granted that the church would need power to witness to Christ, but we did not ask 'Why does the church need power?' We did not even ask, 'Why the church?' let alone, 'Why Christ?' We cannot open up the vast tracts of ground needed to explain the questions here stated. But we must provide some kind of an answer to them. This is what we must see. It involves both power as strength and ability (*dunamis*) and power as authority (*exousia*).

God's purpose in creation was to raise up a community (*koinonia; ekklesia*) composed of humanity, each person of which would be so like Himself that he would be the perfect image and likeness. That is what He had in view. It is presupposed then that the community would live in a creation which would be peerless, fitted for such a God and such a peerless community that it would be—like God—holy, perfect and full of glory. Before the day could come for this transformation of humanity its fall in Eden under Adam would have to be entirely cancelled. Humanity would have to be so forgiven its sins and so justified by God's grace that it would never again revert to disobedience but would be as dependable as God's Son himself, having been transformed into his image, and having received the gift of immortality—eternal life—sin and death being vanquished forever. *Man would have to become as magnificent in his humanity as Christ in his humanity.* None of this could be achieved without: (i) God sending His Son into the world to accomplish salvation; (ii) the salvation to be through the incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and reigning of the Son; and (iii) the true community of love being the messengers of salvation through: (a) Christ's Lordship and Leadership; (b) through the power of the Father; and (c) through the revelation of the truth to the church by the Holy Spirit in order to be the community of love, and so empowered as to be the active witness to the love of God for all time and eternity. None of this plan, purpose and intention of God can be achieved apart from the power and authority of God. All creation is involved in its initiation and completion.

What Constitutes Power in the Church

It is axiomatic to say that all power (Heb. *oz*; Gk *dunamis*) belongs to God. Psalm 62:11 has it, 'Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God'.

Many other biblical references could be quoted in favour of this fact. To many of the human race—if not all—the matters of power (*dunamis*) and authority (*exousia*) are primary matters. John Milton once wrote in the poem *Lycidas*, 'fame is the spur'. The main reason Man likes to have power is told in the mandate of Genesis 1:26–30 in which Man was given lordship over all the earth (cf. Ps. 8). The lordship involved the Kingdom of God. Man was to be regal. That is why he likes to exercise power, for the legitimate power and delegated authority is part of being really Man. Fame for its own sake is to be despised as selfish and gross. History involves the legitimate and illegitimate exercise of power and authority. Theologians speak of the act of creation and the commission of Man as 'the beginning of the end' and the completion of the things of time as 'the end of the beginning'. Biblically, power is strength and ability to accomplish God's plan along with God, whilst authority relates to rule in the given category of an office. Power and authority have to be used in the processes of history, but there is a right and wrong use of these two elements. The right use is directed by God. The wrong use is linked with Satan whose mind is that 'fame is the spur'.¹

Satan deceitfully puts it out that he will ultimately rule over all creation and his subjects will rule with him. God truthfully puts it out that ultimately his kingdom will prevail and his loving subjects will reign in the Kingdom of the Son of his love. The truth is that Satan and all incorrigible evil persons and powers will be utterly destroyed as in the lake of fire. In his state of being innocent, primal Man had both power and authority to rule the whole earth. He was lured into disobedience, refusing to be one with God in obedience to His [God's] word, law and plan for time and eternity. Man's alienation from God meant his becoming the slave of Satan—the prince of the power of the air who perpetually works in the children of disobedience. This has meant that there are two communities on the earth, and they continually clash as they fight for power and authority.

Power in the Church Today

Our theme this year has been to look at the matter of power in the church. We have been cutting a wide swathe, generally referring to God as the one with great power in His various elements pertaining to life, such as the River of life, the Bread of life and so on, and we will return to this matter later in our paper. Whilst the word 'authority' is used some 32 times in the New Testament, the word 'power' is used 210 times. Power (*dunamis*) is an important word and theme. We asked ourselves frankly whether there is great power in the churches of today and whether or not some churches are simply pragmatic, running as organisations and using modern methods of organisation, communication and promotion.

As we now take up the matter of power in the church² we will confine ourselves to certain texts which speak of active power, asking ourselves whether this is virtually how we know and have power in the church today.

¹ Readers should search out the whole matter of the terms 'power' and 'authority' in Theological Dictionaries and Word Studies volumes. At times 'power' and 'authority' are almost synonymous.

² The community of God as it has been in Israel and the *ekklesia*—the church—has always had a certain authority as a community for its own life and management. It has always had power to pursue God's will. Jesus only spoke of the church in two passages—Matthew 16:13–20 and Matthew 18:15–20. However, throughout the four Gospels Christ speaks to his disciples, the faithful people who do his will. In Acts the *ekklesia* is set forth as an active community. The Epistles contribute to the teaching regarding the church. Likewise Revelation speaks clearly of the people of God. The Ephesians Epistle clearly defines the true nature of the church. We will not try to do this in our present paper.

The Promise and Gift of Power in the Church in the New Testament

John the Baptist, who came in the name of the Kingdom and as forerunner to the coming of Israel's Messiah, made it quite clear that the baptism in water was one matter but being baptised in the Spirit was far beyond simple discipleship baptism. In the Old Testament there were examples of the Spirit being poured out on single persons and in one case on a group of seventy elders. There were also prophetic promises of the Spirit yet to come. These generally pointed to the renewal of Israel following God's judgments of the nation (e.g. Isa.). One special promise was in Joel chapter 2, especially in verses 28–32:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit. 'And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.'

The pouring out of water often referred to in Isaiah was tantamount to the Spirit being poured out on the Servant of God or Israel as the servant of God. It is the closest we can come to the term 'the baptism in the Spirit', i.e. water or the Spirit being poured from on high as happened at Pentecost. The accounts of the Spirit's work in Ezekiel 36:22–28 and 37:1–14 seem to exemplify this.

On one occasion Jesus spoke of the gift of the Spirit, 'If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!' (Luke 11:13). On the whole he did not otherwise amplify what John the Baptist had said. In John's Gospel much is said by him of the Holy Spirit, especially in chapters 14 to 16. The Holy Spirit was to be another one such as he, Jesus, was. Without going into a long description, we know the Holy Spirit would work in the world after Jesus had gone to be with his Father. Through him the disciples would do greater things than even Jesus had done. The Spirit would teach Jesus' followers 'all things'. He would bring to their memory all things he had ever said and done. He would lead them into the truth.

So would the Spirit ever be in the world. This *eschaton* era would forever be 'the day of the Spirit'. John 16:7–11 tells part of the coming story:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

We need to concentrate on this passage for much of the thought contained in it. Elsewhere we will speak of the necessity of destroying all that is evil so that the new creation or new world will contain nothing evil, all evil having been destroyed totally and forever. Jesus had said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matt. 19:28). No new world (the *paliggenesis*) can be possible without a mighty work of God.

We think of the vast task the Holy Spirit would have to accomplish until the new creation would be complete, for without the Holy Spirit completing it there could be no fail-proof new world, no utterly dependable 'community of love'. The *first work* would be to convince or convict the entire world of sin. Note that it is not a work a human can do unaided. Let a human being without the Holy Spirit try to do such a work and see whether it is humanly possible. Such conviction only God can accomplish. Such conviction is necessary to accomplish or the world will claim it is able to defy God and prove Him wrong. When we think about the manner in which God brings conviction through His Spirit we are stunned by such power and such working. It is not noetic 'power' which can bring this to pass. All evil seeks to use its power to defy God by lies and cunning deceit. The sin which is blatant and which will be brought to conviction is 'because they do not believe in me', i.e. that all sin is at heart defiance of Christ the Word, Son of the eternal Father, Creator of all things, Redeemer of all sins, Sanctifier, Glorifier and Perfecter of all sinners—those sinners who repent of their sins and believe properly in this one, Jesus Christ.

The *second work* would be to convict the whole world of righteousness. In this case it is to believe that Christ—far from being rejected by God as a pretender to the heavenly throne—is acknowledged creation-wide as Messiah and Holy King, the true occupant of the Throne of God with his Father, in the light of Psalms 8 and 2. He is the only one among mankind to rightly be placed at the right hand of God and reign eternally over all creation. It is this truth that the Holy Spirit brings through ceaselessly to the church, and the church, under the Spirit's power, tells it ceaselessly to the world.

The *third work* would be to convict the world of judgment because the prince of this world is judged. This one called 'the ruler of this world' is 'Satan', also called 'the devil', 'the red dragon', 'liar' and 'murderer' from the beginning. His whole 'word' is the word of deceit. He aspires to destroy the true work of God and replace it with the claim that he will set his throne above the stars of God, meaning he will rule over all powers and angels and be greater than God. As Luther said, 'One little word shall fell him'. The 'little word' is the great word of salvation. The Holy Spirit will reveal to us that by means of Christ's cross, resurrection, ascension and reigning God has judged the prince of this world, doomed him to destruction, proving him to be the evil one who can never attain to the throne of God. That message gives relief and peace to those who would proclaim the *kerugma* (message) of salvation.

We may think that the Holy Spirit will aid us to cause Satan to fall, that the Spirit is there to aid us. Whilst that may be part of the Spirit's action yet his action is on a greater scale. *He* will convict *the world*, i.e. that which is from one point of view the world of human beings God has created, including those who have been blinded to the truth by Satan. Yes, surely he will use the gospel for this nations-wide ministry. That is his work in this age. He calls—even commands—us to work with him for, being as he is the Third Member of the triune Godhead, he brings us assurance and guarantee that what we cannot do *of ourselves* he will accomplish using us in the ministry of proclamation. He will reveal this to us. Yes, he will reveal all things by his power. He will reveal all that the word of God tells us, even to 'the deep things of God'. We will know the Alpha and Omega of all things, the plan of God from beginning to end. This is what undergirds us, strengthens us, delegating authority to us to declare all things—all the truth to a sinful world. This is the same authority Christ delegated when he said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and

make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age' (Matt. 28:18–20).

The Coming and Action of Power in the Church by the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Above we noted some New Testament verses relating to power in the church. In our first studies we spoke about Acts 1:8—the power of the Holy Spirit; 1 Corinthians 1:17 – 2:5—the power of the word of the cross; Romans 1:16–17—the power of the gospel; Romans 15:19–20—again, the power of the Spirit and the word of God; Philippians 3:10—the power of his resurrection. To these we may also add Romans 5:5 regarding the pouring of the love of God into our hearts when we were weak, i.e. powerless.

What we will now do is speak on some of these points, linking them together. Our overall point is simply this. Man being dead from the fall in Eden is unable to understand the mind and plan of God. Even if he were literate and given hard copy of the truth it would be unintelligible to him. God has worked in history for the salvation of Man and that work is a Trinitarian one. The Spirit has worked along with the Father and the Son. Christ has worked a full gospel but it is still unintelligible until the Spirit unveils its reality to Man. Jesus said that he and the Father would send the Spirit and the Spirit would be their Teacher, teaching them all things, leading them into all truth. So, by the Spirit, the gospel would be made understandable. The Holy Spirit would convict his hearers of sin, righteousness and judgment and those who would really hear would come to new birth, and so to salvation. The verses above can now be seen in the light of our overall point, i.e. that the Holy Spirit unfolds the powerful mystery of the cross, the burial, the resurrection, the ascension and reigning at God's right hand, and the mighty effects of this reigning King. Since Christ crucified is the power and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), and there is the power of Christ's resurrection (Phil. 3:10; cf. 1 Cor. 15:3–5) and these are brought to us by the Holy Spirit who now dwells within us (Rom. 8:9–11; Eph. 3:16–17; 5:18), then filled with the Spirit, the newborn person knows the magnificent truth of God. The community of love under Christ will defeat all evil and bring in the Kingdom of God in its fullness.

Take then the verses nominated in the paragraph but one above. Acts 1:8 says clearly, 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you'. That is surely simple enough and we know that at Pentecost this is what happened, and as such still goes on happening. If persons within the church are not baptised in the Spirit, then this does not happen through them, i.e. the revelation of the Spirit does not come to them and they are unable to work in power.³ Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:24 that Christ crucified, whilst a scandal to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek is in fact 'the power of God and the wisdom of God'. Who, unaided by the Spirit, could understand this mystery? At the same time if we do not understand the mystery we will never know the power of God in our lives. Likewise, 'the power of his resurrection'. If Philippians 3:10 is not understood that means we are always in fear of death and judgment and so without salvation. We cannot proclaim with power.

If to this we add all the insight regarding the power of love (November study) then it means that without the Spirit we cannot reveal the love of God to Man through the

³ There is much debate concerning the Holy Spirit and our being baptised into him or by him. A small book speaking of this is *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit* by Geoffrey Bingham (NCPI, Blackwood, 2003). A larger volume is *The Day of the Spirit* by Geoffrey Bingham (NCPI, Blackwood, 1985), with a section on the subject.

work of Christ, and so we cannot live with the love of God filling our hearts. We are thus loveless and so are without obedience to God. Here we should read 1 John 2:3–5 and 5:2–3, for they are the tests of whether the love of God has been perfected in us. For a further test see the whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 13.

THE FULL POWER OF GOD DWELLS WITHIN US AS WE INDWELL HIM

Throughout our series this year we have spoken of the source and presence of power, in that God dwells in us and we in Him. The words Israel treasured were, 'And I will make my abode among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people' (Lev. 26:11–12; cf. Ezek. 37:27; Exod. 25:8; Jer. 31:1; John 1:14; Rev. 21:3–4). God has always dwelt amongst us, primarily in His sanctuary which was the temple that represented his people in worship. It is so in both Testaments, the climax coming in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. Revelation 21:3 says, 'and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them."'

In John 4:16–24 Jesus taught the new principle, that material temples are no longer needed—as such. It is the Father who is to be worshipped and He alone initiates and enables such worship. Paul calls this worship of God in the Spirit in Philippians 3:3, as against worship of God in the flesh.

The special point of God dwelling with us is brought out in the teaching of 1 Corinthians 3:16 where the church is God's temple in which He dwells. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 the body of each person is a temple of the Holy Spirit. This teaching is expanded in Ephesians 2:17–22, and then in 1 Peter 2:4–10 the church is God's *naos* or holy sanctuary, equalling what is said of Israel in Exodus 19:5–6, 'Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'

We take the point then that God indwelt His people Israel, and now indwells His people of the *ekklesia* so His indwelling affects the church. Where God indwells, it is there that His authority and power are in action from Himself. Below we will speak of this indwelling God in terms of all His elements which are life giving. Our next point touches on the mutual inter-dwelling of the Three Persons of the Trinity and the inter-dwelling of God and Man.⁴

'God Dwells in a Man—a Man Dwells in God'

In John 6:56 Jesus told us, 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood *abides in me and I in him*'. In 10:38 he said, 'but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that *the Father is in me and I am in the Father*'. In 14:11 he added, '*Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me*; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves'. Then a

⁴ Although within the scope of our subject is the matter of God dwelling in His own sanctuary as we can see it in Eden, in the ancient world among His faithful people (e.g. Jacob and Bethel), in Israel, in the church, in the Holy City where God Himself is the sanctuary, we can trace the life of the people of God. An excellent aid—among other recent publications—dealing with this theme is *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole and published by Paternoster Press, Wheaton, in 2004.

few verses later he spoke of the Holy Spirit indwelling them (vv. 15–17), 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, *to be with you for ever*, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for *he dwells with you, and will be in you.*' Then in 14:23 we read, 'Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" '.

In John we have so far seen that the Father and the Son inter-dwell one another, and then that the Three Persons inter-dwell men and women of faith. John chapter 15 speaks of the disciples inter-dwelling him who is the vine. The way to fruitfulness is to abide, i.e. deliberately remain, stay and continue dwelling in Christ. This and other contexts show that abiding is obedience (cf. 1 John 2:4–5; 5:2–3), and we have already stated that God's love comes to its fullness where there is obedience.

It is when we come to John 17 that we see the importance of inter-dwelling. In verses 20–23 Jesus prays, 'I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, *that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.*' Inter-dwelling brings perfect unity.

Inter-dwelling is related to the doctrine of *perichoresis* which is virtually the doctrine of two or more persons opening themselves to those others, i.e. giving space and hospitality to one another. One assumes that the statements 'in Christ', 'in the Lord', 'in the Father', found so plentifully in the New Testament letters all refer to this indwelling. The subject is as vast as well as a powerful one. What does it mean for a man to dwell in God, and for God to dwell in a man? Our answer is that we have faith in God, that whilst inter-dwelling cannot be by sight, yet it is known by faith, in faith. Sometimes it even seems to break through into human feelings of awareness but that is not essential.

The following verses as a whole are very powerful. They state what we surely know. No one can talk us out of their reality. God is in us: we hide in Him: we dwell in Him. There has never been a time when we—His faithful ones—have not dwelled in Him and He in us. All His powers are with us, to be used as He chooses to distribute and use them in an amazing partnership. *It is because of this that there is power in the church*, i.e. God is most intimately in His own sanctuary. Below we will look at the powers or supply of those powers from the very actions of God:

The eternal God is your dwelling place,
and underneath are the everlasting arms.
And he thrust out the enemy before you,
and said, Destroy (Deut. 33:27).

For he will hide me in his shelter in
the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent,
he will set me high upon a rock (Ps. 27:5).

O God, thou art my God, I seek thee,
my soul thirsts for thee;
my flesh faints for thee,

as in a dry and weary land where no water is.
So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary,
beholding thy power and glory.
Because thy steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise thee (Ps. 63:1–3)

How lovely is thy dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yea, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God (Ps. 84:1–2).

LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place
in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting thou art God (Ps. 90:1–2).

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust' (Ps. 91:1–2)

If these Old Testament expressions of love for God's sanctuary are beautiful, how much more in the New Testament where the church is the people of God in whom the Father, and so the Spirit dwell, and in which the people of God are built together for the holy sanctuary of God, as we have seen. Now we may venture to see the work of God in the lives of His people and the future which we will deal with under the heading 'The Powerful Hope of Love'.

The Power of God Living and Working within Us

When God who created us, who redeems and glorifies us, lives in each person of faith and at the same time corporately as we are His community and family, then we are encouraged and stimulated as we speak of Him as the one who gives biological life, and also eternal life, and all needed power for time and eternity.

We have spoken of God from the Scriptures as the God who is the River of life, the Bread of life, the Word of life, the Breath of life, the Light of life, and the Tree of life. We remind ourselves that these terms are not just figures of God, but they are what He provides as He is in His eternal nature as Creator. From Him we receive river (water), bread, word, breath, light and tree for living biologically in this world. We know that Man is spiritually dead. He needs the supply of God as River (Water), Bread, Word, Breath, Light and Tree as these are all elements essential for our total living as God originally created life. Fallen Man cannot access God in His being as River (Water), Bread, Word, Breath, Light and Tree. He needs first to be saved by the forgiveness of his sins through the cross/resurrection event, and the justification they give before the law. This involves God's action of new birth or regeneration so that now Man as a new creation can—indeed must—drink of the River of (God's) life, eat from Him as the Bread of life, hear the Word of life and obey Him, draw life from the Breath (Spirit of life), live in and by the Light of life, and eat of the Tree of life. God as these life-giving powers is never apart from us. All these elements constitute God, i.e.

eternal life, as He is. We stress the action of believing and receiving these elements for there are commands that we should do so.⁵

One example of our action is seen in response to the command to come and partake of the supply:

Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness (Isa. 55:1–2).

In like vein Psalm 34:8 bids us, 'O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy is the man who takes refuge in him!' Of the word of God Psalm 119:103 speaks warmly, 'How sweet are thy words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!' and 1 Peter 2:3 says, 'for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord'.

In Jeremiah 2:13 God rebukes Israel for not drinking of Him, the Fountain of Living Waters, and later further rebukes them for drinking of the waters of Egypt and Assyria. When, later, Christ offers the Samaritan woman the water of eternal life she is expected to ask and drink. In John 6:35 Jesus speaks of hearers *coming* to him and *believing* on him so that they will not continue to hunger and thirst. In 7:37–39 Jesus again demands that his hearers *come* and *believe* so that they will not only be satisfied but also will have rivers of living water flowing from their inner beings.

Our conclusion is that God does not dwell in us as a static being. He has been described as 'pure action'. He acts within us, offering us the things of life and then demanding that we respond and so receive what He has promised us. Properly speaking, His power is sufficient for the church to offer salvation to the created world and proceed as the Community of love 'in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life'.

The Hope of Love and Its Present Prolepsis

In another paper—the November one—we have described what prolepsis is. It is a view of and sense of the future when all things will be completed in the fulfilment of God's plan. So strong is the assurance of what will be, that we know we can depend upon it happening and so we are counting now on what will be. This confidence tells us the future will not fail us, so that we work now in the light of that fail-safe future. In our November study we saw the part love plays in the final climax and especially in the life of the Community of love, God's *am segulla*, His 'prized possession', His *laos periousios*—'people for his own possession' (cf. Deut. 7:6–11; Exod. 19:5–6; Titus 2:14). In fact, what we are considering are those things and the state which shall be. We note that in Hebrews believers live in prolepsis because the promises of the future are made by no less than God Himself.

In John 14:1–5 we have the heart-warming passage concerning Jesus' going to the Father and his *preparing* a place for the disciples—the children of the Father. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:9 of 'what God has *prepared* for those who love him'. He says, 'But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man

⁵ I suggest we go back over our speaking of God as the God who is the River of life, the Bread of life, the Word of life, the Breath of life, the Light of life, and the Tree of life, and see how necessary these powers of God are for our lives which have become truly living by participating in them. We will be greatly enriched by deliberately receiving all things from God in His giving. They are part of what Paul calls 'the whole spiritual blessing' (Eph. 1:3).

conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him', and goes on to say, 'God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.' That is, we have more than an intimation of what will be in heaven, the Paradise prepared for us, which is the Holy City, the very Bride of Christ. The essence of it all is imprinted within us by the Holy Spirit.

In 1 John 3:1–3, John tells us how magnificent is our future:

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

That *we shall be like him* is a beautiful promise: a promise of beauty. We here keep that in mind for a later concentration on it. The picture we are now developing from these Scriptures is a wonderful one indeed.

Romans 5:5 adds the dimension of love, 'and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us'. At present we have to visualise a community which is purely of love: to date we have not seen one of pure love. Even so, we live in a community—the church—which does have so much of God's pure love in it. This, too, is part of the hope of love. What we will be will be the fruit and result of love. We will all be lovers as 1 Corinthians 13 describes persons of love, and as we developed this thought in our November paper. We will all have the love that is described in that chapter, especially in verses 4 to 8a:

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends . . .

With delight we visualise a community of this ilk—love embracing us all, with hate banished forever! All things not of God will have been banished forever.

In Matthew 25:31–46 we have the description of two communities, the first of love and the second of hatred of Christ and his people. The first are the nations who followed Christ, and to them are these words spoken, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'. A similar commendation is found in Matthew 25:23, 'Well done, good and faithful servant'. Such praise, given by God and His Son to us, does not fill us with pride and hubris, but humbles us with joy and peace and delight. We are greatly encouraged and filled with grateful humility.

There are some pictures given to us which pertain to heaven. Revelation 7:9–17 is one of these. At first we see the redeemed as a great multitude which no man could number. This is a change from God's people being pictured as a miserable minority in history. As in Revelation 5:8–14 all heavenly creatures and the Redeemed are offering wonderful praise to God and the Lamb. Perhaps the praise commanded and given in Revelation 19:6–8 is most beautiful of all because it is linked with the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying,

'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure'—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

The Presence of the Triune God in the Holy City will mean that fellowship of the redeemed with the Three Persons and all with one another. John the apostle speaks of having fellowship with the Father and the Son here, on this earth:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:1–4).

How wonderful it will be to have the Holy Spirit show us our Elder Brother and Redeemer—Jesus Christ—and to be led to the Father who is the loving Head of the vast family of love-people. How wonderful to have the name of the Father written on our foreheads and to know him who has interceded for us down through the millenniums. The Good Shepherd will continue to lead us to springs of living water, to cause us to eat of the River of life and the Tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Also we shall eat of the hidden Manna—the Bread of life. The Lord God shall be our Light of life in which we shall walk forever.

So much more—ever so much more—we could describe which has been shown to us, but perhaps one will be permitted to share one's own feelings—one's prolepsis of the glory to come—by telling a short anecdote of a recent happening:

Recently I was lying in bed recovering from a major operation. I was contemplating the fact of death and then the glory beyond. I was not feeling any heroism. The beautiful symbolism of a throne, angelic creatures, and even the noble redeemed was not stimulating me very much. I felt tired and of course quite inferior, even that I was a failure. I did not mind the matter of death: I have been well taught on that score—that in fact we *do not die* and we *do not see death*. What I felt was that I would like to slip in at the back unnoticed. That would be good. But no! I was told to look at my redeemed brethren. They would have none of my pathetic humility. I was shown that here was a community filled with love. I was loved by the Three Persons and no less by all my brethren. Everything was genuine—nothing pretended—and there was heart-warm commendation which must have been genuine. Inferiority was totally banned as being an affectation.

Then I noticed a wonderful something. Every one of the redeemed had the body of glory, as also I did, myself. It was as Christ's own body of glory. Somehow I was being told, 'Look! This is what heavenly humanity is. You have no less than the fullness of Christ's own human fullness and glory. Christ's humanity is the humanity to which he has brought you. As to his divinity—his being God—you are not as him. This wonderful pitch to which you have been brought is your full humanity to which this Second Adam has brought you. It is yours forever.'

There are so many other things I could tell you because they have been told to me in the Scriptures, the word of God, but let me remind you of what you well know. You know nothing but what God has spoken to you. The speaking by Him brings hearing to you, and your faith comes through the hearing and so you respond. You obey and that is faith in action. By God's grace you obey, and your obedience comes from love to Him. This is the secret of power in the church. This is the power working. God knows no other way.

- ¹ William A. Quayle, *The Pastor–Preacher*, ed. Warren W. Wiersbe (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 143.
- ² John Killinger, *The Centrality of Preaching in the Total Task of the Ministry* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1969), 28.
- ³ Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 5.
- ⁴ R. E. O. White, *A Guide to Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 24–25.
- ⁵ Adapted from Clyde Reid, *The Empty Pulpit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 67–74.
- ⁶ The case for this view is ably stated by Reid, *Empty Pulpit*, 83–85.
- ⁷ It would do every pastor good periodically to ponder the chapter “Demonstration of the Spirit and of the Power,” D. Martyn Lloyd–Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 304–25.
- ⁸ ‘The best discussion of originality in all homiletical literature, in this writer’s opinion, is by W. G. T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, repr. 1965 [of 1867 edition]), 3–32.
- ⁹ Homiletics’ best discussion of application is still to be found in the century–old text, John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (re–print; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), 211–21.
- ¹⁰ Donald Coggan, *Stewards of Grace* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), esp. 61–64.
- ¹¹ Another whole approach to this matter of variety in outline structure is suggested by Ilion T. Jones, *Principles and Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 103–23. One can further stimulate his thinking by relating Andrew W. Blackwood’s fine chapters on doctrinal and biographical preaching to differing ones of these structural styles. See respectively *Doctrinal Preaching for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 184–96, and *Biographical Preaching for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 150–68.
- ¹² This quality of imagination is one of the “most godlike capacities of man,” Whitesell insists. Imagination in preaching is the picture–making faculty of the mind always under the control of reality; and without its disciplined use, all preaching is dull: see Faris D. Whitesell, *Power in Expository Preaching* (Neptune, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 103–17.
- ¹³ See Donald G. Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957), 142–53.
- ¹⁴ White, *Guide*, 219.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 220–24.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 224–28.
- ¹⁷ W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of Sermon Illustration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1973 [of 1950 edition]), 26–45. If you have never read this little book’s first chapter, “The Place and Use of Illustration,” now would be the time to do it.
- ¹⁸ Webb B. Garrison, *The Preacher and His Audience* (Neptune, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1954), 79.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81–85.
- ²⁰ Killinger, *Centrality*, 28.