



## New Creation Teaching Ministry

### 1995 PASTOR'S MONDAY STUDY GROUP NOTES

**February:** Knowing the Mystery & Mysteries of God

**March:** Knowing God

**April:** Knowing God Through Propitiation

**May:** Propitiation, Love & Co-crucifixion

**June:** Christian Liberation Through Christ's Cross

**July:** Our Active Response to Knowing God As Love

**August:** Our Active Response to Knowing God As Love is to Live in Hope

**September:** Our Active Response to Knowing God As Love is to Live in Faith

**Addendum:** to the Study of September on 'Faith's Response to Love'

**October:** The Sanctification of Man & Living in Holiness Essential to Salvation—I

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## Knowing the Mystery and Mysteries of God

### INTRODUCTION: KNOWING THE THINGS WE KNOW

This year I would like us to go back to what we sometimes call 'the basic things', that is, the basic doctrines which are declared to us in the Scriptures. This may seem to be an unnecessary exercise, but it may be that not all of us grasped these things fully in time past<sup>1</sup>, and some of us may have moved on to various facets of the truth which, strangely enough, have made us somewhat neglect these basics. Paul spoke of 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27; 13:36).<sup>2</sup> In I Corinthians 4:1 Paul speaks of the apostolic preachers being 'stewards of the mysteries of God'. Other New Testament writers might speak more of 'the truth' or 'the word of truth'. Paul also uses these terms. Overall, the New Testament writers use the term 'the gospel' in the sense of its content and its proclamation and by this really mean the whole counsel of God.

In Acts 2:42 the community of Christ which was born on the Day of Pentecost constituted those who 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers'. The apostles' teaching came to be known as the apostolic truth. It was that teaching Christ commissioned them to give, that is, the truth which came to them by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. The apostolic truth was firstly that which was taught by the apostles, then, secondly, that teaching given by others which was derived from what the apostles taught: these teachers would not depart from what the apostles had taught. It was the gospel, but then in a fuller sense than this term 'gospel' is sometimes used when some modern evangelists call for people to believe in Christ. The gospel as delivered by the apostles was described variously in the Book of the Acts as 'the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ,' 'the word of God', 'the word of truth', 'the gospel of the grace of God', 'the word of his grace', 'preaching the kingdom', and consisted of calling for 'repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ'.

In the Pauline Epistles it is called 'the gospel concerning his Son', 'the word of the Cross', 'the word of faith which we preach', 'Christ crucified', 'the mystery [testimony] of God', 'the gospel', 'the word of truth', and similar terms. The writer of Hebrews speaks of 'such a great salvation', and constantly talks of 'the word of God'. James speaks of 'the word of truth', and likewise Peter writes of 'the living and abiding word of God', whilst John uses the word 'truth' to define the gospel.

It is not, however, just the terms for the body of truth<sup>3</sup> that define it: it is the *content* which is spelled out in so many ways which constitutes the gospel. Paul calls it 'the gospel of God,' 'the gospel of Christ,' and even 'my gospel' and calls for a curse on those who preach other than the gospel he preached. Timothy and Titus are exhorted to keep people to this gospel and to correct listeners who have strayed from the truth, and speaks of 'the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness'.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the form of the message and the sort of preaching some received at their conversion.

<sup>2</sup> The writer of Hebrews (5:12—6:3) speaks of 'the first principles' but this does not seem to refer to 'basic principles' but to a portion of the whole truth for he wishes to teach them about Melchizedek, a truth related to the whole counsel of God.

<sup>3</sup> To call it 'a body of truth' is not quite a biblical way of describing the apostolic truth or the gospel. In one sense the truth is God, all that he is and does, including his intention for the creation. Jesus in John 14:1–10 claimed he was the truth (v. 6) but he meant 'the truth of the Father'. Paul said, 'as the truth is in Jesus' and did not mean 'the truth *as* it is in Jesus', which would have been different. In John 16:12–15 Jesus spoke of the Spirit as the Spirit of truth, but then that truth was himself and his Father. In I John 5:7 the apostle wrote, 'And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is truth'. The truth then is God and his actions, and Christ and the Spirit reveal these, as also they participate in them in the concerted Triune being and action of God. Whilst we may rightly speak of a 'body of truth', just as we speak of the 'apostle's teaching' and 'the form of sound words', we must keep in mind that God is the truth.

From the New Testament we can easily discover the *content* of the gospel, and it is upon this that we will be concentrating in later Studies, but in this introductory Study we will be thinking of the gospel in the light and meaning of the word ‘mystery’ for it is also a term for ‘the gospel’ or ‘the whole counsel of God’. Prior to considering the idea of mystery I would like to use a simple story which may help us to realise that, as preachers and teachers, we cannot know and proclaim the gospel from our own resources, even the ‘form’ of the gospel we have adduced from Scripture. The word of God is often spoken of as a sword, but then a sword being used in the power of the Spirit<sup>4</sup> for these two are never apart<sup>5</sup>. This is seen clearly in the Book of the Revelation with its references to Christ and his sword which is ‘the word of God’. The small story we here use may help to illuminate this idea.

### Story: ‘The Legend of Lemery’s Sword’

Lemery’s sword<sup>6</sup> must have gone from his hand. That was the way it always was when he found himself in this frame of mind and body. Not that he immediately recognised the matter each time that it happened since the sword was invisible. He would therefore not see that it was gone. It would take some time for him to realise that it was gone from his hand. ‘From his hand’ is the key thought: the sword did not go from him entirely but it went from his yielding it, often just in neglect of it. It was not in his hand.

How and when did this happen, and how did he realise it was gone? This question is not easy to answer. One can only describe what happened—what was known to have happened, perhaps some time after the event itself. There would come a time when Lemery would know he did not have the sword in his hand, and it was because something had changed for him. Sword in hand he was living, he was strong and he was authoritative. Often he was ebullient. Life around him was lively, sentient. In his mind and brain were great ideas, and his heart found them satisfying.

Of course, if one asks, ‘For what is a sword?’ and tries to answer that question, then the meaning or use of the sword becomes apparent. A sword is for at least two things, the first being to defend oneself, and the second to go on to the offensive and strike down that which opposes a person. If there be no sword then it means either there is no battle, or that one is forced to succumb to the opposing force. Whilst one is battling rightly, it would appear that one is in the right, and when one succeeds it would seem that what is right and good triumphs.

Of course, a sword can be wielded for self-defence when there is no righteous call for defence: one ought to fail in these cases. Lemery’s sword refused to defend its holder when this was the case, and so the man was left in a quandary. He would wish to defend himself, but the sword would not defend him. This had gradually taught him that the sword was not his for spurious self-defence. Likewise should he wish, impetuously or for self victory, to seek to go on the offense, the sword would refuse to aid him. So

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<sup>4</sup> The Reformers—Lutheran and Calvinist—had debate on the matter of the power of the Word and the power of the Spirit. Of course these two are never apart. Hebrews 1:1 writes of the prophets of old being God’s communication to the fathers. II Peter 1:20–21 says the prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 6:17 Paul speaks of ‘the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God’. We simply note that all revelation comes through the Spirit and this as he utters the word of God through whatever agency he uses.

<sup>5</sup> For a somewhat humorous critique of ministry exercised from human resources see my little book *Primarily for Pastors* (NCPI) and the two stories ‘The Theological Student’, and ‘The Preacher and the Parrot’.

<sup>6</sup> The story of ‘Lemery’s Sword’ is one which came to me as do other stories and I thought it might act as a parable of some kind to illustrate a person with or without the sword of God which is the word of God. This theme of course is well-known in Scripture. Sometimes a story is the most powerful way of communicating a truth.

he had been taught to use the sword rightly, and not for his self's wrong purposes.

If you were to ask how this sword came into his hand Lemery could not fully answer you. He would be puzzled, himself, to know when it came to him for he never knew an hour—not even in his infancy—when the sword was not present. In fact life as life would have had no meaning for him had it not been present.

So we would seem to be in a mystery, and perhaps that is the best term we can use. A mystery is a secret which cannot be disclosed to one who is not disposed to know it. Curiosity is not a good enough reason to explore a mystery. The secret is no secret to him who desires properly to know it. When a secret comes to a person then he or she is at that stage in life when the unveiling of the mystery is needful, if not indispensable. This kind of reason assumes, of course, that we are not of ourselves wise enough to know those things that we need to know. We are wise enough, however, to know that we need to know the secret which has come to us.

The sword, then, is linked with wisdom, if indeed it is not wisdom itself. Perhaps we can go one step further and say the sword is the truth, or it is a weapon always present in the interest of truth. In one sense it is one with the truth. That is why it cannot be used wrongly. Some other kind of sword, one manufactured by anti-truth, may come into one's hand. Often one devises such a sword by one's own powers and imagination.

To go back to Lemery. On occasions he would know the sword was no longer in his hands. Some considerable time might have elapsed before he realised it was absent from his grip. He would know this by a kind of lethargy which would come to possess him, much as an old man or woman might discover that the energies that had been known in youth were now gone. Like all persons with a knowledge of vocation and a sense of destiny, Lemery would know a significant loss of energy and driving force, although the sense of destiny and vocation was not diminished. It was a puzzle to him that he was virtually inert, and with an ache in his head that would seem to be a disease. He would wonder why he could not be effective in action.

The strange thing was that the sword would come back into his hand, almost without his feeling that this had happened. He would know it had returned because the lethargy, the unwanted passivity and the lack of drive would have disappeared, and his head would be clear. His sense of vocation and destiny would have been enhanced by the return of the sharp instrument in his hand. He would be eager to experience its powers of defence and attack. He would be alert again to the forces which opposed him and which—as required—he must overcome. Once again he knew he was living and indeed that all the gifts and talents of his life could now have both meaning and expression. They were not there just for him but for others—firstly for the One who had given them to him, and then for the humanity of which he had been created to be part.

Lemery had come to understand that without the sword he was helpless and fruitless; that the sword was not of his own making, and that its use was not of his own desire. He had to be doing the will of Another before the sword could and would be effective. The powerful forces opposing him could never be defeated by other than the sword. Sometimes tempted to devise his own sword, or to use the swords of others, he found this a futile endeavour. The sword was the word he uttered, and that word did not originate from him, but from that Other.

## THE GOSPEL OF TRUTH AND THE MYSTERY OF GOD

### The Matter of Godly Mysteries in General

We use the adjective ‘godly’ because in history many persons have devised ‘mysteries’ out of their own thinking and seeming wisdom. In one sense there is always a ready market for mysteries because, whereas Man has a general knowledge of God, his rebellion against God in the fall has precluded him from intimately and relationally knowing God. Within him is an ontological pressure to know God, but he wishes to avoid the confrontation that pure revelation of God would bring to him. This is the cause of his idolatry and their accompanying ‘mysteries’. Mysteries are a human way of ‘making up’ that which he has forfeited in refusing the knowledge of God. Those who have seen the fallacy of objective idols seek for more esoteric ‘mysteries’. Hence the menu of such mysteries being offered today which are mainly revivals of old mysteries of the occult and which are presently being called ‘the new age’.

In order to see at a glance the fact and uses of the term mystery in the New Testament we cite the following, ‘the mystery of the kingdom’, ‘the mysteries of the kingdom’, ‘the mystery of God’, ‘a secret and hidden wisdom of God’, ‘the mystery’, ‘the mystery of his will’, ‘the counsel of his will’, ‘the mystery of Christ’, ‘the plan of the mystery’, ‘a plan for the fullness of time’, ‘the mystery of God’, ‘the revelation of the mystery’, ‘the mystery of the gospel’, ‘the profound mystery’, ‘the mystery hidden for generations’, ‘the riches of the glory of this mystery’, ‘the knowledge of God’s mystery’, ‘the mystery of Christ’, ‘the mystery of the faith’, ‘*great* is the mystery of our religion’, ‘the mystery of the seven stars’ and even ‘the mystery of lawlessness’, and ‘the mystery of the woman’.

There are enough indications here of the use of the term to show us its use was of importance. We will deal particularly with all these references but references to ‘mystery’ are found in the Old Testament . Ecclesiastes 7:24 (cf. Rom. 11:33; Job 11:7) has, ‘That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep: who can find it out?’. Whilst the term ‘mystery’ is not used here, the idea is certainly present. In passing we note an important point, which is that God revealed himself especially to Israel as a covenant-people so that the mystery of God was unveiled to them, and this was not—generally speaking—for people outside the covenant.<sup>7</sup> In the Book of Daniel we find the term ‘mystery’ 9 times (2:17–23, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47; cf. 4:9). The first reference (2:17–23) says that God ‘gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and mysterious things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him’. We need to understand that God is not a mystery in that he has concealed himself, but rather than Man-in-innocence did know God, but at the Fall God became a mystery only in the sense that man refused to receive what was clearly revealed to him, keeping in mind that knowing God<sup>8</sup> can only happen from being in communion with him. This is the sense of Romans 1:18–32. In the case of the Book of Daniel the prophet is given wisdom to understand the mystery of certain dreams. He was not merely a person with a charisma of interpretation. As for God, Daniel did not see him as a mystery: he knew God and lived in intimacy with him. Even so the principles of Job 11:7 and Romans 11:33 always apply, ‘Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?’; ‘O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways’. It is interesting to see Nebuchadnezzar said that only the Spirit of the holy God can reveal mysteries.<sup>9</sup> Paul was later to say that only the Holy

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<sup>7</sup> We are not saying that God did not give understanding of his person and will to those outside the covenant. In the sense that all human beings are under the covenant of God which was—and is—innate to creation, yet because men and women rejected them, they also rejected his revelation of himself. It is clear that there have been those in all nations who ‘do what is right and acceptable to him’ (Acts 10:35) and presumably have received revelation from him.

<sup>8</sup> The prophet Jeremiah places this relational knowledge of God above all things (9:23–24) and Hosea points to the danger of not ‘knowing God’, asserting it results from a departure into sin and that this departure must be repented of (4:1–3; 6:1–6).

<sup>9</sup> cf. Daniel 4:9; 5:11, 14.

Spirit could reveal the deep things of God (I Cor. 2:10). It seems appropriate here to say that the prophets were the revelators of the mystery or mysteries of God in that they had stood in the council of God, the place where the counsel of God was made known.<sup>10</sup>

In I Corinthians 4:1 (cf. II Cor. 4:1–6) Paul says, ‘This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God’. In Matthew 13:11 Jesus had told his disciples, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets [mysteries] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given’. In Mark 4:11–12 it is ‘the secret’ (mystery). In the New Testament a mystery (*mysterion*) is a secret disclosed only to the initiated, but utterly hidden from the unbeliever. It is not a puzzle to be solved but something in which we must live, and being lived it continues to be a mystery. If there is a withdrawal from the mystery then it becomes again an undisclosed secret.

Thus in the New Testament we are involved in the processes of the outworking of what has been variously called ‘the purpose of his will’. So Paul speaks of the apostolic messengers as being ‘stewards of the mysteries of God’, and states, ‘we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God’. He says ‘Lo! I tell you a mystery’, and states that even if one were to ‘understand all mysteries’ and ‘not have love’, then he would be as nothing. If we try to analyse or classify these mysteries we find they fall into two categories, (i) the mystery of God, godliness, and good, and (ii) the mystery of evil, evil powers and evil plans. What is clear is that no one can understand ‘(i)’ and ‘(ii)’ by unaided human thinking. No one understands God (Rom. 3:11; cf. Ps. 14:2).

### What is a Mystery in the New Testament?

As we have partly indicated the Greek word *mysterion*<sup>11</sup> is generally translated as ‘mystery’ or ‘secret’. It is a secret to the uninitiated but perfectly plain to the initiated. In I Corinthians 2:1 Paul spoke of ‘the mystery of God’, not meaning so much that the knowledge of God is a secret and requires a revelation, so much as the gospel was the secret of God requiring revelation in order to be understood. Whilst it may be said there is a general knowledge of God throughout the human race, yet Christ is uniquely the revelation of God, and so of the mystery of God. When Paul came declaring the mystery of God—the gospel—yet in the same context he then spoke of a mystery in I Corinthians 2:6ff., a mystery which the Spirit of God revealed to a person of the Spirit.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the Spirit there was no knowing this mystery. In the same context then, he spoke of the unspiritual man—the one without the Spirit—calling him ‘the natural’ or ‘psychical’ man. Such a person was blinded to the truth, the mystery of God, the gospel (cf. II Cor. 4:1–16).

Helmut Thielecke in referring Genesis 2:24 to Paul’s words in Ephesians 5:32 —‘this is a profound mystery’—says:<sup>13</sup>

On the basis of the ‘symbolic’ character of marriage, Ephesians 5:32 speaks of a ‘mystery’ . . . In the New Testament the term ‘mystery’ is always used in the sense that a visible, earthly reality or process becomes a similitude of the transcendent sphere of salvation, that ‘nature’ thus points to the ‘supernatural’ . . . This kind of pointing or reference is called a ‘mystery’ because it cloaks and reveals at the same time: the mystery reveals itself to faith, whereas unbelief cannot understand it; ‘to him who has, more will be given . . . but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away’ . . . Because marriage points to the order of creation and redemption it is a similitude of this kind and it also exhibits the same double meaning; for those who stand in faith within the order of

<sup>10</sup> In Jeremiah 23:18 and 22 it is stated that the false prophets had not stood in the council of God, hence it is inferred (i) that the prophecies of these prophets would be false, and (ii) that the true prophets did stand in the council of God to get their message. Job 15:8 in the RSV has ‘Have you listened in the council of God?’, whilst the AV has ‘Hast thou heard the secret [LXX *mysterion*] of God?’, and the RV has ‘Hast thou heard the secret council of God?’

<sup>11</sup> A comprehensive article is found in J. A. Robinson’s *Commentary on Ephesians*, Kregel, 1979, pp. 234–240. Also see articles in Bible and Theological Dictionaries.

<sup>12</sup> A person of the Spirit is one who has been born of the Spirit as in John 3:1–6. Such is one who has the Spirit (Rom. 8:9–11). In I Corinthians 2:14–15 he is designated as ‘the spiritual man’.

<sup>13</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics: Sex*, vol. 2, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964, pp. 125–126.

redemption it has this *symbolic* character, whereas for others it can be merely a contract, a biological phenomenon, or at most a human bond. This is why the letter to the Ephesians calls it a 'mystery'.

Later in our Study we will seek to see the various mysteries which constitute one mystery which we could call 'the mystery of God' but we examine, for a moment, why it is that the natural man with his intellectual powers and brilliance cannot understand God, so that God and his doings remain a mystery to him. I think this is a valuable exercise for it helps us to understand why the natural, secular, or spirituality-seeking person cannot understand the mystery. We have noted that he thinks it is a puzzle to be solved rather than a disclosed reality in which one lives. In all this we keep in mind two things, (i) God is ever, always, disclosing himself by his various media, and (ii) his disclosure is blocked off by the will of the so-called listener. Nor is it merely blocked off, for God refuses to disclose anything to the hypocritical 'listener' and such refusal is part of his judgement for that person not 'having ears [a will]' to listen.

## **TWO WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING: THE HORIZONTAL AND THE VERTICAL-HORIZONTAL**

The Book of Ecclesiastes is a powerful book, requiring many readings. When we have reasonably understood it we will know that the writer—a very wise man—has sought to comprehend 'everything that is under the sun' first by what we might call 'the scientific-empirico' method. Note that he sees things on this horizontal dimension—'everything under the sun'—and seeks to understand them by

- (i) experimentation, and
- (ii) by reasoning from his investigations—the method we use in science. He seeks to develop
  - a) a philosophy (theology?) of life, and
  - b) a practice of life, of living in and enjoying this world which will satisfy him.

In other words he seeks to rationalise the world that is about him and its various operations. The investigating Preacher's conclusion regarding all this is that it is 'vanity and a striving after wind'. That is, a satisfactory rationalisation of it all cannot be found.<sup>14</sup> He sees that man has another dimension—the 'vertical'—for when he mentions God the pride of human 'knowing' is seen to be futile. He says that God 'has put eternity into man's mind [heart] yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end'. Each time he mentions God he is speaking of a fear of God which leads to true wisdom. He concludes, 'this is the end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole [duty] of man'. We conclude that the writer is saying, 'There is a horizontal dimension in which Man lives, created by God and good for Man, but when Man sees *only* the horizontal, seeks to live *only* in it, and tries to derive a philosophy (theology?) of it so that it is all rational to his mind, he will find that it is "emptiness and a striving after wind". If Man fears God then he will do well'. In our terms, if he sees that life has a horizontal-vertical reality and perspective, then he will enjoy God and the creation together. Otherwise he will be either a horizontalist (worldly, secular) *or* a verticalist (hyper-spiritual or dualist).

In this respect we should note that the 'age of reasoning and enlightenment' of the 18th–19th centuries, and whose children we are today, has led to Man seeing human reasoning as sufficient for all authentic knowledge. This has led to the fallacy of scientism.<sup>15</sup> Its antithesis

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<sup>14</sup> Note that in positivism and reductionism—among many such rationalisations—some using the empiric-scientific method believe they have an explanation for 'all things under the sun', but these rationalisations do not comprehend the fact that man is not without the spirit, and that ontologically his being demands a fuller, more satisfying explanation.

<sup>15</sup> In using the term 'scientism' we show we are not attacking science. All knowledge of facts and principles which are derived by science are obviously useful when properly used. However they do not constitute 'the truth' but simply 'the facts' and there is a difference between the two. The 'horizontal' occupies much of our living and scientific discoveries and their appropriate application

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(applied science) are most helpful. It is when we stop short of the vertical dimension and its implications for the horizontal that we miss what is valuable for the human spirit.

is supernaturalism, another fallacy. Human reasoning as an end in itself has led to secular modernity, which at the moment is almost a burned-out entity. We are said to be in the post-modern age. Reaction to idolatrous human reasoning is often a flight to ‘new age’ transcendence or to ‘the spirituality quest’. ‘Eternity in man’s heart’ demands we transcend the limitations of three-dimensional, five-senses living, whilst living in them.

### **Knowledge of God is Personal, Given by God Through Revelation**

The knowledge of God—and hence of his divulged mysteries—is not primarily noetic (of the mind), propositional (reasoned theology) or mystical (seeking to know God by direct contact, through whatever rituals and methods may be used). True knowledge of God is of him as living, personally revealing himself, inhabiting the one he knows so that the one who knows him inhabits him also. Man in fallenness deliberately rejects that intimate, personal knowledge (Rom. 1:28). At the same time he ‘lives and moves and has his being’ in God (Acts 17:28). That is why the ‘mystery’ (secret; *mysterion*) is always hidden from him. Jesus made it clear that only those who wanted to hear would hear: hearing and knowing are a matter of the will which is willing to hear God who is revealing himself. It is axiomatic in theology that God always reveals himself. He has always used the following media—creation, theophanies, his word, the law, the prophets, dreams and visions, his acts as ‘the living God’—acts of providence, redemption and judgements—his chosen people, his Son and his acts, his apostles, the Holy Spirit, the church and the Scriptures. Paul said (i) that he knew the gospel by the personal revelation of Jesus Christ, to him and in him (Gal. 1:15), and (ii) that he was given special revelations concerning ‘the mystery of his will’ (Eph. 3:2–6). These are the revelations which are given to us, and of which we are expected to be stewards. If we know the mysteries listed above then we know a vast amount concerning God, his being and his works, and *can communicate such*.

### **The Mystery of God is Known Only in Love: God is Love**

Paul’s statement in I Corinthians 13:2, ‘And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing’, tells us that to have known mysteries, as such, is not enough. Paul is in fact, speaking of all the gifts known as *charismata*. It is clear from I John 4:9–10 that knowledge of God—especially of God as love—comes through new birth which in turn comes through the revelation of the Cross. It must mean that as knowledge of the mysteries comes in the experience of God as love, so continuing knowledge of them and stewardship of them must be in the life of love. There will be the constant temptation to develop subject-object thinking and propositional theology and (so-called) relationships in these ways of thinking. Empirico-scientific reasoning is excellent and necessary for advances in medicine, technology and all such disciplines on the horizontal, but facts are not truth. The study of the phenomenology of things and the use of their application must be considered in the light of the vertical—the truth of God. God is Person, and within himself a societal community. The mystery of God and of human relationships is always personal. The very fact that God is love means we must know his love for us, and have our response in love to him and all others. We love and know love because he first loved us and continues to do so. Paul’s statement of I Corinthians 13:2 shows that coming to the mysteries and gifts through love means we must live in love to continually and properly know the mysteries and use the gifts.

### **The Various Mysteries of the New Testament, Their Contents and Significance**

If we seek to understand these various mysteries, not understanding them as in any way esoteric or mystical, then we will have to first recognise what we have stated above, namely that the New Testament does not so much speak of God as *a* mystery or *the* mystery so much

as it sees the mysteries it nominates as the mind, will and wisdom of God. It is things about himself, his will and intention for creation and Man, that he discloses to people who are willing to hear. With this in mind we can look at the mysteries remembering that to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of God demands that first we become as little children so that we may enter that Kingdom. It is the childlike [not childish] mind that best understands God's mysteries.

**(i) *The Mystery of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10)***

Jesus told parables of the kingdom the disciples could not understand when they should have. Jesus said that to them it was given to understand the secret or secrets of the Kingdom. See Matthew 13:1–3 and John 3:3 where only by new birth is the Kingdom seen, entered and understood. In this regard see I John 4:7–10 where God is known in new birth, and I John 2:20–27 where 'all' know 'all things' by the Spirit's anointing.

**(ii) *The Mystery of the Hardening Of Israel (Romans 11:25 et al)***

It is difficult to understand why Israel should have been hardened but it is with a view to their 'softening'. All of this is a 'mystery' (cf. Rom. 11:33–36; cf. Isa. 55:10–11)

**(iii) *The Revelation of the Mystery (Romans 11:25–26)***

Hitherto undisclosed, this mystery is now revealed, namely the bringing of the nations to the obedience of faith (cf. Rom. 1:5; 15:18).

**(iv) *The Mystery [Testimony] of God (I Cor. 2:1)***

In the context the mystery is the gospel, word of the Cross, 'Jesus Christ and him crucified'. As seen from I Corinthians 1:17—2:5 this mystery is against human reasoning—foolishness to the Greeks, a scandal to the Jews.

**(v) *The Mystery of Glorification (I Cor. 2:7 passim).***

Here 'a secret [*mysterion*] and hidden wisdom of God' is that of the glorification of the elect, something not understood until the Spirit reveals it.

**(vi) *The Mysteries of God (I Cor. 4:1)***

In the light of I Corinthians 2:1 and 2:7 the mysteries of God are the impenetrable secrets of God disclosed in the gospel by the Spirit, proclaimed by the speakers. They constitute 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27, cf. verses 21–25).

**(vii) *All Mysteries (I Cor. 13:2)***

In I Corinthians these mysteries would include 2:1; 2:7; 4:1; 15:51 and 15:51 being eschatological. 14:2 might be somewhat different, not communicated to hearers.

**(viii) *A Mystery (I Cor. 15:51ff.)***

This is indeed a mystery. The human mind would never have thought. The general knowledge that all human beings have of God never has anything of Christ in it. Therefore what he will do in resurrection of the elect is a mystery.

**(ix) *Mysteries Uttered in the Spirit (I Cor. 14:2)***

It is clear that only the Spirit can disclose the mysteries of God (I Cor. 2:6–10), and only by him can they be uttered (I Cor. 2:4–5). The context shows that the word 'spirit' almost certainly means 'the spirit' of the speaker in tongues, since no one else understands him. It may well be that he does not consciously know the mysteries he utters, but he is edified by their disclosure to him *in his spirit* by the Holy Spirit. By contrast, in this context, the prophet (14:4) utters words which are understood, and doubtless the prophet is dealing with the mystery and mysteries of God.

**(x) *The Mystery of His Will (Eph. 1:9; cf. 1:11 ‘the counsel of his will’)***

Here the will is disclosed (vs 9–10), namely the uniting of all things in Christ. In 1:17–20 wisdom is needed also to see the will of God in the hope of glorification and the energising of believers in the present time. This ‘will’ mystery is expanded in 3:1–11. The will of God is a hidden mystery, but known to the believer. That is why ‘the counsel of God’, ‘the plan of God’, ‘the will of God’ and ‘the wisdom of God’ are all synonyms for that mystery which can only be perceived through the Spirit and the word of God.

**(xi) *The Mystery of Christ, the Plan of the Mystery (Eph. 3:3, 4, 9)***

These three uses of ‘mystery’ in these three verses must be taken together. They constitute the plan that God has in Christ to bring together as one both Jew and Gentile (cf. 2:11–18), showing that both are one in the body of Christ and both fully share the inheritance. It is through this body of Christ—the church—that the plan of God is being, and will be, outworked, thus disclosing to all the celestial powers the will and purpose of God. It is a ‘mystery’ to these powers until the church discloses it.

**(xii) *Marriage, the ‘Profound Mystery’ (Eph. 5:32)***

From 5:21–33 Paul expounds this mystery. It is this: Genesis 2:24 is not speaking primarily of the first couple but of Christ the Husband and the Church his bride. It was always protological, prototypological, ontological and eschatological in intent and meaning.

**(xiii) *The Mystery of the Gospel (Eph. 6:19)***

As we have seen elsewhere, the gospel is a mystery, not understood except through the word uttered by the Spirit. Doubtless it contains all the mysteries of which the New Testament speaks.

**(xiv) *The Word of God, the Hidden Mystery, the Glory of the Mystery (Col. 1:25–27)***

Ephesians enables us to understand ‘the mystery hidden for ages’ (cf. Eph. 3:1–11). Here it is ‘the word of God’ (v. 25) and is also the effected unity of Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:11–18; 3:5–6). The mystery amounts to ‘Christ *in you* [*among you*—both Jews and Gentiles as one in Christ] the hope of glory’. This links with I Corinthians 2:7; 15:51.

**(xv) *God’s Mystery of Christ (Col. 2:2: 4:3)***

This accords with Paul’s use of the term ‘mystery’ for the gospel, but then including all facets of the gospel—‘the whole counsel of God’. In 2:2 the mystery of Christ relates to the fullness (*pleroma*) of him, which is his fullness of ‘the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’. Out of this fullness believers are ‘filled full’ (2:9). In 4:3 it is the same as Ephesians 6:19 and similar uses—the gospel of Christ.

**(xvi) *The Mystery of Lawlessness [Iniquity] (II Thess. 2:7)***

I Timothy 3:16 speaks of ‘the mystery of godliness’(AV) and the mystery of lawlessness is its antithesis. No human being can—or should seek to—know ‘good’ or know ‘evil’ neither of which are abstract. Evil remains a mystery, but one that Paul knows without seeking to state its essential nature, which, as the context here shows is personal. There is a ‘man of lawlessness’, whoever he may be. The church knew of him: he will be fully known at the appropriate time of the mystery’s revelation (cf. Dan. 12:9–13; Rev. 10:4).

**(xvii) *The Mystery of the Faith (I Tim. 3:9)***

This could mean that the *content* of the Christian truth is known as ‘the faith’, that is, *what* one believes, but in the light of 1:5 and 1:19 it may also be *the way* one goes about having faith, living out the truth. In any case it is something revealed to faith.

*(xviii) The Mystery of the Seven Stars (Rev. 1:20)*

The use of apocalyptic language means the objects—the seven stars—can be known only by revelation. It is clear from chapters 1–3 that ‘stars’ represent ‘angels’ or ‘messengers’. More than that we do not know, except that they conveyed the reality of Christ’s Lordship of the churches and then the message Christ sent through the Spirit to the churches.

*(xix) The Mystery of God (Rev. 10:7)*

The chapter seems to parallel the idea of ‘the mystery of the plan’ as stated in Ephesians 1:9–10 (etc.). Again it is not something which can be known by observation or intellectual human reasoning. It does not appear to say that God is a mystery but that what he does is, that this action is a plan with an ultimate intention, yet to be fulfilled and revealed.

*(xx) The Mystery of the Woman, Babylon (Rev. 17:5, 7)*

As there is ‘the man of sin’ so there is ‘the woman of sin’, these being the counterparts to Christ the man of godliness and the church the woman of godliness. The nature of this woman cannot be known apart from a revelation, the unveiling of the mystery.

Having looked at these 20 nominated mysteries we notice that most of them have eschatological meaning and connotation. This must mean that the plan of God has always been a mystery, but that to the elect it is God disclosing what he has done, is doing and will do. Eschatology is not simply ‘the last things’ but God in his action. Creation is the beginning of the end, and the culmination of history is the end of the beginning, so that all things are always eschatological. Revelation is the unveiling of the mysteries: the mysteries are the mind of God and the actions thereof.

**A CONCLUSION TO OUR STUDY OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD**

Doubtless much more can be said regarding the nature of the mystery of God, and the meaning of the particular mysteries revealed, but for us it means we will look particularly at the elements which constitute the mystery which is the gospel, and also turns out to be ‘the whole counsel of God’. This present study should give us a high sense of the calling and office of being ‘stewards of the mysteries of God’. To regard this ministry with great awe should save us from pride’s presumption. Being ‘stewards of the mysteries’ does not mean simply gathering together—as we have done in our last section immediately above—the various mysteries mentioned in the New Testament. It means

- (i) that with a childlike mind we have these mysteries disclosed to us,
- (ii) that we continue to understand them in love and walk by their reality, and
- (iii) that we become faithful stewards of these mysteries as we seek to teach them to others.

### **A Note Regarding Our 1995 Studies**

I have thought about the Studies we have had over many years, and whilst I do not regret other than their various weaknesses and deficiencies, I think we need to have less material and more discussion of the material, so that it can be of practical and applicatory usefulness. We will try out this changed principle, and see how it goes.

## **Knowing God**

### **INTRODUCTION: THE BIBLICAL FACT OF GOD**

Our Study of God, the possibility of knowing him and then the experience of knowing him are all derived from the Bible. We are moving only within the circle of the Scriptures, believing that the Bible gives us the materials for Judaic-Christian understanding of God. The facts of historical theology are that there have been many views of God, of understanding and approaching him, and these purport to arise from the Bible and its revelatory elements.<sup>1</sup> Preceding, but related to historical theology, is the theology of God as formulated within the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

In order to be as biblical as possible we must not approach the Bible through systematic theology as such, although such theology is by no means valueless. We cannot ignore historical, systematic and dogmatic theologies for they work from the same sources as we will use, and they make valuable contributions to us as we seek to formulate a doctrine of God. Indeed we have already been deeply influenced by them.

We also have to recognise that much of what we know of Scripture is considerably aided by historical knowledge available to us of history, geography, and of nations and their religions and cultures. Some of this information is contained or paralleled within the pages of the Scriptures. Even so, we can gain a vast knowledge *about* God from the Scriptures, especially if we have regard for the time taken in their formulation, and if we see them as a divine unity, so that what is revealed in their later writings is at one with what has been formerly written. We must, of course, have some belief about the nature of the Bible, especially as a given revelation of God. Even as we say 'a given revelation of God' we may seem to be importing something from outside into our biblical research. Pointing to the Scriptures as revelatory is valid if the Scriptures themselves indicate such as a fact.<sup>3</sup>

Our heading above—'The Biblical Fact of God'—does not mean the writers of the Scriptures were seeking to prove the existence of God. This was far from their idea. It was axiomatic to them that God is, and they could write, 'The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God" '.

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent article covering these theological developments is one entitled 'God' in the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, edited by Alister E. McGrath, Blackwell, 1991, the article being by Robert W. Jenson, pp. 234–246.

<sup>2</sup> For example the articles 'God' in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, Doubleday, 1992, article (O. T.) by John J. Scullion, (N. T.) by Jouette M. Bassler.

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent treatment on the fact of the Bible as revelation is Hendrikus Berkhof's *Christian Faith*, Eerdmans, 1979, pp. 41–111. Its treatment of the subject 'God' is also most helpful.

## KNOWING GOD

### Knowing and Not Knowing God

Stephen told the Jewish Sanhedrin, ‘The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran’, and his statement was perfectly intelligible to his hearers. It is axiomatic in the Bible that there is one true God, God. The Bible also poses the problem of trying to predicate God,<sup>4</sup> but this limitation is no argument against the existence (Being) of God, but simply the inability of one to communicate to another the nature of God by predication. The apostle John seemed to predicate God as love and as light, but the nature of God as love and light had to be through revelation. John’s predication is revelation. Only when a person is born from above (‘born again’) can he or she understand God as love and light, for knowing love and light come only by revelation. Love and light as humans know these two things do not conduct us to God.

Analogical reasoning concerning God is precluded as revelation, for Psalm 40:5 says ‘None can compare with thee’, and Isaiah 40:18 asks, ‘To whom, then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?’<sup>5</sup> God can only be known by his revealing of himself.<sup>6</sup>

This is not to say that men and women do not think they know God: they generally think they do. In theology this has to do with what is often called ‘natural revelation’. That is, human beings by observing the creation are sure they know that God is, and then, what he is and how he works. It is one thing to say that God declares himself in and through his creation (Ps. 19:1ff; Romans 1:19ff.), but it is another to say that Man actually hears that proclamation and understands it. Paul says categorically ‘no one understands God, no one seeks for God’ (Rom. 3:11; Ps. 14:1–2; 53:1–2). By quoting the O. T. he is including the covenant people, Israel. He is not saying ‘No one believes that God *is*’,<sup>7</sup> but ‘No one *understands* him’. Only the fool says he does not exist.

### MAN’S IMPEDIMENT TO KNOWING GOD

We must first establish the point that all people have a god and know a god. Paul says that every human being ‘lives and moves and has his being in God’ (Acts 17:28). In this sense no one can escape the reality of God and Paul expounds to both the pagans at Lystra and Athens that the good nature of God can be seen in the fact that he gives everything that is required of Man for living and for pleasure. He is not arguing this reality of God but calling upon them to recognise it.

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<sup>4</sup> cf. Otto Weber, *Foundation of Dogmatics*, vol. 1, Eerdmans, 1981, p. 398. For the subject of ‘God’ see pp. 169–227, 349–525.

<sup>5</sup> cf. Isa. 40:25; 46:5; Ps. 35:10; Jer. 10:6; 49:19; 50:44.

<sup>6</sup> In saying this—that no analogy can lead us to God—we are nevertheless left with the fact that our language has analogues and figures which enable us to understand God. If we have him represented to us through the analogue figure of ‘father’, then there must be a revelation of ‘father’ which goes beyond ‘father’ as we understand that category. Even so we cannot do without the analogue ‘father’. It is simply that we must go beyond the limits of our human knowledge of ‘father’ to a revelational knowledge, and that demands the *relationship* of ‘son’ to ‘father’. Revelation conducts to that relationship: we are not given knowledge as material for ratiocination so that we can work through to the truth of ‘father’. What knowledge we have in the natural must derive from the fact that we are in the image of God, no matter what the effects of the Fall may be. All true knowledge of God has not been lost because of the Fall. It is just that our minds have been darkened and our wills in respect to loving God have been atrophied towards him. That is why revelation is needed, and why the power of God is required and given to us by grace ‘to turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God’.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 11:6 says, ‘And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him’. The word ‘exists’ here must not be understood in a human sense. We *exist* but God *is*. In this context the writer is saying we must believe the character of God and that he rewards those who seek him. James 2:18–26 shows that believing God ‘exists’ is not enough. The demons believe that but they tremble. Many humans also ‘believe’ and do not even tremble!

Even so, in Romans 1:18–32 he shows (i) that humanity rejected God, and (ii) that it did not wish to retain the knowledge of God in its thinking. In Romans 1:22f. Paul says Man not only rejected God but substituted idols—other gods—for his own pleasure. Micah 4:5 speaks of universal idolatry, ‘For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god,’ but Israel must not do this, ‘but we will walk in the name of the Lord [YAHWEH] our God’.

We can assess the possibility of knowing the true God truly by a person or a people ‘having an ear to hear’<sup>8</sup>, but the impossibility for those who do not have ‘an ear to hear’. Jesus taught this in the light of Isaiah 6:9–13 as is shown in Luke 8:4–15, Matthew 13:10–17, and John 12:37–40.

### **THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS INDISPENSABLE TO AUTHENTIC HUMAN LIVING**

Jesus said that knowing the only true God and Jesus—his Son—constituted not simply life, but eternal life, and we will look at this later. Jeremiah (9:23–24) puts the primacy in living as one having true knowledge of God.

*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’.*

These verses show us that the knowledge of God is necessary to Man in order to be fully Man. Similar ideas are found in Hosea, and if they know God they will live appropriately, that is, richly and righteously (4:1–3 and 6:1–6),

*Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel;  
for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.  
There is no faithfulness or kindness,  
and *no knowledge of God in the land*;  
there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing  
adultery;  
they break all bounds and murder follows murder.  
Therefore the land mourns,  
and all who dwell in it languish,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
and the birds of the air;  
and even the fish of the sea are taken away.*

*"Come, let us return to the LORD;  
for he has torn, that he may heal us;  
he has stricken, and he will bind us up.  
After two days he will revive us;  
on the third day he will raise us up,  
that we may live before him.  
*Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD*;  
his going forth is sure as the dawn;  
he will come to us as the showers,  
as the spring rains that water the earth."  
What shall I do with you, O E'phraim?  
What shall I do with you, O Judah?  
Your love is like a morning cloud,  
like the dew that goes early away.*

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<sup>8</sup> Having ‘an ear to hear’ is really the same as ‘having faith in God’ (see Heb. 11:6).

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets,  
I have slain them by the words of my mouth,  
and my judgment goes forth as the light.  
For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,  
*the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.*

What we need to see is that it is not the difference between God and Man that prevents Man knowing God. It is true that he will know God *as a Man knows God*, and not as God within the sociality of the Three Persons knows himself, but then Man only needs to know God as Man may. He does not need to know God *per se*, but, for example, as Creator, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and as the God who redeems and glorifies. All that knowledge is rich and really constitutes Man being Man. So when God says through the prophet Isaiah (55:7–11):

let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.  
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.  
"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and return not thither but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and prosper in the thing for which I sent it

the thought is not, 'My cognitive abilities transcend yours, oh Man', but rather, 'Because you have gone away from me you cannot comprehend me. Return to me and you will'. Again it is the matter of being willing to hear the Lord, and to look at his disclosure of himself.

When Job was asked by Zophar the Naamathite, 'Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?', then it might have appeared that the answer should have been, 'No!'. Yet that would not have been strictly correct on the basis that God discloses himself to whom he wills, and that his Spirit searches his (God's) deeps and communicates them to the will of Man. One can 'find out' what one desires with all one's heart.<sup>9</sup> Deuteronomy 4:29 says, 'But from there [the Dispersion] you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him, as you seek for him with all your heart and with all your soul'.

The other side of finding God and coming to know him is that God finds us, or knows us. This is seen in Amos 3:2, 'You only have I known of all the nations of the earth', and Galatians 4: 8–9, 'Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, *or rather to be known by God . . .*'

It is clear from Romans 3:11, 'no one understands God, no one seeks for God', that God initiates the process of human seeking after him. In that sense to come to know the God who created and whom man rejected, requires the grace of God to set Man seeking him.

It is clear from the Book of Job that both Job and his theological 'comforters' believe that if they know God they will understand Job's predicament. In fact they assume they know God and so they understand Job's predicament. God certainly vindicates Job against his accusers, but Job himself has to have a richer revelation of God than he has had, and when this

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<sup>9</sup> The use of the verbs 'to seek' (*baqash, darash*) are interesting to study in their reference to seeking God. Innumerable times it is shown that to seek God is to come to know him, as also to seek after other gods is to come under their sway.

eventuates then he understands the deficient view he has had of his situation. The whole discussion, ascends, so to speak, to a higher plane. Job has certainly known God but now he knows him in a richer way. He only knows him in this way because God reveals himself to him, and in Job's case in a most dramatic way.

### **THE GOD WHO BOTH HIDES AND DISCLOSES HIMSELF**

Isaiah 45:15 has 'Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself. O God of Israel, the Saviour'. There are other references to God hiding himself but they are to do with him hiding his face from his people, and are not a dogma concerning the nature of God towards mankind. Not, anyway, other than what we have seen, that God is unknown to those who will not know him. In this context it would seem that God is showing himself to Gentiles and drawing them in, and the beholder of the event wonders at God so long hiding himself before making himself known in such grace.

God constantly reveals himself though not necessarily that humanity may respond to him. It may well be that, as Paul says, 'they are without excuse'. God will judge according to his revelations which some have refused to see and heed.

The means by which God reveals himself we can see below, but it is 'natural' for Man to know God and 'unnatural' for him not to know God. Curiously enough the person who will not know God is called 'the natural man'. He is the 'psychical' man, who rejects the 'things of the Spirit. To him such things are 'foolish'.

### **THE MEDIA GOD USES IN REVEALING HIMSELF**

- (a) **Creation**—Romans 1:19–20; Psalm 19:1f; I Timothy 4:4; 6:17; Ecclesiastes 3:11.
- (b) **Providence**—Matthew 5:45; Psalm 104; Matthew 6:26, 28; Acts 14:17:25.
- (c) **The Scriptures**—When known as the Word of God, they constitute what God has said and so are God's information and disclosure of himself (cf. II Tim. 3:14–17).
- (d) **History**—the Acts of God. As are all, so is God known by his acts. By these he is known as 'the living God' (Dan. 4:36–37; Ezek. 39:28f.; Ps. 105; 106; 107; John 5:17).
- (e) **The Prophets**—Hebrews 1:1; Luke 24:25ff. As such the prophets were the voice of God speaking directly to the people. Prophets precede those of Israel, e.g. Abel, Enoch, Abraham (see Amos 3:7–8; Rev. 19:10; II Peter 1:21).
- (f) **Theophanies**—that is, manifestations of God. The three visitors to Abraham (Gen. 18:1-6), the burning bush that Moses saw (Exod. 3:1-6), the vision Isaiah saw in the temple (Isa. 6:1ff.) and the vision Ezekiel saw (Ezek. ch. 1).
- (g) **Dreams and Visions**—Numbers 12:6; Jeremiah 23:28–30; Daniel chapters 7—11; Acts 2:17ff.; the Book of the Revelation.
- (h) **Jesus Christ, the Son of God**—John 1:14, 18; 3:35; 14:1–6; Colossians 1:15ff.; Matthew 11:27.
- (i) **The Holy Spirit**—John 14:16; 16:7–11; I Corinthians 2:10–14; John 3:5; Revelation 19:10.

- (j) *The People of God*—Israel, the Church (Exod. 19:5–5; I Peter 2:9–10; Acts 1:8; etc.).
- (k) *The Law*—Psalms 1; 1; 119. Some see the law and the conscience as setting forth God in his Being (see Rom. 2:12–14; 3:21).

It is clear that the media above are what God uses to disclose himself. We should note at this point that natural reasoning, or natural theology, does not tell us that these media are God revealing himself but the means by which he reveals himself. It is the Scriptures themselves which tell us he reveals himself by these measures. Had the word of God not told us about the word of God then we would know nothing. Cut off by the action of the Fall we would have no light that would sufficiently give us perception of God. The Scriptures throughout are the light we have granted to us to be drawn to the God we need to know, and were there no Spirit that word would not penetrate us, and were there no Son, then the very idea of God being Father would be lost to us.

### WHAT WE KNOW OF GOD THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

The sum of revelation to us is that God is the Triune God, and that by revelation we come to know him as such. The natural man—man without God in Jesus Christ and his Spirit—has his own God, ‘for all the peoples walk each in the name of its god’, and he has his own ‘natural’ image of God. Ontologically Man cannot live without a god or an idol, or many of both. With the natural image of deity—or deities—there must be a natural law. From within the Bible we can see the power of the idols’ laws, for the worshippers of idols have a view of creation, a world view in regard to history—whether it be cyclic, repetitive or lacking an eschatology—and so a natural morality must obtain. Such principles are dynamic enough to keep the idolater bound to his idol/s, and to prevent the worshipper turning to God. Disillusioned, maybe, with his idol/s he may turn to other gods and their systems but his mind-set is against turning to ‘the only true God’. Some religions are monolatrous, or have a view of a god above all gods who, so to speak, rules through the variety of gods, but the pure worship of the Most High is impossible.

This is surely seen in the case of Abraham, as the Lord through Joshua, describes the taking of Abraham by revelation to know him as God and as the God of covenant. In 24:1-3 the narrative tells us:

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphra’tes, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many”’.

This comports with Stephen’s statement, ‘The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran . . .’ Unless God had, so to speak, broken into the life of Abraham by means of the revelation of his glory, Abraham would have for ever remained in idolatry. For us he and his case is the paradigm of revelation. Whilst we rightly claim that the God we have come to know in Christ is the Triune God, we must pursue what is the biblical revelation of God in both Old and New Testaments and this we will do in following Studies. Meanwhile we need to keep before us the personal fact of knowing God and our proclamation of the God-revealing gospel, especially in our present pastoral situation.

## **BRINGING MEN AND WOMEN TO KNOW GOD**

We will be examining the knowledge of God in both Old and New Testaments, but the principle of not knowing God and knowing God remain the same. The principle of not knowing God is to seek continually to erase him from our thinking and way of life, in which case we must have ‘an ontological substitute’ and that will be some surrogate lords, idols or gods. The principle of knowing God is to repent of our ‘natural’ worship of the surrogate gods and the attendant forms of world-view, god-view and morality. These images must be changed by the revelation of Christ who is the true image of God and whom the Spirit of God reveals.

Paul speaks of this as ‘repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ,’ and ‘turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ’.

This, then, is the simple way of bringing men and women to know God—the sincere proclamation of the gospel, and not by attacking the ‘natural’ images of God, creation and the law. We cannot proclaim what we do not know, and, in a sense, the more we know the better we can proclaim. Knowing God is a relational matter, and we need to be living in this relationship for its own self, but also that we might better proclaim the message that will bring the knowledge of God to our people.

## Knowing God Through Propitiation

### INTRODUCTION: COMING TO KNOW GOD

In our previous Study we saw that Man by creation knows God, but through the Fall he has rejected knowledge of God. He fights against it, so that when God keeps revealing himself through the various media of which we spoke, Man fights them determinedly, not wanting to be confronted nakedly, so to speak, because of the moral demands, and the accentuation of guilt that comes from having close proximity with God. Whilst Man 'lives and moves and has his being' in God, yet he seeks by every possible means to insulate himself against the Divine presence. This causes what we might call 'ontological tension', for the drive to have pure worship in pure communion with God cannot be denied and, as we also saw, Man makes his surrogate deities to substitute for the true God. These substitutes can never fully satisfy the human spirit, and so fallen Man is never complete. He may persist in eking out this kind of unfulfilled life, and never find God, and this is the self-wrought judgment he experiences and yet this judgment comes personally from God to him.

### NO ONE SEEKS GOD, YET SOME DO

This is a paradox, but it is understood when we see that God does seek Man, so that when we find him seeking it is because God has initiated that endeavour. The Bible makes it clear that God seeks Man. Thus the father of the prodigal seeks the son and finds him at the point where his returning child is ready for the reunion through repentance and faith. The shepherd seeks the lost sheep, the wife the silver coin linked with her betrothal. The fact is that God loves the world that he created<sup>1</sup> and he loves all within it. He has a covenant with all, no matter how much they refuse that covenant. The covenant of God keeps man in the place of despair because he cannot disentangle himself from God, never ever fully escape the knowledge of God. Hence, as we pointed out in our previous paper, he can never be fulfilled apart from God, and his sinful obduracy will never let him seek for God.<sup>2</sup>

### COVENANT ALWAYS A REVELATION

God's affirmation of the creational covenant with Noah at the time of the flood was a message to all mankind, of his restoration (affirmation) of the covenant of creation. All men were seen to be in the image of God, hence the warning against killing. Israel's covenant was with a view to the nations (Exod. 19:5–6), Israel being the priest nation to all the nations. The Davidic covenant had and has, universal connotation. In particular the new covenant is for all. Among other references Jeremiah 31:31–34 speaks of coming to know God through the forgiveness of sins, resulting in the law being made innate to the human heart.<sup>3</sup> It would be reasonable to say that had anyone taken cognisance of the covenant<sup>4</sup> of his day (Abrahamic,

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:16; I John 2:2; 3:16; 4:14. Note especially John 3:17; Luke 19:16.

<sup>2</sup> Case in point is that of Cain who refused communion with God, yet did not want to go out from his presence (Gen. 4:14–16).

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 31:34, 'And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more'.

<sup>4</sup> All covenants are spoken of as being everlasting which would seem to make them universal, so that we have to say they are basically of the quality and nature of the covenant of God, though they may in some cases, have particular reference to a nation or nations. All are in juxtaposition and ultimately may be seen to be the one.

Mosaic, Davidic, New), then he would come to know God—if he *would*. Exodus 19:5–6 sets out that principle.

### KNOWING GOD BY THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN<sup>5</sup>

The passage of Jeremiah 31:31–34 shows that Israel will know God by his forgiving their sin. This principle is not confined to Israel, for the New Testament speaks of Jesus as dying for the sins of the world. See the following references:

- (a) ‘she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins’ (Matt. 1:21).
- (b) ‘this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Matt. 26:27).
- (c) ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ (John 1:29).
- (d) ‘You know that he appeared to take away sins’ (I John 3:5).
- (e) ‘and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world’ (I John 2:2).
- (f) ‘that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest . . . to make propitiation for the sins of the people’ (Heb. 2:17).
- (g) ‘he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself’ (Heb. 9:26).
- (h) ‘Christ [has] offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins’ (Heb 10:12).
- (i) Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood . . . because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins’ (Rom. 3:24–25).
- (j) He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree’ (I Pet. 2:24).
- (k) ‘who gave himself for our sins’ (Gal. 1:4).
- (l) ‘For our sake he made him to be sin’ (II Cor. 5:21).
- (m) ‘repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations’ (Luke 24:47).
- (n) ‘Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins’ (Acts 2:38).
- (o) ‘Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures’ (I Cor. 15:3).
- (p) ‘In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace’ (Eph. 1:7).
- (q) ‘his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins’ (Col. 1:13, 14)

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<sup>5</sup> Apart from subject studies in Bible and Theological dictionaries the following books are helpful, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, H. R. Macintosh (Nisbet, 1927); *The Forgiveness of Sins*, William Telfer, (Muhlenberg, 1960); *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, James Denney (James Clarke, 1959); *The Death of Christ*, James Denney (Tyndale, 1950); *Studies in Theology*, James Denney (Baker, 1976); *Cruciality of the Cross*, P. T. Forsyth, (first printed, 1909; NCPI, 1984); *Freely Flows Forgiveness*, G. C. Bingham, (NCPI, 1981); *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris, (IVP, 1965). See the article ‘Reconciliation’ in the *Dictionary of the New Testament*, (IVP, 1971, pp. 151–160).

- (r) ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’ (I Tim. 1:15).
- (s) ‘To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood’ (Rev. 1:5).

This gathering together of references certainly shows us the New Testament is speaking of the universal—though not universalistic—forgiveness of sins which is an integral part of the New Covenant,<sup>6</sup> and which requires no following or offering of the old Levitical sacrifices. These sacrifices of animals and the spilling of blood was required for the forgiveness of sins, both personally and collectively, as a nation, as on the Day of Atonement. That the death and sacrifice of Christ was/is sufficient to provide the basis for forgiveness is clear from the general thrust of the New Testament. Paul and John both base forgiveness on the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. The writer of Hebrews also does this and in more detail as he compares the Levitical (Aaronic) priesthood with that of Christ; which is that ‘after the order of Melchizedek’.

### **FORGIVENESS NOT GRATUITOUS, SIMPLY FROM GOD’S FORGIVING SPIRIT**

By ‘not gratuitous’ we mean that forgiveness comes promptly from God as a sort of right of Man to be forgiven, i.e. God must forgive. The saying in Habakkuk 1:13, ‘Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on wrong’. The prophet is protesting to God against his allowing the Chaldean nation to ravage Israel, but he finally sees it is essential. By the way, he states a principle that God cannot see evil and not punish it.

- (a) The matter of forgiveness in the first sacrifice needs to be examined for that will prove to be a principle which would be present in all sacrifices. The first sacrifice—that of Cain and Abel—was certainly linked with forgiveness. Without giving this event over to speculation, we gather from Genesis 4:7 that the ‘If you do well shall you not be accepted?’ can be rightly translated, ‘Is there not forgiveness if you do well?’<sup>7</sup> It is clear Cain was not forgiven.
- (b) Exodus 34:6–7 shows the nature of God, ‘forgiving the iniquity and transgression and sin, but *who will by no means clear the guilty*’. This is generally taken to mean ‘the guilty who are impenitent’, a thought repeated in Numbers 14:18 and Nahum 1:2.
- (c) The Levitical sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins are all according to prescription.<sup>8</sup> Apart from them there is no forgiveness. Sins done with a high hand have no provision made for their forgiveness. It is interesting to note that worshippers could not go outside prescription, and this would seem to indicate that sacrifice is a very important matter, and that it is God who sets it out.
- (d) The sacrifices offered up by Job for his children, tell us the necessity for sacrifices to deal with the guilt of sin and the hatred of God which results from guilt (Job. 1:4–5).
- (e) The writer of Hebrews says, ‘without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins’ (9:22).
- (f) In Lamentations there is a passage dealing with the fact that God’s wrath does not cease because Israel has not repented (3:40–45; my emphasis):

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<sup>6</sup> It must also be seen to be an integral part of all God’s covenants, and certainly of God’s covenant relating to creation.

<sup>7</sup> This is the view of Gordon Wenham in his Commentary on Genesis, *Word Biblical Commentary 1, Genesis 1–15* (Word, 1987, pp. 93–106).

<sup>8</sup> It would seem by our note on Genesis 4:7 (above) that all forgiveness is linked with prescribed sacrifice.

Let us test and examine our ways,  
and return to the LORD!  
Let us lift up our hearts and hands  
to God in heaven:  
'We have transgressed and rebelled,  
and *thou hast not forgiven.*  
'Thou hast wrapped thyself with anger and pursued us,  
slaying without pity;  
thou hast wrapped thyself with a cloud  
so that no prayer can pass through.  
Thou hast made us offscouring and refuse  
among the peoples.

When Israel repents then the wrath of God will cease, is the message; see 1:13 and compare with the message of Habakkuk ('in wrath remember mercy'), and the 9th chapter of Daniel where the whole matter of God's active wrath is justified and there is a prayer for forgiveness.

We can conclude that forgiveness was never (i) by contract, and (ii) by negotiation. Exodus 34:6–7 makes it clear that God is Forgiver, but forgiveness is not made gratuitously where there is no repentance.

## **NO FORGIVENESS WITHOUT PROPITIATORY SACRIFICE**

If we keep in mind that our aim is to realise we know God and can only know God by forgiveness,<sup>9</sup> and this is what has always obtained, and does obtain in every covenant of God, then we need to know on what basis God forgives. His will to forgive is ever present but he will not bring forgiveness into effect where it violates his law, so that gratuitous forgiveness makes a mockery of his holiness, and this is the message of Exodus 34:6–7, amongst other passages.

Romans 1:18–32 and related passages<sup>10</sup> show that God's wrath is ever on sin and we need to realise that this is because of the violation of his holiness and righteousness. He who violates creation violates the Creator. He who violates redemption violates the Redeemer. He who violates the creating, regenerating and glorifying work of the covenant God, violates the Glorifier and his covenant. When Paul commences his argument about the Gospel being the power of God for salvation and then brings up the matter of God's wrath, it is not simply to give an exposition of wrath but to lead on to the power of the Gospel which deals with that wrath by propitiation.

## **THE SACRIFICES FOR FORGIVENESS ARE ALWAYS PROPITIATORY<sup>11</sup>**

First we need to understand what propitiation means. Leon Morris in an article 'Propitiation'<sup>12</sup> gives two descriptions of propitiation, 'The removal of wrath by the offering of a gift', and 'the averting of anger'. Some modern translations use the word 'expiation' but expiating is the working out of a punishment, whilst propitiation is the offering to God of that which averts

<sup>9</sup> See Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:24–28; Jeremiah 33:8; Psalm 32.

<sup>10</sup> See Psalm 7:11; 60:1–3; Isaiah 30:27–31; 60:2; Jeremiah 23:20; Ezek. 7:8; Hab. 1:13; Zech. 13:7/Matt. 26:31; Rom. 4:15; 5:9; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6. These verses must be taken in their contexts, and the wrath of God must be seen generally throughout Scripture, such as the flood which was a judgment on human sin and violence. For further teaching see my *The Things We Firmly Believe* (NCPI, 1986, pp. 92–117), and my *For Pastors and the People* (NCPI, 1989, pp. 238–258). The reader needs to painstakingly go through these references to work through the whole subject of God's wrath being upon those who violate his holiness by their sin.

<sup>11</sup> For this idea in the New Testament, see Romans 3:24–25; 5:9–11; Hebrews 2:17; I John 2:2; 4:10.

<sup>12</sup> *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans, 1986, vol. 3, pp. 1004–1005). See also the article 'Reconciliation' in the *Dictionary of the New Testament* (IVP, 1971, pp. 151–160), and the article 'By Propitiation' by P. K. Jewett in the *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Zondervan, vol. 4, 1976).

his wrath. In no sense is it a bribe, although the word ‘propitiation’ may have been used where bribes were offered. The old term ‘satisfaction’ used by theologians is also not to be understood in the sense of a paying off of sins committed. ‘Satisfaction’ is offering that which satisfies the affront done by Man to God in violating his holy Being, but it is self evident that Man has nothing of this sort to offer God, nor could he ever possibly devise it. His violation of God’s holiness is of enormous dimensions. A little later we will see what propitiation is as offered by Christ the Propitiator (I John 2:2) and *set forth* by the Father as the Initiator of propitiation (Rom. 3:25).

## KNOWING GOD THROUGH PROPITIATION

Since our study is primarily on *knowing God by propitiation* we need now to turn to I John 4:7–18.

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. 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 for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. 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.

This passage is significant because it shows us clearly that knowing God is not something which Man can come to by some action of his own. We look at the following points.

### *Part One: Verses 7–10*

- (a) All love is *of* God and of none other.
- (b) To know God is love requires the action of new birth. Elsewhere (John 3:1–6; cf. 1:12–13) it is shown that new birth comes by an act of God’s Spirit and Man cannot effect it.
- (c) Only he who loves is born of God, for being born of God he knows God is love and so becomes one who loves.
- (d) That God is love is shown by two things which combine together to be the one, (i) God has sent his Son into the world that we (mankind) might have life, and (ii) we have not loved God, but he has loved us and that love is known in the propitiation of our sins. The word ‘propitiation’ must be seen in the light of our assertion that God is wrathful upon all our evil.<sup>13</sup>

### *Part Two. Verses 11–18*

- (a) Because he has first loved us we ought now to love, i.e. love one another.
- (b) No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, then in that sense God is made manifest, and his love comes to its full goal (intention) in us.

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<sup>13</sup> Note the words in Romans 1:18, ‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth’. Such a situation has always obtained since the Fall. Our study of Genesis 4:7 *et al.*, shows that sacrifice was offered for the forgiveness of sins, i.e. to avert the wrath of God.

- (c) We know that we dwell in God and that God dwells in us, and this knowledge comes through God's Spirit, given to us.
- (d) We now know and testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world, for this confessing is linked with, (i) dwelling in God and he in us, and (ii) dwelling in love and love dwelling in us.
- (e) Out of all this comes confidence (a bold spirit) in regard to the day of judgment, because as Christ is in regard to judgment, so are we, i.e. guiltless by propitiation. This perfect love we perceived and by which we were changed, at the Cross, has cast out the fear of judgment (fear of death). So we are now filled with love, and love.

Our conclusion then is that we have had a revelation of God at the Cross in the action of his propitiatory sacrifice. That is we *see* and *know* God!

What is it that we *see* and *understand* by the ministry of the Spirit? It is propitiation, effected by Christ as the propitiation set forth by the Father, and it is the provision by the Father for the action of the sacrifice (cf. Rom. 3:25).

What we see is the action of the Son offering that (satisfaction) to God which averts his wrath and so reconciles us to God. If we do not see this, if the Spirit of God does not bring it as a revelation to our hearts, then *we do not know God*, we are not able to see him. Even the theological agreement with the text that we may have is not sufficient. The element of Jeremiah 31:34 will be missing, 'for they shall know me . . . says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more'. A failure to have heartfelt forgiveness means a person *does not know God*.<sup>14</sup>

## THE NATURE OF PROPITIATION IN ACTION

A technical setting forth of the nature of propitiation is beyond the scope of this study. The articles and books referred to already certainly cover its nature. What we propose to do is to show, (i) that propitiatory sacrifices—as set out in the O.T. were indispensable to God's dealing with his wrath upon sin, (ii) that it was God who provided all elements required for true propitiation, and (iii) that the averting of his wrath from us by Christ, was the bearing of that same wrath by him, the Son.

### **Propitiatory Sacrifices—As Set Out In the O.T. Were Indispensable to God's Dealing With His Wrath Upon Sin**

We see that Abel offered a sacrifice by faith (Heb. 11:4), but Cain's was not sufficient for forgiveness. Cain seems to have seen no reason why his should not have been accepted. Abel's faith must have been in a propitiation-making God. We have a right to see all sacrifices for forgiveness as propitiatory. In Leviticus chapters 1–7, the sacrifices which are particularly nominated for sins, which are bloody sacrifices, have this principle 'and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him' (1:4). In 4:1ff. the priest who is guilty must make offering for himself. In 4:13ff. then the priest offers sacrifice for the whole congregation who 'sins unwittingly', the statement is made, 'and the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven'. So in 4:22ff. when a ruler sins, 'the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven'; in 4:27ff, when one of 'the common people' sins then the priest shall make atonement and he shall be forgiven'. In 5:6, 10, 13, 16,18; 6:7 (and contexts), this principle of the priest making atonement which issues in forgiveness is repeated. Without

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<sup>14</sup> This can be seen in Jeremiah 9:24, 'but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practise steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord'.

further examining accounts of guilty states, repentance, sacrifice, atonement and forgiveness in many places in the Old Testament, we can conclude the propitiatory nature of certain sacrifices.

### **It Was God Who Provided All Elements Required For True Propitiation**

One of the best expositions of this is P. T. Forsyth's essay 'The Moral Meaning of the Blood of Christ' in his book *The Cruciality of the Cross*, (pp. 175–218). Leviticus 17:11 sets this out, 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life'. The principle of Genesis 22:8, 'Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb for the burnt offering"', obtains. For example, 'Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock', and such firstlings already belonged to the Lord. In propitiation no one offered what God had not already provided. This principle of God's provision of the true high priest and the true (efficacious) oblation, is powerfully set forth.

### **The Averting Of His Wrath From Us By Christ, Was the Bearing Of That Same Wrath By Him, the Son**

In order to understand the action of propitiation set forth in the New Testament we need to read Romans 1:18–32. Three times in this section the statement 'God gave them up to . . .' When we see what God gave them up to we can understand the nature of God's wrath: it is giving humans up to their guilt, the elements of which are shame, pain, burden, alienation, confusion, fear, dread, heaviness—and so on. This turmoil of human guilt is felt in the conscience which can never cease from accusing, and in the mental, emotional and physical elements of Man's being. Guilt triggers off more sin, and sin compounds guilt. God does not simply give us up to some mechanistic action and reaction of sin, but personally, intimately gives us up to this anguish of guilt which is really the personal wrath of God in action. This principle of guilt suffering being the wrath of God is deeply entrenched in the O.T. if we look for it. Psalm 32:1–5 gives a contrast of two states of being, (i) the forgiven, justified person, (ii) the sinner under God's wrath, and (iii) the person restored to normalcy through forgiveness of 'the guilt of sin'.

1. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
2. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
3. When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.
4. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. [*Selah*]
5. I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.

The other passages we have referred to above, in which the fact and act of God's wrath is stated (Ps. 7:11; 60:1–3; Isa. 30:27–31; 60:2; Jer. 23:20; 3:42; Ezek. 7:8; Hab. 1:13; Zech. 13:7/Matt. 26:31; Rom. 4:15; 5:9; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; with Lam. 1:12; I Thess. 1:10) should now be looked at afresh. **What we have to see in all fullness possible, is the happening of the Cross** in which (i) Christ was made to be sin for us, (ii) he bore our sins in his own body on the tree, because (iii) the Lord laid on him, the iniquity of us all, (iv) he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, (v) he died once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous.

When we see that all the elements of the guilt of sin were borne by him in his heart, mind, spirit and body, and that in the hours on the Cross he bore all sins and guilt of all men for all

time, then we know how terrible was the receiving of the wrath in the ‘being given up’ to the wrath of God in sin, that he was drawn out to cry, ‘My God! My God! Why did you forsake me?’<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Although we have dealt only summarily with the whole matter of propitiation, it should be seen from I John 4:7–18 that we know God only by seeing and experiencing Christ’s death as propitiation. In our next study we will seek to see more elements of his sacrifice. However, we can come to this conclusion, which is of immense personal and pastoral importance, namely, that if we do not know God through propitiation we do not know him at all. If we do not know him, then all our attempts at worship are but futile. God is known in the forgiveness of sins, and the blood of Christ (the death of Christ) wholly purifies our conscience from dead works that we might worship (serve) the living God. We can see immediately the state of our own lives, and of the church when the knowledge of God through the Cross—as propitiation—is unknown, or not received.

We can test out our own situation by asking, ‘When did I last know and teach the wrath of God, and the Son’s averting it from others by taking it upon himself? When did I last see, experience and proclaim the love of God from this point?’

**Note:** In seeking to keep our studies simple so that they can be used we also see that whilst the gospel is simple enough, yet its elements are many and involve more than we have been able to present under the idea of propitiation. Indeed we have not fully enough presented this subject. Hence our need to proceed to more studies about the central act of all theology—the Cross.

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<sup>15</sup> Here see my exposition of the Cross in *Christ’s Cross Over Man’s Abyss*, especially in the section on the seven words of the Cross. The book seeks to answer the question, ‘What happened up there?’.

## **Propitiation, Love and Co-crucifixion**

### **INTRODUCTION: PROPITIATION, LOVE, CO-CRUCIFIXION**

If we know God through propitiation, that effected by God in Christ, then we know him as love. Paul spends almost all his first three chapters of Romans in leading up to the fact of propitiation which is offered to deal with the wrath of God. The writer of John's First Letter twice refers to Christ as being 'the propitiation for our sins', and of the Son being sent into the world to be the propitiation for our sins. The author of Hebrews spends many chapters leading up to the fact that Christ was made 'a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation<sup>1</sup> for the sins of the people'.<sup>2</sup>

In our last Study we saw some of what it means for God to give his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, some understanding of the nature and cost of propitiation, and then the recognition, personally and intimately, that this propitiation was essential and indispensable for Man's salvation, all leading to the experience<sup>3</sup> of salvation itself. This led thus to the rich recognition of God as being love, and God loving us as Propitiation, the basis for forgiveness, and without propitiation forgiveness of sins is impossible.

This Study seeks to understand the nature of the law as lethal, and of co-crucifixion, that is, crucifixion with Christ, as essential to emancipation from the legal bondage of law, and the liberation of the person into the new life of freedom, that is, life in Christ. We can gain some help in looking at what we might call the pericope of Galatians 2:11–21.

### **THE PLACE OF LAW IN PAUL'S REASONING IN THE PERICOPE OF GALATIANS 2:11–21**

#### **Law Not Effective in Justifying a Person**

There can be no question about the fact that both Peter and Barnabas were 'carried away' by their fear of the circumcision party which came down from Jerusalem. These men insisted on the Gentile converts being circumcised in order that their place in the church and in salvation might be assured by conformity with the law of Moses. We must clearly keep in mind the fact that it is in the law that we see God, that is, we derive our image of God from our attitude to law.<sup>4</sup> The point at issue was that of Peter and Barnabas eating with the Gentiles, who were clearly considered by the circumcision party to as yet be unclean, since they had not been circumcised. Peter and Barnabas, it is clear, had already been eating with the Gentile converts, but now they made a movement away from the Gentile Christians<sup>5</sup> which was so significant that Paul rebuked the two men. If Paul and Barnabas, being Jews, had lived

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<sup>1</sup> Much must be made of two things (i) 'a priest must have something to offer' (Heb. 8:3), (ii) Christ has a body prepared for him that he might offer a true oblation (Heb. 10:5), and (iii) he, Christ offered the full oblation by offering his body and the blood shed by it (Heb. 9:26, 28; 10:12, 14, 19).

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 2:17; Romans 1:18—3:26; I John 2:2; 4:9–10; 7:1—10:18.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'experience of salvation' might appear to be unfortunate, as though the efficacy of the experience determined the salvation of a person. That is not our emphasis, but we cannot, either, speak of a happening which is merely a cerebral recognition of the validity of the propitiatory act. As we will see, there has to be a full personal act in co-crucifixion pertaining to Christ and the person.

<sup>4</sup> One defect in propositional theology is that it often speaks in theological terms, rather than communicates the rich nature of God. For example, a legal view of law conveys a legal God, and a Father view of God conveys a warm, personal and heartfelt understanding of him.

<sup>5</sup> There can be no such thing as a Gentile Christian as there cannot be a Jewish Christian (Rom. 3:29), but the term is used in this case to distinguish those who had been Gentiles from those who had been Jews.

like Gentiles and not like Jews, then why are they now compelling Gentiles to live like Jews? To 'live like Jews' means to be under Jewish law. 'To be under Jewish law' as were the circumcision party from Jerusalem, certainly meant to be circumcised but it meant that justification was not complete without certain adherences to Jewish law. For Barnabas and Peter to withdraw from the Christians who had once been Gentiles was to say there was something about them which was incomplete. This then, shifted justification from the love-work of the Cross to the legal works of the law, and Paul said that 'by the works of the law shall no man be justified'.<sup>6</sup> In the same breath he had said, 'If, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then the agent of sin?' By this he meant that none of the Christians who had formerly been Jews had been justified by law, but, rather, had discovered that they could not be justified by the law, and hence were found to be sinners who needed Christ's justification. This point of Paul is very strong, making circumcision quite redundant and quite beside the point, since circumcision could not justify..

What, then, had happened in regard to the law in Christ's death? The answer lies in two factors, (i) the place of the law in making Christ's justification essential, and (ii) the action of the Cross in regard to the law.

### **The Place of the Law in Making Christ's Justification Essential**

In 3:10 of this Letter Paul says all who are under the law are under the curse of the law, hence to seek to be justified by the law is an impossible exercise. The curse brings to shame and death. In 3:19–24 Paul shows that the law was given, (i) to vivify sin, i.e. 'to increase the transgression', and it was given (ii) to shut sinners up to the only means of justification, that is, by faith in the one who was to come, Christ. So strong were these two functions of the law that nothing could alter them.

### **The Action of the Cross in Regard to the Law**

The law had to kill.<sup>7</sup> To be 'under the curse of the law' meant death. In Romans 7:9–11 Paul describes the action of the law that took place in his own life:

I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me.

Even in this life, Paul knew death by the law. Romans 2:12 showed that in the final judgment a person would be judged by the law.

What the law had to do, it did do in the death of Christ. That is, it had to kill, and this it did—in the death of Christ. Unfortunately Galatians 2:20 has often been loosed from its moorings, namely the whole pericope of Galatians 2:11–21. Thus we should read, 'For I through the law died to the law, that I might live unto God. I have been crucified with Christ'. Notice here that the killing of the 'I' by the law is with a view to that very death bringing 'living unto God'. That is why, having been crucified with Christ to attempt to be justified then by law is not only an anomaly but a wholly abortive and reprehensible action.

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<sup>6</sup> It would seem from Psalm 143:1–2 that the Psalmist knew no man could be justified *apart from God's faithfulness*. In essence it was impossible for any person, of himself or herself to be justified.

<sup>7</sup> As we see in the text following this point, the law was not there, primarily to kill but to lead to Christ. Pastorally, the law must not be preached as though its primary purpose is lethal. All truth is communicated by the way the communicator sees and feels it.

## BEING CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

To be crucified with Christ must first mean that in that act of crucifixion the person crucified with the Son of God is killed by the law, but then killed *that he might live unto God*: i.e not just killed that he might remain dead. We saw in Galatians 3:19–24 that *the intention of the law was not, primarily, to kill but to shut up the person to being justified by faith in Christ*. We might thus observe that the attempts of the Judaisers to justify the Galatian church members by works of the law was a ridiculous and futile effort since the law was not just out—so to speak—to destroy persons, especially persons who were now ‘in Christ’.<sup>8</sup>

Now we are concerned to examine what it means to be ‘crucified with Christ’. The questions we will pose and try to answer are three, (i) who crucified Christ? (ii) who were crucified with Christ? (iii) how did such co-crucifixion proceed?

### Who Crucified Christ?

The answer to this question is not difficult. *Firstly* it was the Father who crucified his Son. We must keep the term ‘the Father’ firmly in mind, for the aim of the crucifixion is to bring men and women to the Father:<sup>9</sup> it is the Father who is the true Initiator of the Cross. At first sight what we have said above seems too shocking a statement to be received, and taken the wrong way, it is a scandalous claim. The key to it lies in Acts 2:23, ‘This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men’. The direct responsibility for killing him lies in the hands of ‘lawless men’. In Acts 4:27–28 it is the Father who appoints the situation of crucifixion, ‘for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place’.

So many New Testament passages speak of God sending his own Son into the world to redeem the world—and so on—so that we must speak of the Father as being the Prime Mover in the event. This means that the Father neither directly nor indirectly crucifies Christ.<sup>10</sup> The Father ordains, from the foundation of the world, that a Lamb shall be slain. Had the Father not moved there never would have been a crucifixion, and so there would never have been the salvation of the human race.

*Secondly*, it is patently obvious that Pilate and Herod had Christ crucified. In particular, Pilate did so because of the pressure of the Jewish leaders. Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57; John 11:49),<sup>11</sup> Annas and the leading Jews crucified him, but Acts 2:23 speaks of ‘lawless men’<sup>12</sup> and since 4:27 puts Pilate, Herod, the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel as the executors, then they may be seen as ‘lawless’, that is, his execution was invalid at law.

*Thirdly*, we have the powers of darkness who had some hand in the crucifixion. It is clear

<sup>8</sup> Note verse 17, ‘in our endeavour to be justified *in Christ*’ (*en Christ*) gives the lie to anything being accomplished *en ego*, ‘in the law’.

<sup>9</sup> In a number of places it can be seen that the Father initiates the action of the Cross. It would be intolerable to think of the Son initiating such action, for then the Father would not primarily be the Saviour of his children. His Fatherhood would be shockingly deficient, and the Son would be the Divine mover in love whereas we know from I John 4:7–13 that the Father sent his Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins, and so, the Saviour of the world. In Romans 8:32 it is the Father who does not spare his own Son but gives him up for us all.

<sup>10</sup> If this is not so, then we must make God purely into a Law-giver who saves the human race by some act of sacrifice which he provides, whereas to be crucified with Christ in the way we will show it, must mean the whole act of the Cross was one of the Father and the Son together—to say nothing of the Holy Spirit—and so the action of the Cross is not purely and simply a forensic act, inspired in God by we know not what. The aim of the Cross was to bring sons to the Father by means of the Son. That is the glory of co-crucifixion.

<sup>11</sup> Annas was Caiaphas’ father-in-law, and was probably in the eyes of the Romans, the one appointed by them to be high priest but the active high priest was Caiaphas and he was the one most active (John 18:13–14).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Lawless men’ may imply that Christ was judged not according to the law of Israel, so that those who judged were lawless in that sense. It could mean other things also, such as the Roman judgment being invalid, or that those who judged Christ worthy of crucifixion—such as the crazed mob—were all ‘lawless’.

that Jesus was physically crucified by men and not spirits. In I Corinthians 2:7 Paul speaks of ‘a secret and hidden wisdom, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification’. He then adds, ‘None of the rulers of the world understood this; for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory’. Who then, are ‘the rulers of this world’? It would seem that these were Pilate, Herod and the chief priests, but not all commentators see it this way. ‘The ruler of this world’ was undoubtedly Satan, and Jesus said ‘the ruler of this world is coming but he has nothing in me’, and he also said ‘Now is the judgement of the world, now is the ruler of this world cast out’, and these were surely references to the Cross. Satan was said to enter into the heart of Judas, the result of which was he betrayed Christ to the Jewish leaders. In the Pauline Epistles principalities and powers seek to do harm to believers, and to separate them from the love of God, but perhaps the strongest indication that the powers of darkness were in action at the time of the Cross, was Jesus’ statement to those who came to apprehend him in the garden, ‘Now is your hour and the power [authority] of darkness’. Admittedly he was talking to men, but ‘the authority of darkness’ seems to point even beyond them. The reference in Revelation 12:4–6 to the child born of the woman and the attempt of the red dragon to destroy it may well refer to the Cross. In any case Paul speaks of all mankind following the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air who energises the children of disobedience’.

We may surely conclude that the prince of the power of the air was there, inciting the religious and civic leaders—‘the powers that be’ (Rom. 13:1)—to destroy the One they hated above all others.

*Fourthly* the whole human race was present. The religious leaders and the nations and the ‘peoples of Israel’ were all demanding his death. The mob was crazed, calling for Jesus’ blood, preferring a common criminal, Barrabas, to the man in whom neither Herod nor Pilate found any fault. We recognise that some were present who did not desire to see him killed but all of these were people of faith, the true children of God, the spiritual descendants of Abel.<sup>13</sup>

As we shall see shortly, Paul makes it clear that all were present *in* the Cross, and in that sense they were certainly present *at* the Cross. Those who thought they were spectators were really participators in the act of the Cross. They demanded Christ’s death. They hated him, and on John’s definition that he who hates his brother is a murderer, so were they killers of Christ.

There is yet a deeper strata to be seen: the matter of our sins. It is not a new thing to say that our sins crucified Christ. Had we never sinned he had never been crucified.<sup>14</sup> Sins are not separable from the sinner, and all sins are a dreadful violation of the holiness of God and, as such, deserve his wrath, so that ‘the wrath of God is being poured out from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth in unrighteousness’. In this, sense, then, the whole world was present and all in it crucified the Lord of glory.

If we lacked positive evidence that ‘the whole world was present and all in it crucified the Lord of glory’ then Revelation 1:7 surely makes the matter clear, ‘Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him’. This is a conflation of Daniel 7:13–14 and Zechariah 12:10. Doubtless John 19:37 is also involved. It would seem that ‘every one who pierced him’ is parenthetical of ‘every eye shall see him’, and ‘all the tribes of the earth’ are those who pierced him. ‘Will wail’ seems to indicate in the light of the whole of Revelation that those who wail have not repented, and will not. In any case their opportunity has passed.

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<sup>13</sup> From Hebrews 11:4ff. and I John 3:10–11 we recognise that there have always been the people of faith, the children of God, but they are that by faith. Abel had to offer his propitiatory sacrifice by faith. Had the watchers who believed Jesus not been under the grace of God, they, too, would have been caught up in the cry to crucify Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Some know the rather beautiful song, ‘Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?’. The title is quite wrong. Unconsciously the writer of the lyric speaks of ‘my Lord’ as though he were on the side of Christ, i.e. ‘my Lord’, and asks ‘were you there?’ as though the writer were not a sinner and did not crucify *the* Lord.

## Who Were Crucified With Christ?

Paul wrote in II Corinthians 5:14–15, ‘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’. He says, ‘we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died’. Taken at face value this means all humanity from the beginning to the end were taken up into that Cross. When we hear John saying, ‘He is the propitiation for our sins, and not ours only, but for the sins of the whole world’ (John 2:2), then surely there is none for whom Jesus did not die. When we say ‘Taken up into that Cross’, what do we mean? John Brown in his commentary on Galatians 2:20<sup>15</sup> says, “‘I am crucified with Christ,’ I view myself as connected with Christ, as that when he was crucified I was, as it were, crucified; and I am as much interested in the effects of that crucifixion as if I had undergone it myself. He, in being crucified, endured the curse, and I in him endured it; so that I am redeemed from the law and its curse, he having become a curse for me’.<sup>16</sup>

## Excursus on the Limited Atonement

*I am powerfully aware of the doctrine of ‘the limited atonement’ which, for some means he died only for the sins of the elect, those who by God’s grace, would come to believe in Christ. I would parry this by saying that his death proves only effective to the elect and that in this sense only the atonement is limited. What must be taken into consideration is that Christ bears the sins of the world and in that sense is its Saviour and the final judgment of Hell will be for the finally impenitent. I have never sought to justify God in anything that he does—so weak a creature I am to dare to justify God! It was necessary that Christ destroy all the power of sins and the evil powers by leaving no ‘wild sin’ so to speak, to linger in his new heaven and the new earth.<sup>17</sup>*

Again, Paul said, ‘But be it far from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world’ (Gal. 6:14). The obvious meaning of this verse is that Paul no longer belongs to the world because he has been crucified with Christ, and Christ has crucified Paul to that world, and that world to Paul. This may not be all which is contained in the verse, but as in Galatians 2:20 the verbs are in the perfect tense, it means that something once happened in history of which Paul was the beneficiary and the effects of which still flow on in his life, and in the existence of the world.

The world to which he has been crucified must include the Jews who so opposed him and who were scandalised by the Cross. It included the Judaisers who refused the power of the Cross to liberate from law, and in the wider sense it included—and includes—the ruler, Satan, and his co-rulers, the evil principalities and powers, and all human creatures who ‘follow the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air’. Something once happened at the Cross which has changed everything. The person crucified with Christ is now dead to the world, i.e. is not controlled by it and is unresponsive to it, and the world has received a death blow whereby its powers have been stultified. I Corinthians 1:18–25 speaks about the so-called ‘wisdom of this world’ and I Corinthians 1:19 speaks of God’s destruction of it.

At the same time, there must be more to it even than what we have seen, and some understanding is supplied by Jesus’ claim that he would cast out the ruler of this world, and

<sup>15</sup> Banner of Truth, 1957, p. 96f.

<sup>16</sup> Luther speaks similarly, ‘Paul speaketh not here of crucifying by imitation . . . but he speaketh of that high crucifying, whereby sin, the devil and death are crucified in Christ, and not in me. Christ Jesus was all himself alone; but I, believing in Christ, am by faith crucified also with Christ’. *Galatians* by Martin Luther (James Clarke, 1953, pp. 166–167).

<sup>17</sup> Evil, not being ontological, has no essential being, but is rather a series of personal acts by evil powers and human sinners to disturb what is ontological. All evil is personal, never abstract and has to be cast into the lake of fire so that its effects cease for ever. Christ’s bearing of all sins was a judgment upon them all.

have him judged at the Cross, the teaching of Colossians 2:15–15 where the principalities and powers are humiliated and defeated, and Hebrews 2:14–15 where the Devil is destroyed through the Cross so that men and women are freed from the fear of death, i.e. the fear of judgment. Human guilt of sin is the means by which Satan, his evil powers, and indeed the law, God's wrath, death and conscience have power over the spirit of a person. One cannot forbear quoting Luther on Galatians 2:20 where he says:

This he addeth, to declare that the law is a devourer of the law. Not only, saith he, I am dead to the law through the law, that I may live to God, but I also am crucified with Christ. But Christ is Lord over the law, because he is crucified and dead unto the law: therefore am I also lord over the law; for I likewise am crucified and dead unto the law, forasmuch as I am crucified and dead with Christ. By what means? By grace and faith. When through this faith I am crucified and dead unto the law, then the law loseth all its power which it had over me, even as it hath lost its power which it had over Christ. Wherefore, even as Christ himself was crucified to the law, sin, death and the devil, so that they have no further power over him; even so I through faith being now crucified with Christ in spirit, am crucified and dead to the law, sin, death and the devil, so that they have no further power over me, but are now crucified and dead unto me.<sup>18</sup>

What Paul has said of Galatians 2:20 applies also to 6:14. The same principle tells us that sin, the law, death and the Devil have been attacked by Christ on the Cross. He has crucified them. From one point of view Christ's withdrawing the sting of death, sin, and so the withdrawing of actual guilt, is that which breaks the power of the law and kills the world. In some senses that world has had to be taken up into the Cross and crucified. Just as in purifying his people from sin Christ had to take their sin into himself and dissolve and neutralise its penalty, pollution and guilt, so he had to draw up into himself the world, and there crush and defeat it in his holy, purging love. The world has fallen victim to the immense power of Christ's holy love.

Often readers of Galatians 1:4; 2:19–21; 5:24; and 6:14, look at the *results* or *effects* of Christ's work upon the Cross, and whilst they are grateful that they can gain these results they forget two things which Luther has mentioned in his commentary (above), namely (i) that they were 'crucified with Christ in spirit', and (ii) that all things evil 'are also crucified and dead unto me'.

### How Did Such Co-crucifixion Proceed?

By this we mean 'Did Christ do all for us on the Cross, we being absent from him and at the best spectators of what he did, or were we somehow present in him and in his work?'. Luther's statement that we were 'crucified with Christ in spirit', is the key. Paul said, 'We are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died'. That is, all humanity was present in that death. We know that some take this statement to be 'bare substitution', that is, that we were not up on that Cross, whilst other take it that Christ was our representative, but we were absent. That he was a substitute and representative cannot be in doubt, especially if we read Romans 5:12–21 correctly, but if we were not in Christ on that Cross then there are difficulties in understanding substitution and representation as a truly moral happening.<sup>19</sup> I believe we should take the statements, 'one died for all, therefore all died', 'crucified with Christ', 'our old humanity was crucified with him', 'I was crucified to the world', 'you died and your life is hid with Christ in God', to refer to a substitution by identification with humanity, as also representation with humanity in the action of the Cross. It may be that the perfect tenses in

<sup>18</sup> op. cit., p. 166. Note that Luther thinks only in the terms of Christ working personally, and sinners being one with him in the Cross-action. At the same time the Father figures prominently in the action of the Cross—'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself'. Also Christ works through the eternal Spirit. The idea of a technical, theological 'transaction' taking place away from the realm of Man seems not to be present.

<sup>19</sup> I am sure this is the problem some folk have who find themselves opposed to the substitutionary idea of the act of the Cross. How can Christ take punishment for our sins, as it were 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth'? The very idea is ludicrous, especially if we understand the nature of God's wrath, and do not see it as some 'punishment which fits the crime'!

Galatians 2:20 and 6:14 may speak of an act in the past of which we are reaping the present benefits, but when it is stated that ‘he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree’, and ‘Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous’, the question arises as to whether sins can be borne apart from the sinner. To say, ‘He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows’, makes us wonder what this means if it is not entire identification with us in those griefs and sorrows.<sup>20</sup> James Denny in his book *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*<sup>21</sup> speaks of the insights of Horace Bushnell and John McLeod Campbell’s view of that identification by Christ with mankind, and the vicarious nature of his work of the Cross:

He was not sick or infirm himself, but he felt in genuine sympathy with what sickness and infirmity meant to others, and in love he made the burdens his own . . . when he healed it was through his personality and at a personal expense; virtue went out of him, and he felt the drain upon himself. It is not exaggerating to say that he really made his own the pains he relieved; it was at his cost that the sufferings of others were lightened. This conception, obviously, can be extended by analogy to Christ’s sympathy with the moral sickness and infirmity of men. His feeling with them under the burden, the disablement and the alienation of sin. He did not become a sinner out of his sympathy with the state of the sinful, any more than he became a sick man out of his sympathy with the diseased, but he took on himself, in the one case as in the other, as far as the nature of things admitted it, the weight under which men laboured.

It is this principle which tells us that Jesus bore the wrath of God which was upon sinners for their sins. In the mystery which we cannot explain, he suffered with humanity for its sins and its violations of the holiness of God, whose holy wrath was stirred because of that human evil. It has been pointed out that God is love, but he is not wrath. Even so, his holy love is stirred to wrath, and so to the outpouring of that wrath. We need, then, to say that God is love, and that this is shown in Christ being the propitiation for our sins as he bore the wrath upon those sins.

In our last Study we saw Man feels the wrath of God in his conscience, and the components and elements which he feels, such as pain, shame, burden, loneliness, alienation, pollution, confusion and fear are, in fact, the wrath of God. When this is understood then we can see why Christ could not take up our guilt from us, unless he were first identified with us. The mystery of that identification lies within love, but we can sense that as propitiation was essential for the delivering of us from the wrath, so then, Christ took up those components of wrath—that dynamic guilt. As he did so he loosened sinners, sin by sin, guilt by guilt, wrath by wrath, pain by pain as he took these things unto himself. Thus the love of Christ became so evident, for the cessation of former pain cannot but bring delight to the relieved sinner. When, by the act of Christ on the Cross, the sinner realised it was the Father who initiated and brought that work to its conclusion, then he must needs have seen the love of God as Father and so have known that the act of the Cross was the act of the loving Father. Thus it is that the sinner can flee to the Father, not now as a sinner, and not even as sinner accounted righteous, but as one who is actually righteous and is at last the son of the Father. From that point the whole appearance of life changes. ‘God is love’, now means ‘The Father is love’, and so God is known both *in* and *by* that propitiation.

### **CONCLUSION: THE DEATH THAT REVEALS LOVE WAS TOTAL ON OUR BEHALF AND WAS UNTO LIFE**

If we shrink from an unacceptable ‘bare substitution’ we also shrink from a substitutionary act which is lost and hidden from faith in unacceptable mysticism. The death was objective

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<sup>20</sup> Horace Bushnell in his book *The Vicarious Sacrifice* speaks of Christ’s identification with people in their sickness and griefs. Taking Matthew 8:17 he says, in effect that Christ’s identification with people and his taking them into himself began from the beginning of his ministry.

<sup>21</sup> James Clarke (1959, pp. 256–258).

enough as the timber, nails, suffering and death so clearly show. Luther's insistence that the co-crucifixion was 'in spirit' does not mean that it was not Christ who bore all the sins of mankind as High Priest, Offerer and Oblation in himself. He was the one who acted and not we, but he acted as the incarnate Son of God who had truly become man so that his acceptable suffering was in his vicarious humanity. That fact and work is objective in history. *How* he identified with us we cannot tell, but *that he did*, we do know. The effects of that suffering were to have us killed to law-as-a-means-of-justification, for ever. The new 'I' is new because it is released from the law, the threat of death, guilt and judgment. It is new not because of some inner moral crucifixion of the human nature but because the removal of guilt changed its view of God, and because its realm is now love and not legal bondage. It continues to be new because it is in union with the risen Christ, having itself risen with him. So, then, it lives by the faith of the Son of God. The 'I' certainly lives by having faith in the Son of God, but here the text better speaks of Christ's faith *for* the believer, or his faithfulness *to* the believer. Galatians 2:21 shows the outrage and blasphemy that any attempt to go back to law-justification would constitute, for it would be a rejection of the work of the Father, and the Son and the Spirit in the accomplishing of justification.

**I want to leave two final questions for you for your thinking,**

- (i) if the Cross were a universal happening, and if it involved Christ being lifted up as a serpent with that connotation of Numbers 21:4–9, and if the crucifixion of the world, our old humanity and all powers of evil was accomplished, then what does this mean in terms of the Cross being the centre of all history and all actions of history? and
- (ii) if all mankind and other powers were involved in the action of the Cross, that is, none was absent, then what does that mean for all creatures and within their own beings? Is there then a memory, a something in all creatures which may not be conscious but is there, hidden or otherwise but not ineffective?

# Christian Liberation through Christ's Cross

## INTRODUCTION: THE HUMAN NEED OF FREEDOM

Paul said, 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.' Christ said, 'Truly truly, I say unto you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever . . . So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed'.<sup>1</sup> Charles Wesley sang:

Since the Son has made me free,  
Let me taste my liberty;  
Thee behold with open face,  
Triumph in thy saving grace,  
Thy great will delight to prove,  
Glory in thy perfect love.

What, then, is this thing we call 'Christian Freedom'? Freedom is a word well known today. It has been the catchcry of many a nation pressing to its liberty, but the freedom sought has, in many cases, led to a tyranny more terrible than the one they have escaped. Human beings have always looked to personal freedom of spirit, but that has rarely been obtained, and never outside of Christ. There is a seeming freedom which is not liberty, but license.

### The Primal Freedom of the Human Spirit

Man in innocence dwelt in the Paradise of Eden—'the place of delight'—and knew no fear, no shadowy conscience, no sense of coming death, no opposition to the law of God. The spirits of the primal couple were fully free. They were naked and not ashamed. No lust was present and their consciousness of God meant they had pure consciences. Their delight was in God, their environment and themselves. Just what all this was we can only faintly conjecture. The eschatology of Man means he will once again move into such delight, serenity and moral strength. Again we can only sense to a degree what this will be: we have the foretaste but not the full taste. Even so, we need to keep these things in mind when thinking of the present depravity of Man.

## THE BONDAGE OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Few human beings would claim that by nature they are free persons. Doubtless innocent Man would have known such freedom, until it was suggested to him by the serpent that he could be *as* God, knowing good and evil, and wishing to be freer than he thought he was, he reached out for a richer freedom, and lost the freedom he had had. Total freedom never ceases to be the dream of fallen Man.

In our present study we will try to compass the bondage in which human beings live. I suggest the bondages in which all human beings live are; sin, the flesh, the law, God's wrath, the conscience, fear of death, Satan, the world and its powers, and the idols linked with that evil system. Here are some nine enemies, and there are more, all linked into this system of bondage and all are inseparable. The law, God's wrath and the conscience are not in themselves evil enemies, but they are three factors which evil forces upon us in order to

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 5:1; John 8:34–36.

strengthen their lethal bondage of the human will. In the light of these enemies we could say that Man is his own enemy, but that would have no meaning until we were aware of the way in which the enemies keep Man fast-bound in chains.

There can be no doubt that Man feels his bondage, but he does not know what it is. Perhaps he can recognise that he is a slave to passions and lusts, to drugs and damaging habits, and may come into despair because he is not free to work without their mastery, but on the whole he does not understand the enormity of his bondage. 'The mystery of iniquity' is a reality the Word and Spirit of God must open to him, just as 'the mystery of godliness' is unknowable except it be revealed to him. The most dreadful part of the bondage of the enemies is the deceit that one is free, when, in fact, one is in horrible bondage. For this reason we must set Christian liberty high above all things. Luther, when commenting on our verse above (Gal. 5:1) encourages us to seek that inestimable freedom:

This is the liberty whereby Christ hath made us free . . . And where is that done? In the conscience. There resteth our liberty and goeth no farther. For Christ hath made us free, not civilly, nor carnally, but divinely; that is to say we are made free in such sort, that our conscience is now free and quiet, not fearing the Wrath to come. This is the true and inestimable liberty . . . For who is able to express what a thing it is, when a man is assured in his heart that God neither is nor will be angry with him, but will be for ever a merciful and a loving Father unto him for Christ's sake? . . . Wherefore, this is an inestimable liberty, that we should be made free from the wrath of God for ever and is greater than heaven and earth and all other creatures.

Of this liberty there followeth another, whereby through Christ we are made free from the law, sin, death and the power of the devil, hell etc. For, as the wrath of God cannot terrify us, for that Christ hath delivered us from the same, so the law, sin etc. cannot accuse and condemn us.<sup>2</sup>

### **Man's Bondage to All Enemies Lies in His Guilt of Sin**

Man has two forms of guilt which are really the one. First he has the guilt of separating himself from God, and being in that state of separation and not in the state of communion with God. Secondly he has guilts which obtain to each of his sins. His sinful state—separation from God—is a denial of his true being and he is guilty because he is not true. Out of that state of separation issue acts of sin, and the guilt of sin issues from these. We do not say a sin and its guilt can be separated, but guilt is the result of the sin. Guilt means Man is infringing the law, and yet the law is not an entity on its own. The law is the law of God, and therefore sin against the law is sin against God. Guilt with its many innate components such as shame, defilement, dread and fear, heaviness, confusion, loneliness, is really the wrath of God working in the conscience. Man fears this wrath because it is linked with judgment and death. This state of mind and being lays fallen Man open continually to onslaughts by Satan and evil powers, and in his state of alienation from God and desperation of Spirit Man continually sins, and the sin compounds his guilt and lands him up in further acts of sin. As Man's guilt compounds so he is further opened to all the nine enemies of which we have spoken, and this is the bondage from which Christ said he would liberate. It is the bondage from which Paul said the Christian has been delivered.

### **Man's Passage through Life Not An Easy One**

In the Gospels Christ views the lot of humanity as a tragic one, and his sympathy is deep. He sees the Pharisees wrestling with the matter of law, but to their own pride, arrogance, aridity of spirit and destruction. Leaders of the Jews he perceives to be children of the devil. He sees sinners—harlots and taxgatherers—caught in the web of their own lusts and desires and desires to liberate them. He sees some laden with guilt, others caught under the bondage of Satan and evil spirits—spirits which are unclean—and he deals with them to set them free. More than once he sees people grovel before death in abject fear, so piercing and painful is the

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther's *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (James Clarke, 1953, p. 442).

sting of death. He knows what is in Man and will not trust even those who say they believe in him. In his own home village they seek to cast him over a cliff. When the pinch comes those whom he baptised forsake him.

When we look at ourselves, our own generation, we see the unrest and fear pervading us. Not only wars and rumours of war, with their dreadful atrocities beset us, but greed, selfishness, desire for riches, entertainment, and fleshly pursuits are often espoused to somehow drown the anguish within as we are in the grip of our enemies. We, too, are rarely to be trusted. Few find genuine *shalom*—strong serenity—and pure joy is a rare occurrence. This is the background of sin, the law, God's wrath, the flesh, Satan and his worldly system, death and conscience. Life is indeed painful, and for some empty, a void, no goal at which to aim, no final, lasting achievement.<sup>3</sup>

### Required Sensitivity of Our Condition As Fallen Persons

If we have a proposition before us which we can recognise, namely that man is a sinner and sin keeps him self-deservedly in bondage to his enemies; and if knowing noetically the fact that Christ has removed guilt from us and so set us free, then that would seem to be all that is required of us. Not so: unless we have clear revelation of the dreadful state of ourselves under sin, and the impossibility of anything but Christ's comprehensive propitiation being powerful enough to deliver us, the act of the Cross and the Resurrection will be known only in a minor way. Conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment is required before we can glimpse the breathless immensity of the grace needed, and the grace in action. Let us then look at the array of enemies against us, and at their ruthless power to keep us in bondage and eventually destroy us, and let us not make light of any of them. Let us keep in mind the utter impossibility of delivering ourselves from them.

Let us keep in mind that the enemies whilst always holding us in tight tyranny, nevertheless conceal themselves from us as enemies. Were it not for the Scriptures, and certain elements we learn from them, we would scarcely know they exist. For example, sin is said to have its own inbuilt deceit; lusts are called 'deceitful', Satan is said to deceive the whole world and in fact has much of humanity and some celestial creatures in thrall, the conscience of a person in sin is not reliable and many will not believe God is wrathful, that death will mean destruction, and as for the gospel of liberation, Satan seeks to blind the eyes of needy men and women. The footnote covers some of these elements of deceit which are self-sought and appear to protect Man from alarm and dread.<sup>4</sup> This tragedy of Man—self-wrought—is not intended to be futile and final. 'The Son shall make you free', is both a glorious invitation and an assurance that life does not have to be tragic, but can be abundant in the most beautiful way.

## THE NATURE OF THE NINE ENEMIES

Paul once said, 'We are not ignorant of [Satan's] designs' (II Cor. 2:11), and from the revelation of the Scriptures we can come to know the nature of the nine enemies and the ways in which they work, and we can thus—through grace—walk in the life of Christ's liberty.

(i) **Sin.** This dark monster came into our world through the sin of Adam. It has no ontological reality, but it is a tyrant, fastening upon Man, keeping him in thrall as a slave and laying burdens of guilt on him which never allow him true peace. Man is constantly battling

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<sup>3</sup> The wise writer of Ecclesiastes shows how 'everything under the sun' is intolerable in its futility when human beings live on the horizontal level, without knowing the vertical dimension which shows life can be rich and beautiful.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 3:13; Romans 7:11; Ephesians 4:22; Revelation 12:9; 13:10; Hebrews 10:2, 22 ('sinful conscience'); II Corinthians 4:3, 4.

with its deceit, its power, its pollution, its presence and the heavy overlay of the penalty which dogs him throughout his life. Having degenerated from his original innocence and his regal authority, man cannot understand the deceit of his heart, and at times he is shocked by his own dark evil, and at other times by his white evil of self-righteousness as though he has surmounted his depravity and is pleasing to God.<sup>5</sup> The law of God always confronts the sinner and because he transgresses it he cannot escape the wrath of God.

**(ii) The Law.** This is not an evil enemy, but is intended to be the way of true living for Man, and for fallen Man to bring him to salvation, 'to live unto God' and 'to be a custodian to bring him to Christ'. Sin, however, uses the law to incite further sin. The dreadful pressure of law to the sinful is seen in 'the curse', in the fear of death and judgment, and the law slays the sinner. The conscience is always directly connected with the law, and so the guilt of sin is never absent. Paul speaks about 'the letter of the law', and Luther comments:

The law of the letter is everything written with letters. . . . This is the Law of works, the old Law, the Law of Moses, the Law of the flesh, the Law of Sin, the Law of Wrath, the Law of death. It condemns everything, makes all men guilty, increases lusts, and slays; and the more spiritual it is, the more it does so. . . .<sup>6</sup>

In the New Testament the term 'law' refers to the law given to Israel in the Old Testament, but in Romans 2:12–16 Paul assumes Gentiles also have the law written in their hearts. In any case the law of 'the elemental spirits' is no less tyrannical for the Gentiles who 'were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods' (Gal. 4:8, *passim*).<sup>7</sup>

**(iii) The Flesh.** The flesh is Man-in-himself, Man-without-God, Man-without-Spirit, Man-for-Himself, Man-hostile-against-God, this is the flesh. It is Man's being; fallen, contaminated by sin, seeking autonomy, incorrigible, unable and unwilling to obey law. Whilst all men are born of the flesh, this is not always in a pejorative sense, but certainly to be born of the flesh requires man to be born of the Spirit. The flesh has its tyrannical fleshly lusts, which are deceitful.<sup>8</sup> Sin and the flesh are the one together, and sin uses the law to incite to more sin, and the flesh promises delight, but can only end with the horrible works of the law. Man-in-sin is obligated to do the works of the law, to be subject to the flesh. Man, even if he wished to do so, cannot extricate himself from the toils of this enemy.

**(iv) The Wrath of God.** We have seen this is God working in the conscience with all the components of the guilt of sin as God gives Man up continually to his sin (Rom. 1:18, 24, 26, 28). When he is in guilt Man cannot see God in all his glory, his peace and his love, but he sees God as grim, vengeful, judgmental and ruthless. God's wrath terrifies him up to fear of judgment, and is the fire of death to him. God must be wrathful where Man is sinful, for Man's sin violates his holiness, especially when Man is 'suppressing the truth in acts of unrighteousness'.<sup>9</sup>

**(v) Death.** This is the most dreaded enemy of Man: Man is continually thinking about it in one way or another. It is called 'the last enemy' and has a deadly sting—sin which deserves the pain which is at once 'the fear of death' and the horror of judgment. Through fear of death men and women are all their lifetime subject to Satan's bondage, for certain is the Accuser,

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<sup>5</sup> In this and the following footnotes we will give the biblical references for our evaluation of the power of the enemies; Romans 5:12, 21; John 8:34; Matthew 1:21; 23:13–31; Jeremiah 17:9; Proverbs 5:22–23; James 1:14–15; II Peter 1:9.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by John R. Loesch in his *Wrestling with Luther* (Concordia, 1976) p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 2:16, 19; 3:10, 19; Romans 3:18, 19; 7:7–11; 8:2, 5–8; I Corinthians 15:55–56.

<sup>8</sup> John 3:3–6; Romans 7:5; 8:3–8, 12, 13, 23; Ephesians 2:3; 4:22; Colossians 2:11–14; Galatians 5:19–21.

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:3–4; 5:5–6; Psalm 7:11; 38:1ff.; Romans 3:5–6; Ezekiel 7:8; I Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 6:15–17; 11:18.

especially where sin has been committed and he brings what has been called 'the bitterness of death'. Human beings vie with one another in the competition to remain alive, even at the expense of others, thus it is 'every man for himself' and 'blow you Jack, I'm all right!'. From the time of the Fall man has been in death through sin, and so death becomes a tyrant of the worst order. Guilt is the feeling of that death within the conscience.<sup>10</sup> It is frightening that Man who was made for life must go into death. Just as the dissolution of the body is horrifying to behold, so the dissolution of the whole person is dreadful to contemplate.

**(vi) Conscience.** Conscience is a tyrant to sinful Man. It makes demands he cannot fulfil and then judges him for failure. It is filled with Man's dead works, which are sins. Man has 'an evil conscience', 'a seared conscience' and 'a defiled conscience'. The conscience terrifies a person because he has sinned, broken the law, not fulfilled God's demands, been lustful and proud in the flesh, and his conscience will not let him off the hook. It has been said that it takes as much to satisfy the conscience of Man as it does to satisfy the conscience of God. Conscience is linked with law, is a purveyor of God's wrath, presents the law's demands, alarms up to death, and keeps its subject restless—"There is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked".<sup>11</sup>

**(vii) Satan.** Known also as 'the devil', he keeps men and women in bondage all their lives through fear of death. He keeps fallen man in his system called 'the world'. He is the thief who comes to steal and kill and destroy. He sets out to deceive the whole world, and uses sin, the lusts of the flesh which are also deceitful, and raises up a deceitful heart in Man. He sets out to dethrone God and enthrone himself, and the nature of his proud spirit is seen in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14, where he is corrupted by his own beauty and believes he can win all the nations. He is 'the accuser of the brethren'. He could do nothing to Man if Man were not fallen and sinful, having listened to 'that old serpent the devil' in Eden. Were there no law, there would be no sin, and nothing with which Satan could accuse. Satan uses all things to dominate Man continually. He threatens, seduces, and blinds people to the truth (I Pet. 5:8; II Corinthians 4:4; 11:3, 14).<sup>12</sup>

**(viii) The World and Its Principalities and Powers.** Satan is called 'the prince of this world' or 'the ruler of this world', and he has other angelic powers under him called 'the rulers of this world', or 'principalities and powers'. These, two, dominate Man by guilt. Having been given certain authority by God they have used this for their own means, rejecting service to God. They seek to effect the rise and fall of nations over which they were placed. They constitute, under Satan, a cruel and dominating system. Man is helpless when within their powers, for as does Satan they also use sin, the law, the conscience, death and the wrath of God to keep their minions in thrall.<sup>13</sup>

**(ix) The Idols.** Paul, speaking of idols says in I Corinthians 8:4–5:

we know that 'an idol has no real existence,' and that 'there is no God but one.' For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

He means no idol has ontological existence. In Deuteronomy chapter 4 there is a powerful exposition of the evil and danger of idols, and that God will not tolerate idol worship. Much of

<sup>10</sup> Romans 5:12–21; 6:23; Hebrews 2:9, 14–15; 9:27; I Corinthians 15:26, 51–56; I John 4:17–18 (cf. John 10:10; 11:25); II Timothy 1:10; Revelation 12:21; 20:11–15.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 2:14–15; Hebrews 9:14; 10:2, 22; I Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15.

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 2:14–15; Ephesians 2:1–3; John 10:10; Revelation 12:7, 10; Jeremiah 17:9.

<sup>13</sup> Galatians 4:8–10; Colossians 2:14–15; Daniel chs 10–11; Ephesians 2:1–3; 6:11; Romans 8:38–39; II Peter 2:4ff.; Jude 8ff.; Revelation 12:1ff.; I John 2:15–17.

the Old Testament text is given over to the condemnation of idols. Romans 1:18–25 has a brilliant exposé of Man's rejection of God, and of his devising of idols and giving them the powers of God. In practice we all know the fascination of idols. We create them and seek the stimulation of love, peace and joy from them: an impossible matter. When we ask how they dominate us the answer is that they exercise a lordship over us because we have refused the Lordship of God. In I Corinthians 10:14–22 Paul says that idols have demons, that occultic forces always operate in idols. All elements we have spoken of above meet in this practice of idolatry. Dreadful sin is present and has power; the flesh is given over to idolatrous practices; idolatrous persons are in the grip of Satan and worldly evil powers. Idols have their own laws. Man is never so guilty, never so much under the wrath of God, as when he is in idolatry and death confronts him in its enormity.<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion As to the Nine Enemies

Man is engulfed in the tyranny of these nine enemies, and the constant, catastrophic disaster and his own miserable bondage takes away the true joy, love and peace of created living. There is no hope of emancipation, no hope of eternity. 'He who commits sin is the bondsman of sin', is a deadly certainty. So Man lives daily and momentarily in the fixed slavery. The main point we make is that Man is in the power of all the enemies through one factor, namely the guilt of sin. If Man's sin could be erased, if his guilt could be borne to extinction, then Man would be freed from all enemies, in the sense that they would no longer have a hold over him. God and his law would now be his friends whilst God's wrath would have vanished. Death, too, would no longer be an enemy with power, since its sting has been withdrawn. Satan would no longer have any power because he has had the weapon of guilt snatched from him at the Cross. The idols, the principalities and powers, the flesh and all worldliness would cease to have a hold on Man made new in Christ, Man forgiven, regenerated and made to be the child of God would experience the freedom promised by Christ, 'The Son shall make you free, indeed'.

### HOW, THEN, IS MAN MADE FREE?

Man's freedom lies in the death and resurrection of Christ, 'who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification'. The Atonement, as we have seen, is the Father setting forth his Son to be the propitiation for sin, and so 'he *is* the propitiation for our sins'. Propitiation is that which averts the wrath of God from us, the wrath being the personal action of God in our conscience where the components of guilt are working painfully. Christ, the High Priest, 'having somewhat to offer', is himself the oblation, and in offering himself 'bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors'.<sup>15</sup> In being made sin for us, and bearing 'our sins in his body on the tree,' and dying 'for sins, the just for the unjust', he removes every ounce of guilt of sin and thus his death (blood) 'purifies our consciences from dead works to serve the living God'.

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<sup>14</sup> See my book, *Dear Darling Idols* (NCPI, 1981), for a larger treatment of this subject. I beg out of giving a full list regarding the enemy of idols: the material is so profuse.

<sup>15</sup> I thought it good to include some material on 'intercession' which we used in a study on April 11th, 1994—*The Marvellous High Priesthood of Christ, the Son of God—II*:

If 'made intercession for the transgressors' is the saving act of the Suffering Servant in this passage then it gives us understanding of his utter identification with us in our transgressions. In 53:6 the verb *paga* ('to intercede') means 'laid on him' is 'made to meet upon him' and in 53:12 'made entreaty for', 'interceded for the rebels', is the idea. This 'mediatorial interposition' is the very act of 'personal sin-bearing' by which the sinners are exonerated and restored. J. A. Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, IVP, 1993) pp. 438–443, says of *paga* here, 'The base meaning is "to cause to reach" and hence to "cause someone's plea to reach someone's ears" ("to intercede") or "to introduce someone into someone's presence" ("to mediate"). What we cannot miss in Isaiah 53:12 and context is the amazing fact that this interceder mediates by means of allowing 'to meet upon him' i.e. 'come upon him' (*paga*) the sins of the transgressors. Bearing sins is here 'intercession'. This, surely, is the key to Christ's intercession for his people. His intercession is not limited to petitions but its nature is vicarious and redemptive suffering and in all true intercession there must be something of this.

When guilt is gone so has the wrath of God been worked out to exhaustion, the power of Satan and his principalities to accuse is cancelled, and so, then, the power of the world to hold in bondage. Death's sting which is sin's penalty has been withdrawn, and the fear of death has been dissolved. The law has been satisfied by Christ's obedience and his taking of the penal suffering due to Man. The purified conscience is no longer a tyrant, but one which allows us to have entrance to the Holy of Holies. Love—the love of the Cross—has cast out all fear, and so the rebellion of Man is cancelled. Man is reconciled to God, and now by the Spirit the love of God is poured into the heart, thus breaking all obligation to the flesh to live after the flesh. Living in the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit and not the works of the flesh. Idols can no longer fascinate redeemed Man, for God's love now constrains him.

All of this is another way of saying that the power of sin has been broken. The Son has thus made us free and broken the power of the nine enemies. We are free, indeed!<sup>16</sup>

### **CONCLUSION TO OUR STUDY: THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF FREEDOM IN CHRIST**

We may be tempted to think in terms of 'What does this freedom mean to me?', and whilst that is a legitimate question, we need even more to think in terms of God's creation; all its creatures and its eschatology, especially that of the vast body of humanity. Coming into personal freedom is a glorious event and we trust our present study has renewed many of us in the wonder of it, but our thinking should be universal and take in the clash of the kingdoms—the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. We should see the titanic battle that has gone on and still proceeds for the redemption of all creation and, in particular, of the vast tribe and race of Man. Romans 8:17–25 speaks of the ultimate redemption of creation as it enters into 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'. The Book of the Revelation describes the actions of Christ the Lord through history and the ultimate outcome of the new heavens and the new earth, along with consummating actions of the defeat of all evil and the bridal Feast of the Bride and the Lamb, as also the holy City, the new Temple, and the new race of Man—a kingdom of priests unto God.

This life of freedom certainly begins with God's personal salvation given to us, his redemption of us from the nine—and more!—enemies; but humility bids us stand fast in the liberty for which Christ has made us free, and not be entangled in the yoke of bondage. Present freedom must keep in sight the ultimate freedom—'the liberty of the glory of the children of God'—and must share its freedom with a world in bondage.

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<sup>16</sup> We set out here the Scriptures which show the defeat of all enemies: (i) *Sin*: John 8:36; Romans 3:24–25; 6:12, 14; I John 2:2; 4:10–13; I Corinthians 15:55–56. (ii) *The Law*: Romans 3: 24ff.; 5:12–21; 6:14; 7:4, 6; I Corinthians 15:55–56. (iii) *The Flesh*: Galatians 5:24; Romans 8:12–13; (iv) *The Wrath of God*: Romans 3:24–25; I Thessalonians 1:10; I John 4:10. (v) *Death*: II Timothy 1:10; I Corinthians 15:55–56; Hebrews 2:14–15. (vi) *Conscience*: Hebrews 9:14; 10:22; Titus 1:15. (vii) *Satan*: Hebrews 2:14–15; John 12:31; 16:11; Colossians 2:14–15. (viii) *The World, Its Principalities and Powers*: Colossians 2:14–15; Galatians 1:4; 4:8–9; 6:14. (ix) *The Idols*: I Thessalonians 1:9; Acts 17:29–30; Romans 1:19–25. For a fuller treatment of these enemies and their defeat see *The Things We Firmly Believe* (NCPI, 1986), *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989), and *Christ's Cross Over Man's Abyss* (NCPI, 2nd ed. 1987).

# Our Active Response to Knowing God as Love

## INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER OF KNOWING GOD AS LOVE

Our studies this year have been directed to knowing God, and particularly to knowing him as love. We should see that to know God loves, to know him as love, and to continue in that love is, inevitably, to love him and others. All talk of knowing 'God is love', but then we being those not actively loving is absurd: we simply do not know him as love if we do not love. Of course we do not know him as love because we love. It is the other way around: we love because he has revealed himself to us as love.

John in I John 4:7–20 and Paul in Romans 5:5–11 show us it is first by seeing, through revelation, the work of the Cross that we see and so come to know God as love.<sup>1</sup> Both emphasise that it is by the Spirit we come to this reality of the Cross and into the experience of it. John says not to love means we do not know God, that we have not been born of him. Paul would say the love of God has now been flooded into our hearts. There are tests which show whether or not we love God, whether we have God's love in us. We will later come to examine these tests.

The primary principles to which we address ourselves are (i) knowing God means we love him;<sup>2</sup> (ii) knowing God as love means we love all others; and (iii) we love according to command and not according to arbitrary choice or whim; that is, not when the fancy takes us.

### The Order of Coming to Know God's Love

The apostle John makes it clear that there is an order of love.

- (a) We have never loved God by means of, and in the nature of, our fallen nature. In fact a number of writers show that we have basic enmity towards God.<sup>3</sup>
- (b) God's love is shown to us in (i) God's sending his Son into the world that we might have life through him, and (ii) that we have life through him by the Son becoming the propitiation for our sins.
- (c) We love because he first loved us. This happens in the act of revelation when we see the Cross, and it constitutes the new birth.<sup>4</sup> We repeat: we love (him and all others) because he first loved us. We do not love him so that then he loves us.
- (e) John tells us (i) that since God *so* loved us, we ought, also, to love one another,<sup>5</sup> and (ii) this action of loving one another is God's love coming to its intended goal in us.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus believes his hearers should love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. This was incumbent upon all of Israel as it was spelled out in the Pentateuch. In Deuteronomy 30:6 God promised to give them a heart to love him. In Exodus 5:20ff. they are to love him because he will deliver them from Egypt. In Exodus 34:6–7 he revealed himself as the God of covenant love. In Matthew 5:43–45 Jesus showed his listeners that God loves all human beings and showers his providential blessing on them. In I John 3:1–3 the apostle shows that God loves by granting us sonship. All these things given in, we primarily know God by seeing him as love at the Cross. As we have seen, it cannot be denied that from Abel onwards, people of faith saw God as the God of propitiating love, so, in that sense, they knew God primarily in the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>2</sup> Of course we do not know God unless he first knows us, as is seen in Galatians 4:8–9; I Corinthians 8:3; cf. Amos 3:2.

<sup>3</sup> I John 4:10.

<sup>4</sup> I John 4:7.

<sup>5</sup> I John 4:11.

<sup>6</sup> I John 4:12.

(f) The continuing experience of being loved and loving arises from us dwelling in God and God dwelling in us, which is the same as us dwelling in love and love dwelling in us.

Whilst John takes it for granted that we love God because he first loved us, the matter of us loving God is not often mentioned explicitly in the New Testament. Paul mentions it twice in Romans 8:28, and I Corinthians 2:9, and it is also mentioned in James 1:12. In Ephesians 6:24 Paul speaks of those ‘who love our Lord Jesus with love undying’, whilst Peter speaks of having a love for Christ whom we have not seen, and having that love with ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory’.

## **THE STRANGE MATTER OF NOT LOVING GOD**

We have seen that God is love. Although this is revealed directly to us at the Cross by the Holy Spirit, and is sufficient for us, yet as we grow in faith and love and in the knowledge of God, we come to see the very nature of God as love. We have noted in our studies that the Father is the fountain of the Godhead; that is, he is the fountain of love. It is the Father who *is* love. The Son is the Son of his love, which means that his love with which he loves derives from the Father. Likewise the Spirit, who is the Spirit of love, proceeds from the Father and the Son. Thus, in Being, God is love.

Man, made in the image of God, is bound to love. Now it is a strange thing if he does not love. If he does not love then he is not in communion with God, and if he is not in communion, he does not worship God. He must, then, be awry in his being so far as love is concerned. This is the strange thing of not loving. Man is at odds with his true self.

Further than this, fallen man is spoken of being at enmity with God. The references—Romans 1:30, ‘haters of God’; 5: 10, ‘we were enemies [of God]’; Colossians 1:21, ‘hostile in mind doing evil deeds’; Titus 3:3, ‘hated by men and hating one another’—all show us the strangeness of human beings hating God and hating one another. By ‘strangeness’ we mean fallen Man being perversely against what he was created to be. If, for some time, we have been amongst those classed as ‘children of God’ (I John 3:10ff.) or ‘the people of faith’ (Heb. 11:4ff.), then we may be unable to understand this ‘strangeness’. Even being ‘children of God’ or ‘people of faith’, we were yet born in sin, and rejected God, in Adam. Only by covenantal grace have we been lifted out of this strangeness. The reality of Man’s deceitfulness was never far from the consciousness of Jesus Christ. John 2:22-24 shows that Jesus did not trust those who believed on him, and Mark 7:20–23 reiterates this.

### **Our Comprehending Man Outside of Love**

We have just been telling ourselves it is difficult to understand the strange thing of human beings not knowing God as love. We live in an age when the needs of Man are set forth as the primary matter for ministry. We think, often, in terms of human beings as being victims of a number of things such as heredity, environment, circumstances and parental upbringing. We tend to see much as being against the growing person, and so we may feel we need to comfort Man in his strangeness. This strangeness is really Man in the fallenness of sin. We fail to see modern Man against the foil of the righteousness of God. We preach to Man’s needs rather than confront him—and ourselves—with the righteousness and holiness of God. We even preach a love of God which is not a holy and righteous love. And we may also preach a severity of God which is without mercy (cf. Rom. 11:22).

## **GOD’S LOVE FOR ALL MANKIND**

Often a moralistic approach to fallen Man causes us to be against those who have not yet come into redemption. God loves the world! This is the story of the Scriptures—John 3:16, 17;

I John 2:2; 3:16; 4:14; I Timothy 1:15; Matthew 5:43–48; cf. Ezekiel 18:30–32; Hosea 11:8–9. We often get it into our mind that God loves only the elect. We forget that God has a covenant with all the earth, with all mankind (Gen. 6:18; 9:8–17; cf. Jer. 33:19–26; Isa. 26:5–9). We forget that he has commanded all men everywhere to repent because of the coming and salvation of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30–31), that the gospel is to be preached (i) to every person (Mark 16:15), that (ii) his servants are to make disciples of all nations, and (iii) ‘repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be preached among all nations beginning at Jerusalem’.

We might miss the reality of ‘a multitude such as no man can number’ and whilst undoubtedly those whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life will perish, yet the necessity of perishing because Christ did not ‘bear the sins of many’ is not a scriptural doctrine. Our love for mankind must compass all mankind (I Thess. 3:12; cf. Matt. 5:43–48), a point which we will later discuss, but sufficient here to say that if God’s love is universal then it will only be that in us and through us.

### HOW FAR DOES OUR LOVE GO?

John in his First Letter tells us there are two situations in which God’s love is perfected in us. God’s love, of course, is perfect: we cannot perfect it, but it can come to its fullness in us, which can be translated ‘Love comes to its full goal’ (2:5; 4:12). The two situations are (i) 2:3–5, where keeping God’s commandments is the very action of God’s love coming to its full goal in us, and (ii) 4:11–12 where God’s love comes to its full goal in us when we love one another.

#### Love Has Been Poured into Us and We Can and Must Love

We need to note that God’s love has already been poured into our heart by the Spirit who himself dwells in us (Rom. 5:5), so that his love is always present. We need to abound in that love which is always perfect, whether we do or not. Abounding in that love will bring us to love all men (I Thess. 3:12). Our love for others does not depend on them being lovable. Lovable or not, we are to love them. In our next section we will see to what extent or limits we have to go, but to understand how what is commanded is possible for us to do, we need to see that God is love; that is, the action of love is the action of God himself. When in I John 4:7 the apostle says, ‘Love is *of* God’, this must mean there is absolutely no *source* of love other than God, and when he says twice ‘God is love’ (I John 4:8, 16), then he means it must be God himself in action which constitutes the action of love. Understanding this, we understand there are really no limits to love. I Corinthians 13:7–8a, ‘Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails . . .’, shows that only God as love, that is, God who is love, can accomplish these things. Since we dwell in God and he in us, and since to dwell in God is to dwell in love and love to dwell in us,<sup>7</sup> there is no excuse for us not accomplishing what is commanded. The principle of loving is, ‘We love because he first loved us’. Our love may be thought of as a response to God’s love, but then we do not have the capacity to produce a response from ourselves since (i) we are not love, and (ii) we do not have love unless we have God and are in him.

#### The Extent or Limits of Our Love

We have asked the question, ‘How far does our love go?’, and have given the answer that it goes to very extremes: it has no limits. What is in mind when we say this? Do we think it pertains primarily to good ethical relationships and going to the limits with persons and the community, and is that where our love ends? If so, then we have missed much of what love is about.

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<sup>7</sup> I John 4:15–16.

Love is about what God is about, and nothing less. God is about the whole world, and he is about creation, redemption, judgment and glorification. That, then, is what our action of loving must be about, as we dwell in God and God dwells in us. I Corinthians 13:7–8b refers then to our participation in the cosmic act of God. It is not just an ecclesiastical ‘in-house’ preoccupation with love in relationships, or love in some kind of charity, however much it may include these.

### **THE TESTS OF LOVE**

We need to recognise the elements of love. These are set out by Paul in I Corinthians 13:1–8(b) in two ways, (i) what love is not, and (ii) what love is. These need to be examined and pondered. In I John we find time and again that the elements of love are (i) living and walking in light, (ii) doing righteous deeds, and (iii) fulfilling the commands of God. 1:5–7 speaks of living in light as the way of true fellowship with God and Man. 2:3–6 speaks of God’s love coming to its full goal in our keeping of his commands. 3:10ff. speaks of (i) the way of love as doing righteousness, (ii) loving the brethren, and (iii) that love showing itself in meeting the dire needs of the brethren. 5:1–3 shows that those born of God love those born of God, starting with Christ, and that this love is worked out in obeying the commandments of God. There are other tests: in I Peter 4:8 the writer says ‘love covers the multitude of sins’; and in Romans 14 Paul’s message is that love will build up (edify) the brother who is weak in faith; it will not cause him to stumble.

#### **The Law of Love and the Law of God**

John’s insistence that one who loves obeys the law of God leads us back to the fact that the law of God is the law of love. This is because it is the law of God (subjective genitive) and the law God plants in the human heart at creation (objective genitive) and which he renews in fallen man through the New Covenant by Christ and the Holy Spirit (objective genitive), because the new person dwells in God and God in him; that is, he dwells in love and love dwells in him. The law is the way of love, and its prescriptions are many, just as in the New Testament what we call paracletics (exhortations) and paranetics (ethical injunctions) are many. We can certainly dispense with ‘situational ethics’.

### **THE ACTION OF LOVE WHICH KNOWS NO LIMITS**

We now come to the goal and climax of our study, namely, our active response to knowing God as love.

The first thing to note is that in the New Testament when God comes to a person and shows him his love, that that person then wants to take the love of God to all the world. In John 21:15–19 we have the story of Peter, and Christ asking whether he loves him. Peter’s answer, even in the shame of his denying his Lord is, ‘You know Lord, that I love you’. He is rehabilitated and reinstated in Christ’s love and told to feed the sheep and the lambs, the true flock of Christ, and later he reiterates this charge in I Peter 5:1–4. All the disciples are commissioned to go into all the world and preach the gospel (i) to every creature, and (ii) to all nations, baptising the nations into the Triune Name.<sup>8</sup> We take it that, as for Peter, so for all the apostles, it was the constraint of love which sent them forth.

Again, Paul tells us it was God revealing his Son in him (*en moi*: ‘in me’) that made him go

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<sup>8</sup> Doubtless *eis to onoma* can be translated ‘in the name’, but surely ‘into the name’ is also a possible translation, and is so much more dynamic as it is baptism into the Triune God, just as in I Corinthians 12:13 which can be translated ‘For *in* one Spirit we were all baptised *into* one body’, although the ‘in’ (*en*) can be an instrumental and not a locative dative. The *eis* here is certainly ‘into’.

to the world, constrained by that love.<sup>9</sup> The Epistles make it clear that that constraining love was the motivating and enabling power in all his ministry. So far as John the apostle is concerned, his Gospel and Epistles show us that this love was the same for him as for Paul. Three important passages show the extent to which Paul would go—and went—in the drive of God’s love, and Paul’s love for all others—both Jew and Gentile. They are I Corinthians 9:19–27. II Corinthians 6:3–10, and II Corinthians 11:21–29. We quote two excerpts, II Corinthians 6:4–10 and 11:23–28:

... but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Reading these passages may make us feel inferior and deficient in love, but that is not the point. Paul is not boasting as though he had this drive and work of himself. Again it is only the love of God, the Being of God in him, which accomplishes this work.

### **The Extent of the Work of Salvation in a Person Which Requires Our Bearing, Hoping, Believing and Enduring Love**

For us, the following is the heart of our study. What is the holy nature of God, and what is the unholy nature of Man? What is the nature of God and Love, and then Man as a hating, cruel, selfish and wholly evil creature. Above we saw in two passages—John 2:22–24 and Mark 7:20–23—that Jesus knew what was in Man and did not trust him. He met the vilest of all hatred of him at the Cross, and Psalms 22 and 69—both Messianic Psalms—portray the heart of that dreadful enmity and the pain it brought to Christ in his suffering.

In life we meet this evil. Our reaction and response to it is the measure and test of our love. If we withdraw from the difficult situations and preserve ourselves, then we cannot claim to be loving. The testing of bearing, believing, hoping and enduring has not been fulfilled. We are talking first in regard to our families, our marriages and our relationships with our parents, our brothers and sisters, our children and wider family relationships. We are talking about our churches and the demanding happenings within them, the pastors and people, the leaders and their actions. We are talking about society, our culture, the society beyond our own, the cultures and the nations. We are talking about the men and women, the young and the old who constitute the people with whom we have to do.

### **The Heart and History of Mankind**

We need to trace the history of the human race, and come to see the heart of humanity and the society which obtains. If we start with Cain and Abel we see violence against love. If we trace Genesis chapters 3—6 we see the falling away from God which results in violence and corruption across the face of the earth. On the matter of violence, Jurgen Moltmann says:

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<sup>9</sup> II Corinthians 5:14.

Violence committed by people against other people, and by human beings against weaker creatures, is sin, and a crime against life. Violence always has two sides: on the one side is the person who commits the act, and on the other is his victim. On the one side the master set himself up as superior, on the other the slave is humiliated. On the one side the exploiter wins, on the other the exploited person loses.

An act of violence destroys life on both sides, but in different ways—on the one hand through the evil committed, on the other through the suffering. The person who commits the act becomes inhumane and unjust . . . Wrong has been done. No better future can ever ‘make good’ the suffering of the past. But how can one *live* with a guilty past? . . . Guilt without the experience of atonement leads to the repression of guilt, to the compounding of injustice, and to the compulsion to repeat the unjust act. Unless his guilt is forgiven the guilty person cannot live. But there is no forgiveness of guilt without atonement, just as there can be no reconciliation without the restoration of justice.<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely at this point—the hard-hearted becoming ‘inhumane and unjust’—that we need to apply the test of I Corinthians 13:7–8b. Do we love here, not only the victim but the perpetrator? Moltmann speaks of the hard-hearted and violent as justifying their actions, and really believing they are doing righteousness by the line of action they take. Many of those involved in the killings and other cruelty in the Nazi concentration camps, thought they were doing a good work, so far had they gone. Moltmann cites a book titled *The Inability to Mourn* by A. and M. Mitscherlich (New York, 1975). Hardness comes to a place where repentance appears to be impossible. Do we then, persist here, with love?

If we apply Jeremiah 17:9 to this state, ‘The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt’, then we see an intolerable state in which historically Noah is seemingly alone as a righteous man in his own (wicked) generation. If we follow the fortunes of his post-Flood family, then we see, again, the incursion of violence and corruption. We are aware that side by side with this evil are the true children of God, the men and women of faith who love with God’s love,<sup>11</sup> but the hardness of men and women in sin is difficult for us to comprehend. When we realise that the hardness of the human heart is beyond human assessment and knowledge, then we realise we are up against something that is indescribable. The hardness of human beings and other creatures which are evil, arises from deceit, hence the writer of Hebrews 3:13, ‘Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin’. It is often that we lose our sensitivity to God’s holiness, and so to the evil of sin, because we have been caught up in hardness, without seeming to have known it. Paul speaks of the insensitivity of the Gentiles ‘because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to every kind of licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of evil’. He speaks in this context of them becoming ‘corrupt because of the deceitful lusts’. It is enough, at this point, to indicate that Satan goes out continually to deceive the whole world and keep it in the deceit of sin and the deceitful lusts of the flesh. This is ‘the spirit who now energises within the children of disobedience’.<sup>12</sup>

When we further trace the history of man and come to the matter of God’s people Israel, then we are confronted by the indescribable cruelty, mayhem, lusts and killings which are described to us in the Books of the Kings and the Chronicles. We are also confronted with the vicious violence of the enemies of Israel. The history of the world since the time of Christ is no less filled with violence; violence which we have seen in our days expand beyond human description and interpretation.

It is appropriate here to include one section of the New Testament which shows us the situation in which we live, and in which our love must be exercised without fainting. It is Romans 1:28–32:

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,

<sup>10</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, Fortress Press, 1992, pp. 132–133.

<sup>11</sup> cf. I John 3:10ff.; Hebrews 11:4ff.

<sup>12</sup> See Ephesians 2:1–3.

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.

This is the world we always face when we go to proclaim the Gospel. We are aware that we are weak and helpless before the powers of evil, yet it is Christ who proclaims in and through us, and it is when we are weak that we are strong. We know that it is only the love of God which will penetrate the hearts which are hard, but will we put this knowledge into practice? Will we face the hard-hearted such as were justifying themselves as righteous in the concentration camps; or will we seek, instead, to evoke the curse of God upon them?

### **The Inability to Repent**

We know that repentance is a gift of God and none can repent unless the Spirit of God enables him or her. Hebrews speaks of some being unable to be restored again to repentance, and of Esau who 'found no chance to repent', and the Book of the Revelation, speaking of the great judgments upon the human race, indicates the human race did not repent. Of one occasion it was said, 'men gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pains and sores and did not repent'.<sup>13</sup>

Seeing how great a work is repentance, are we prepared to go to the full extent of love to proclaim, to persist and to seek to have fellowship with God in the work of love which brings human beings out of hardness to brokenness of heart and spirit? This is the true love of I Corinthians 13:7–8b. We, 'by the mercy of God have this ministry', are made 'stewards of the mysteries of God' and 'we faint not'.

## **CONCLUSION: THE POWER OF LOVE AND THE DANGER OF ABANDONING SUCH LOVE**

In one sense we have scarcely touched the edge of what is required of us in love and what we are enabled to do by it. The principle 'love never fails', or 'love never dies', encourages us to go on in love. So many commands there are for us to love. There are warnings, too, against loss of love. In Matthew 24:12 Jesus warned us, 'And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold'. Paul warns Timothy that in 'times of stress' men will be 'lovers of self, lovers of money . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God'. Christ and the Spirit speak to the church at Ephesus telling it, 'you have abandoned the love you had at first'. The church is commanded twice to repent, as also to turn and do the works it had done at the first, the works of 'the first love'.

So easy it is, then, to abandon God's love for the love of things or of others. We must be wary of this deceitfulness of sin, and guard ourselves against it by walking and living constantly in love. Perhaps we can do no better than to use the exhortation of Jude:

*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. And convince some who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh (Jude 20–23).*

For those of us who have abandoned our first love or have had it grow cold through various reasons, we can be encouraged, while there is time, by the promise of God in Zephaniah 3:17, 'I will renew you in my love'.

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<sup>13</sup> Revelation 16:10–11. In 11:13 we have most positive response to a judgment, 'and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the Lord of heaven'. This does not necessarily mean they repented.

# Our Active Response to Knowing God as Love Is to Live in Hope

## INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER OF FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

In I Corinthians 13:13 Paul says, 'So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love'. Paul has contrasted the things which are spiritual but will pass, that is the gifts, and the things which remain,<sup>1</sup> that is, faith, hope and love. These must be of greater worth and importance than the gifts, which after all require faith and love to be operated. 'The greatest of these is love' is easily understood since God is love, but he is not faith and hope. Faith and hope are certainly gifts of God<sup>2</sup> as indeed is love. God being love<sup>3</sup> gives himself to us, and by election draws us to give ourselves to him. That, then, involves us in Divine-human relationships as we become one with the Godhead: we are partakers of the Divine nature.<sup>4</sup> This being of us in God is experienced as the flow of Divine *perichoresis* into our being and constitutes union and communion with God. This high calling has innate to it the eschatological consummation, and so we live in hope of the coming *telos*.

## THE DYNAMIC TRIAD OF FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

### Faith, Hope and Love Indispensable to Human Living

Working on the basis that what is protological is at the same time eschatological,<sup>5</sup> we see that it is love which matures us towards the *telos* as is shown powerfully in I 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.

What we will be at the fulfilment time will be no less than what we were as created, though it will certainly be more. Created in love we were/are ontologically love creatures. Thus to be one with God then was to have faith in him and his word, and to have hope for the ultimate

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<sup>1</sup> There has always been a debate as whether 'remain' means that they will also be present in the future life. Bishop Wordsworth's words, 'faith is swallowed up in sight' have to be considered. Even so, faith and hope, if they are present in the future life, will take on a different hue than in this world. Here they have to remain, or nothing can be accomplished.

<sup>2</sup> That faith is a gift is apparent from Ephesians 2:8–10 and Philippians 1:29. In II Thessalonians 2:16 Paul tells us God 'gave us . . . good hope through grace'. As for love being a gift, God has poured his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.'

<sup>3</sup> We have seen in previous studies that there is no abstract love. God is love, so when his love is poured into our hearts (Rom. 5:5) then it can be said that God is poured into our hearts. Thus all our love acts are God's acts. Another way of saying this is that God dwells in us and we dwell in God. Hence our lives are under the regime of love.

<sup>4</sup> That is, we are participators in God.

<sup>5</sup> See my *The Profound Mystery* (NCPI, 1995) which examines Paul's claim that Genesis 2:24 is protological of the marriage of Christ and his church. Thus all that constitutes 'the beginning' is in fact the beginning of the end, so that the end is the end of the beginning. Thus the fullness of love (cf. I John 2:5; 4:12) is the designed human *telos*.

purposes of God for us and all his creation.<sup>6</sup> We have the evidence that those who were—from Abel onwards—the ‘children of God’ and ‘the people of faith’ lived by love, faith and hope. We note here a very important point; *the creature, Man, can only live by faith, hope and love*. We would expect, then, to find the true children of God living in this triad of faith, hope and love, and indeed this is the principle of their living. We would also expect to find that those living outside of God by choice would have upon them an ontological pressure to live by faith, hope and love. It is a fact that *all human beings have to live by a faith, a hope, and a love*, and that these three cannot be found apart, no matter how inadequate these three elements might be. If it is rightly objected that Paul says in Ephesians 2:12 that the Gentiles are those ‘having no hope and without God in the world’, then ‘no hope’ must be qualified as ‘no hope from God and no hope in God’ which means ‘no authentic hope’, that is ‘no ontological hope’. Such folk have a faith which is essential to their living in this world, inadequate though it may be. Likewise they will have hope and love which will be inadequate.

### **The True Triad of Faith, Hope and Love in the New Testament**

We look to see whether this triad is in the New Testament, but do not mean it only begins in the New Testament. Hebrews chapter 11 makes it clear that from Abel onwards all the saints of God lived in faith and hope—to say nothing of love.<sup>7</sup> The writer states that, ‘Faith is the assurance of things hoped for’, so that faith and hope cannot be apart. Thus faith is not hope, nor hope faith, though they are one together. The roll-call of the people of faith in Hebrews is the roll-call of people who lived in faith, hope and love. We can conclude, then, that the people of God have always been the people of faith, hope and love.

When we look at the text of the New Testament we see this triad in many places, such as Romans 5:1–5; I Corinthians 13:13; Ephesians 1:15ff.; Colossians 1:4–5; I Thessalonians 1:3; 3:6; 5:8; II Thessalonians 1:3; Titus 2:11–14; Hebrews 6:10–11; 10:23–24; I Peter 1:3, 22; I John 3:1–3; Jude 20–21, some of which we now quote:

because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven (Col. 1:4–5).

remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thess. 1:3).

But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation (I Thess. 5:8).

We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, as is fitting, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing (II Thess. 1:3).

For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end (Heb. 6:10–11).

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 (Heb. 10:23–24).

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 (I Pet. 1:3).

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 (Jude 20–21).

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<sup>6</sup> It is reasonable for us to see innate in the creational mandate of God (Gen. 1:28) the earth ‘filled up’, implying a creational fulfilment, which would be creation’s *telos*.

<sup>7</sup> Where true faith and hope are found so is true love. The principle of love is (i) God is love, (ii) God loves us, and (iii) we love (God and all others) because he first loved us. Faith and hope cannot be apart from love, for they spring from love and are essential to it.

## A Definition of Hope

J-J. von Allmen has a definition of hope. ‘Hoping is seizing in faith a promise of life and salvation. To have hope is to have a future which, even if it contains tribulations, will be good’.<sup>8</sup> We can say then that hope is the expectation of something good. Of Old Testament hope P. S. Minear says:

The existence of hope springs from the covenants made by God with his people. Hope links together the two parties of the covenant: God is man’s hope; therefore man hopes in God. Hope is intricately involved in the total pattern of divine action and human response.

Of hope in the New Testament he says:

Hope is simultaneously the response among his [God’s] people to his activity among them. As a description of this response, hope is expectation expressed in faith, confidence, patience, endurance and eagerness.<sup>9</sup>

We can say that hope is trust in God with a view to his handling of creation, and his (good) intentions for its future. Hope is a word which conveys its meaning to all; all we need to do is to distinguish between human hopes and the hope humans have *in* God.

## Hope—Objective and Subjective

Hope always has its object. Biblically Man cannot devise or create the object. The object of hope is God who has given the gift of hope in the sense that he is what is hoped for—‘our hope of sharing the glory of God’, ‘heirs of God’. Under a heading below— ‘The Objects of Hope’—we see the objective nature of hope. These are God’s plan and provision for believing humanity. Hope, then, is a way of life; a way of seeing, being confident, expecting. When it is said that ‘love hopes all things’, it shows that hope is of love, and is connected with ‘all things’. We take time to note that this subjective hope of ours, centred on the Object and objects of hope, is a very powerful thing *now!* Like love and faith it deeply affects our living and our doing *now!*

## SAVED BY HOPE FOR HOPE

Romans 8:20 has, ‘for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope’, and 8:24 has, ‘For in this hope we are saved’. It is legitimate to say we are saved in hope. This may not quite mean ‘saved by hope’ but probably in the light of Ephesians 2:8, ‘By grace you have been saved through faith’, we should be able to claim we are saved by faith, hope and love. Of course it is grace which saves us and grace brings faith to birth, as in Romans 10:17 faith is said to be brought to birth by the word of Christ. I Thessalonians speaks of, ‘for a helmet the hope of salvation’, Titus 3:5–7 links salvation, justification and the ‘hope of eternal life’ together:

he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

The statement regarding Abraham was that, ‘In hope he believed against hope’, which we might translate ‘in God given-hope—through God-given promises—he hoped against the

<sup>8</sup> *The Vocabulary of the Bible* (ed. J-J. von Allmen, Lutterworth, 1958), p. 172.

<sup>9</sup> *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, (Abingdon, 1952), pp. 640–641.

hope of human sight and reasoning'. The natural man has a hope of his own making, which precludes any hope based upon God-given promises and its fulfilment by God's acts in and for the person.<sup>10</sup>

### HOPE IS A PRESENT DYNAMIC

One of the aims of this study is to show that what is 'there', that is, what is at the end-time—the *telos*—has its impact in the present. If we look at what we might call a psychological study of hope in the everyday world of human beings then we gather the following:

- (a) **A Person without Hope is Hopeless.** Whilst such a state may be rare, yet if it is so, then it is caught up in things such as nihilism, accidie, refusal to give reality to what surrounds one—and so on. Probably no one escapes temporary hopelessness.
- (b) **All Human Beings Must Devise Some Sort of Goal in Which They May Then Hope.** In order to escape the dreadful state of hopelessness, human beings must manufacture a goal or goals. Religions without an eschatology devise cyclic developments for Man.<sup>11</sup> Religions and ideologies which have an eschatology are potent. Only they can give rationality to living in the present. On any score short term goals keep hope alive, and the more dynamic the goal, the more powerful the hope. We reiterate: no human being can live without faith, hope and love; if they are missing then they must be manufactured.
- (c) **The Object or Goal of Hope Determines the Present Way of Life in Which People Live.** If, for example, a person is seeking to accrue enormous wealth, then this will determine his or her present way of life. Hope that is merely wishful thinking is not hope, but a delusion. If one had what may be called 'the first fruits of wealth', then that person would be encouraged in hope, because the hope would not be without *present* encouragement. If there was no hope of wealth and yet wealth came, this would not be from hope, but from chance or circumstance. The cult of Lady Luck motivates people towards acquiring wealth, position and power, but hope is not based upon a rational action of life, but a delusive one. What we have claimed immediately above—that *hope in a future object is powerful for creating action in the present*, is true. This would be the case whether the goal was obtainable or not, and whether it was in the context of godly faith, hope and love, or not.
- (d) **The Object of Hope Determines the Way in Which Those Who Hope Go About Life.** The Christian triad of faith, hope and love is commensurate with Christ who is our hope, and the elements of Christian hope such as holiness, perfected love, glorification, inheritance, sonship, worshipping as the kingdom of priests—and so on—will determine the way we go about living in this life,<sup>12</sup> and prior to its climax which is godly perfection, the new heavens and the new earth, the Holy City—and so on. If one has an idol (or idols) as the goal, and then all that idol seems to offer will determine the modes and ways of the idolater's living. The elements of non-godly living will be in the context of fallen faith, hope and love.

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<sup>10</sup> Philippians 1:6 and I Thessalonians 5:23–24 show that God fulfils the plan he has set forth for us. In terms of the idea of hope, he fulfils the hope that is set before us. Whilst of our wills we seek to fulfil that hope, yet it is he who enables us to do so.

<sup>11</sup> Karma, cyclic developments and the like carry a sort of eschatology, but such never points to an ultimate, for if the Nirvana is a qualitative *telos*, nevertheless it gives way to a recommencing of the old cyclic pattern.

<sup>12</sup> Take for example, I John 3:1–3. John shows what we will be—like Christ. He then concludes, 'And everyone who thus hopes in him, purifies himself as he is pure'.

We might note here that in any system which includes and is motivated by hope that it will be the quality of the object or person of hope which will determine the working of that system. So a tawdry or insignificant object (or person) of hope will mean a small and mean hope. By contrast if there is the hope of glory and Christ is (the object of) that hope then it will be a glorious hope.

### THE GOD OF HOPE

The term ‘the God of hope’, appears in Romans 15:13 in a context in which Paul has been speaking about ‘strong’ Christians and ‘weak’ Christians. He has said that what was written in former days was written that by them ‘we might have hope’ (v. 4). In this case both Jews and Gentiles might have hope, and in particular the Gentiles might have trust in the ‘root of Jesse’. So he is saying ‘the God of hope’ is the One from whom hope comes for both Jew and Gentile, both weak and strong.

Time and again Israel speaks of God being their hope, of putting their trust in God and hoping in him.<sup>13</sup> The Gentiles ultimately come to see him, likewise, as the God of hope—their hope.<sup>14</sup> Paul prays in Romans 15:13 that the God of hope may fill his readers with all joy and peace in believing that they may *abound in hope* by the Holy Spirit. Such a prayer may be taken for mild piety except that having hope in God is a matter of life or death for the Gentiles. The prayer is no cliché. When we ask what is it to ‘abound in hope’ then it must mean the church has all the objects of hope in sight, those which below we discuss under the heading ‘The Objects of Hope’.

### THE TRIUNE GOD OF HOPE

God is the God of hope. In the New Testament this would mean the Father is the God of hope. In order to understand the hope God gives we would have to start with creation, and in spite of the Fall and all the evil that abounds we would have to see him as a ‘faithful Creator’, that is, that we can trust him to make the *telos* complete in the face of all other things. So Israel could trust him for its living as a nation and its goal as a nation. As the one who has covenanted with all the world to bring grace to the nations our hope can be only in him.

Jesus, to Paul, was ‘the hope of Israel’,<sup>15</sup> that is, the one whom God the Father had promised, for whose coming Israel hoped and looked. Paul also spoke of ‘Christ Jesus our hope’ and ‘Christ in [among] you, the hope of glory’.<sup>16</sup> All hope has to do with promises and Jesus is the one promised. Hence he is our hope. In him are all the promises of God made to be God’s ‘Yes’. So he is the mediator by whom God settles and substantiates and fulfils the hope.

The Holy Spirit is without doubt the Spirit of hope. It is by him that we abound in hope, and this even in the face of deep suffering.<sup>17</sup> When we ask how he makes hope to abound in us, and keeps us patient in suffering and tribulation, it is because he reveals the Father and the Son and brings application of the gospel to the heart of a person. He is the ‘Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him [God]’.

Thus ‘the God of hope’ is the One who is first the object of our hope, who creates the

<sup>13</sup> e.g. Jeremiah 14:8; 17:13; 50:7. Persons have hope in God or are enjoined to do so. Psalms 39:7; 42:11; 43:5; 78:7.

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 11:10; Romans 15:12.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 28:20.

<sup>16</sup> I Timothy 1:1; Colossians 1:27.

<sup>17</sup> Romans 15:13; 8:18–27; cf. Ephesians 1:17–20; II Corinthians 3:17–18; cf. Galatians 5:5. The latter reference speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit keeping us in waiting for the hope of justification. We can read this reference back to say that it is by the Spirit that we come into justification by grace.

elements which constitute our hope, and who enables us to have hope even in tribulation and suffering.

## COMING TO HOPE

It is clear that those outside of God, and in particular outside of Christ, have no (authentic) hope. In I Thessalonians 4:13 Paul speaks of those ‘who have no hope’, and in Ephesians 2:12 of those who are ‘strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world’. Those outside the covenants with Abraham, Israel and David are without hope. They have no promises.

How then do we come to hope? It is clear we come by simply coming to ‘the hope of the gospel’, ‘the hope of eternal life’, ‘the hope of salvation’.<sup>18</sup> To come to that hope is to come to Jesus Christ, but Paul speaks of ‘the hope of your calling’.<sup>19</sup> His whole doctrine of calling is here involved. Thus Romans 8:28–30 needs to be studied:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

From ‘the hope of your calling’ we derive the fact that when we are called we have a hope. Calling is effectual and places us within the hope who is Christ and gives us the hope to which he brings us, the many details of which we are about to speak. This links with Peter’s statement, ‘By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead’.<sup>20</sup> Paul had spoken of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, being the dead—‘having a hope in God which these [Paul’s accusing opponents] themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust’.<sup>21</sup> God’s mercy, then, works to bring new birth through the (Cross and) resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, so that now hope of eternal life comes to the new believer.<sup>22</sup>

Undoubtedly the calling of which we have spoken above comes through the proclamation of the gospel. This Acts 13:48 tells us, ‘And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed’.

In speaking of this calling we must remember that it was the calling of love, and required the act of faith from those who would respond to the grace of God bringing salvation.

## THE PRESENT LIVING IN HOPE OF THAT WHICH IS ESCHATOLOGICAL

We find the principle outlined in I John 3:1–3 where John says we as yet do not see what we shall be<sup>23</sup> but we know we shall be like him, and because he is pure and we shall be pure, so then we *now* purify ourselves in that expectation (hope). The significant principle we draw is, ‘Because we are shown what we will be, we hope for that; and because that is how we shall be, we now set about being that’. In other words, hope is a great dynamic for present living, obedience to God’s law, ethical practice—and so on.

In order to see this more clearly let us take Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:15–21:

<sup>18</sup> Colossians 1:23; Titus 1:2; I Thessalonians 5:8.

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 1:18; 4:4.

<sup>20</sup> I Peter 1:3.

<sup>21</sup> Acts 24:15.

<sup>22</sup> Titus 1:2; 3:7.

<sup>23</sup> cf. I Corinthians 2:9–10.

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his 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.

Paul is asking the Father of glory that out of his riches (of glory) he will ‘give a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him’ to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 1:9–10 he says God has made known to them in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will. That will is to effect his plan to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. So then ‘a spirit of wisdom and revelation’ is needed for Paul’s readers—and us—to know the future. All darkness must be driven from the heart so that the eyes of the heart may be enlightened. The outcome of this will be that they will know ‘the hope to which they were called’. This is important. Without such a spirit (Spirit?) they will never know the hope of the calling. As we have said, being called they now have a hope, the hope of their calling. This includes everything that will be—see our heading below ‘The Objects of Hope’. The second thing they will know will be ‘what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints’. Here the saints are God’s glorious inheritance. This must not be missed. Thirdly, they will know the greatness of God’s power working towards, in, and through the called ones. The called ones need to know this power is working for the hope of their calling, getting them to that hope’s consummation. They need to know the power that is making them fit to be ‘his glorious inheritance *in the saints*’.<sup>24</sup>

## THE OBJECTS OF HOPE

These are many, and whilst we will deal briefly with the elements of hope spoken about, the point of looking at them is really to see that ‘Our Active Response to Knowing God as Love Is to Live in Hope’. This is important—we live now in the light of that which will be, but what will be affects us deeply in our *now* time. As we have said, whatever was at the beginning was protological of what will be at the end. The beginning is the beginning of the end, and the end is the end of the beginning. The *Object* of hope, God, has always been the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. Christ the Son is the same today, yesterday and forever. The *objects* of hope have themselves been planned before creation. Subjective hope is shaped by these objects. If we look at the objects of hope as never coming to us *before* the end, then we will see an act of salvation (ours) as a long period, or a stint of waiting which will suddenly be effected at the end. In nominating the objects, time and space do not here permit us to expand and comment, but if Paul thought it so necessary for us to know the hope of our calling then we should give much time to considering them. We note that in one sense they are all of a one piece.

- (a) **Glory and Glorification.** Romans 5:2 speaks of ‘our hope of sharing the glory of God’. That glory is to be revealed to us (Rom. 8:18). I Corinthians 2:6–7 speaks of a hidden wisdom ordained for our glorification. The glorification is that we will be in the likeness of God’s Son (Rom. 8:28–30; I John 3:1–3). Glorification will be of the person, including ‘the redemption of the body’, and can be called ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’.

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<sup>24</sup> Some commentators see this as ‘our glorious inheritance as saints’, but the text translates otherwise. In the Old Testament whilst God gave the land to Israel for an inheritance, and also promised them that they would inherit the world, yet Israel is more spoken of as being God’s inheritance. This is a subject which can be greatly expanded.

- (b) **The Sonship and the Inheritance.** Glorification as sons of God means we will inherit the earth, the world, the new heavens and the new earth (Matt. 5:5; Rom. 4:13; Rev. 21:7). This inheritance is laid up in heaven (Col. 1:5–6, and we are sealed for it by the Spirit (Eph. :12–14). It is imperishable, undefiled and unfading (I Pet. 1:3–4). Only sons inherit (Gal. 4:7; Rom 8:15–17).
- (c) **The Resurrection and Eternal Life.** By his resurrection we will be raised (I Pet. 1:3) and although we have eternal life now (I John 5:12), yet ‘the hope of eternal life’ will be realised (Titus 1:2; 3:7). That means a body of incorruption (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21; I John 3:3). I Corinthians 15 is a weighty exposition of this whole theme.
- (d) **The Hope of Salvation and Justification.** We have already been saved ‘in hope’ (Rom. 8:24) which is the hope of the redemption of the body and the glorious liberty of the children of God. So there is ‘the hope of salvation’ (I Thess. 5:8) which does not mean we do not already have salvation: we do, but it is as yet incomplete, although thoroughly assured. Likewise by faith, through the Spirit, we wait for ‘the hope of righteousness [justification]’. We already have this, but we have it ‘in faith’ and not ‘by sight’. One day we will have it by heavenly sight.
- (e) **The Hope is of ‘All Things’,** that is God, the New Heavens and the New Earth, the Holy City, the New Temple (God and the Lamb), Our Being a Kingdom of Priests unto our God and our Reigning Forever on the Earth.

### **THE OBJECT AND OBJECTS OF HOPE DYNAMICALLY DETERMINE THE LIFE WE NOW LIVE**

Hebrews chapter 11 is the passage which shows us that ‘Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’. It is clear from this chapter that all the Old Testament saints went through their lives on the basis of faith, but since faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the hope is thus, with faith—and of course with love—a *present dynamic for living*. II Corinthians 4:18 speaks of looking at things unseen (cf. Heb. 12:2; Col. 3:1). Thus hope is something we must be about deliberately. On the principle we have enunciated of I John 3:1–3, we set about living our lives motivated by the Object and objects of hope. This is really the same as ‘seizing the hope’ (Heb. 6:18), and ‘holding fast the confession of our hope without wavering’. It is the same as ‘hoping against hope’, and ‘we are not ashamed to hope because the love of God has been poured into our hearts’ (Rom. 5:5), we have the first fruits of the Spirit, that is, the first fruits of the objects of faith and the living fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). We have tasted of the good things to come (Heb. 6:5), have been sealed by the Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30), and indeed have the Spirit in our hearts as a given guarantee (II Cor. 1:22; Rom. 5:5). We rejoice then in the assurance ‘so faith, hope, love abide, these three’. This is the hope that will not be deferred, for ‘a desire fulfilled is a [the] tree of life’. If we set our hope humanistically on ourselves, or idolatrously on the idols, then we are doomed to eternal hopelessness.

# Our Active Response to Knowing God as Love Is to Live in Faith

## INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER OF FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

As we have seen in previous studies faith, hope and love are an inseparable triad.<sup>1</sup> 'So faith, hope, love abide . . . but the greatest of these is love', informs of us the continuing nature and necessity of this triad for the people of God. For the Christian person, faith in God and His Son have constituted his/her entrance into eternal life. John 5:24 states, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life'. This is belief in the Father. Jesus told the disciples, 'Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me'. Time and again he had said that belief in him brought everlasting life. 'He who believes in the Son has eternal life.'<sup>2</sup> Jesus made it clear that to believe in him was something impossible unless the Father drew the person to him.<sup>3</sup> The missionary emphasis of the apostles was belief in Christ, and in Acts there are some thirty references to believing and so receiving salvation. Believing comes through the hearing of the word of God, and in some cases there were signs and wonders confirming the word. In almost all the Epistles the matter of believing unto salvation is present. We ought to note in passing that Paul spoke of his ministry as that of 'testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of *repentance to[wards] God* and of *faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*'.<sup>4</sup>

The act of saving faith leads on into the life of faith, and, as we saw, such life is lived in the triad of faith, hope and love; the three being as one, though each is distinct enough to be called faith, hope and love.<sup>5</sup> Being saved by the love of God means being 'saved in hope'<sup>6</sup> and is being saved through the act of faith in the faithfulness of God as Creator and Redeemer.<sup>7</sup> Galatians 5:6 is an appropriate verse, 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love'. The thrust of this verse is that faith, once having come to the believer, will be worked out in the energising of love: its actions will be love actions, but then its actions will be those of obedience, and obedience which is in conformity with the shape of faith; that is, truth revealed to faith as set forth by God.

It is important to see that the only thing which matters is faith being energised by love. In this sense it is 'Love from beginning to end'. I Corinthians 13:2 speaks of the kind of faith which can remove mountains, but if it is not working through love the one

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<sup>1</sup> See Monday Pastors' Study 7/8/95, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> John 14:1; 3:36.

<sup>3</sup> John 6:44-45, 65.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 20:21. It has echoes of John 14:1.

<sup>5</sup> See Monday Pastors' Study 7/8/95 p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Whilst we are undoubtedly saved we have yet to hope for the fullness of salvation, that hope being given to us by God in our calling, that is, 'the hope of our calling'. So in Galatians 5:5 it is said, 'For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness'.

<sup>7</sup> I John 4:9-10; Romans 5:5-11; 8:24; Ephesians 2:8-10; cf. I Peter 4:19.

who has this faith is *nothing*.<sup>8</sup> I Timothy 1:5 speaks of ‘love that issues from a . . . sincere faith’, and here there is no question of love being ‘a special gift’. Because ‘faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’, it can be seen that the three—faith, hope and love—are all in juxtaposition. We can even say they have their own inseparable, intrinsic, triadic and perichoretic relationship.

## THE CHRISTIAN COMING TO FAITH

We have seen that no one can come to Christ and have faith in him unless the Father draws him/her to do so. Likewise Christ must also draw them—‘I, if I be lifted up . . . will draw all men unto me’. This drawing of them was to be accomplished by the Cross.<sup>9</sup> We must also keep in mind the birth of faith by the hearing of the word of Christ.<sup>10</sup> At the same time this could not be so without the revelation of the Spirit.<sup>11</sup> The Christian coming to faith is by the Triune work of the Godhead. Paul spends the writing of Romans 1:17—3:31 in showing God’s plan for justifying sinners by his grace, and the faith which is evoked by that grace. Thus Ephesians 2:8–10 is a pericope covering this amazing work. Christ’s coming had been one ‘bringing salvation’<sup>12</sup> and was a new event in the life of the people of Israel, and one to which some responded and others did not. One of the main points on which we will focus will be the statement of Hebrews 12:2, ‘. . . Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’.

## THE NATURE AND MEANING OF FAITH

### Faith and Belief in the Old Testament

An examination of the nature and meaning of faith requires a comprehensive coverage which we cannot undertake in this paper. The Hebrew verb *aman* has the ideas of ‘to remain steadfast’, ‘to remain firm, true, reliable, stable and constant’. It is from this we derive the word ‘amen’. King Ahaz is told by the prophet, ‘If you will not believe [God’s word to you] surely you shall not be established’; that is, ‘If you believe God then you will be established’.<sup>13</sup> Again, Hezekiah is told, ‘He who believes will not make haste’.<sup>14</sup> We may speak of God’s faithfulness in all things, and this will pertain to his work of creation as also his covenant inherent in that creation. Thus he is ‘a faithful creator’ and ‘our Father, our Redeemer from eternity’.<sup>15</sup> Of him Abraham would say, ‘. . . the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth’. In that sense

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<sup>8</sup> Sometimes this has been called ‘special faith’, meaning it is a gift of the Spirit (cf. I Cor. 12:9; Rom. 12:6). All faith is not a *given* but a *gift*. That is, we are not all naturally endowed with faith, but we receive it as a gift (Eph. 2:8–10; Phil. 1:29).

<sup>9</sup> John 12:32; Matthew 11:27.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 10:17. We will need to understand the meaning of the phrase, ‘the word of Christ,’ or ‘the preaching of Christ’.

<sup>11</sup> John 16:12–15.

<sup>12</sup> Titus 2:11 *passim*, cf. 3:3 *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 7:9

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 28:16.

<sup>15</sup> I Peter 4:19; Isaiah 63:16.

he was at one with the first article of the Apostle's Creed. It is also said of Abraham 'And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness'.<sup>16</sup>

Belief in God concerns creation and covenant, and entails belief in his promises made on the part of his people to his people, as well as their obedience to him. Unbelief in God is a rejection of his nature as reliable, and within Israel<sup>17</sup> it is a refusal to receive into heart and mind and action of life the great revelation of himself in his covenant promise of 'I shall be your God and you shall be my people'; God giving them a revelation of his covenantal Being as in Exodus 34:5-7:

And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. 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.'

The whole nature of God is what Israel must believe in covenantal relationship. Those of Israel would have to remember that, no matter what the circumstances, God would remain faithful, and hence they were obliged to responsive belief and faith. Faith is a relationship, and its obedience follows the acts and promises of God. For example, the promises of covenant to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are shown to be fulfilled in God's action on Israel's behalf:

And Israel saw the great work which the LORD did against the Egyptians, and the people feared the LORD; and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.<sup>18</sup>

Even at this point we need to note that in the covenant of God its members were called upon to live in faith, hope and love. Believing in God was to be a major part of their way of life. We also need to note that God has never left himself without witness to all mankind, and in particular to those with the stated covenants—Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic. By the media of his theophanies, angelic messengers, the word of the law and the word of the prophets, he has constantly informed those who will listen to him. Very significant has always been the word of the prophets, for it has spoken of the nature of God, and has always spoken of things to come; and faith is the assurance of things hoped for; that is, hoped for on the basis of God's stated promises and his reiterations of 'things to come'.

### **Faith and Belief in the New Testament**

We have spoken of this sufficiently in the first two sections above. Our belief has to be in God as Creator and as Redeemer, but this belief is brought to sinful Man by the Holy Spirit and Christ as the Father purposes. Man is saved by grace, but we can also speak of man receiving saving faith; that is, he is saved by faith. This act of his salvation brings him into union with God, transfers him into the Kingdom of God, makes him to be a member of the Body of Christ, the Church, and so places him in the worshipping community which is the community of faith, hope and love. Thus he lives by faith: not only is he justified by faith, but sanctified by faith also,<sup>19</sup> since God himself is 'the

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<sup>16</sup> Genesis 14:22; 15:6.

<sup>17</sup> Creation and the covenant of creation are really God's promises to Man, and not only to Israel.

<sup>18</sup> Exodus 14:31; cf. Numbers 14:11; Deuteronomy 1:32; II Chronicles 20:20; Psalm 78:22.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 20:32; 26:18; cf. Hebrews 10:10, 14. I Corinthians 1:30 shows that the faith in Christ which brings union with Christ, at the same time receives all the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption that God bestows in Christ.

source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption'. The principle of 'the just shall live by faith' is not expended in the act of saving faith, for all life issues from 'a sincere faith', and all faith works (is energised) by love.

## **FAITH COMES BY THE WORD OF CHRIST**

### **The Refusal of the Knowledge of God Is Rejection of Faith in God**

What is important for us is to see that, through the Fall, Man lost faith in God. That is, he refused to believe in God. In the fullest sense he lost the knowledge of God. As created he knew God naturally in his innocence, in his relationship with God; and the *word* God had given to him of mandate, of not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was believed. That is, Man trusted God. When the *word* of the serpent came, Man trusted that *word* above God's *word*. He, Man, was now in disbelief. The offerings of sacrifices by Cain and Abel would attest to their faith or lack of it.<sup>20</sup> Abel offered by faith, but Cain did not. Cain and his progeny were set on the path of faithlessness, whilst Abel's spiritual descendants are children of God and people of faith.<sup>21</sup> Had there been no covenant inherent in creation, reiterated with Noah, and set forth redemptively to Abraham, concerning his people and the peoples of the earth, then there would be no foundation for faith, and no promises upon which faith could flourish and be sustained.

### **The Word of God in History**

All God's media of communication constitute his word uttered. Israel is in this case. Its being, as such, constituted God's revelation to a nation and then through that nation, so that Man—Israel and the Gentile nations—could have faith in God and live in faithful obedience to him within his creational covenant. Israel did not wholly live in that word, and so it did not wholly witness that word to the nations. The prophets of Israel spoke of the Messiah to come and the word which would come with the messenger of the covenant.<sup>22</sup> In past times God had spoken to the fathers by the prophets, but in the last age—the age of the Kingdom of God and the New Covenant—he would speak by the Son.<sup>23</sup>

### **Faith Coming by the Word of Christ, the Word Which Is Christ**

'So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.' When we follow Paul's argument from verse 5, then we see that Romans 10:17 in its context is saying, 'Faith comes to the hearing person by the word which Christ preaches'. Christ began his preaching by announcing the Kingdom and calling

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<sup>20</sup> Hebrews 11:4. Note Abel is 'approved as righteous' and 'through his faith he is still speaking'.

<sup>21</sup> cf. I John 3:10–11. The children of Abel are those who do good. The children of Cain are those who hate those who do good, for their own deeds are evil. Luther said, 'To know God is to worship him'. To refuse to know him (Rom. 1:21–25, 28) is to refuse to worship him truly.

<sup>22</sup> That the word was nigh unto Israel, even in its mouth, is clear from Deuteronomy 30:12–14, the passage which Paul uses in Romans 10:5–13. 'The messenger of the covenant' of Malachi 3:1–4 was to be Messiah, the one who would be mediator of the New Covenant, and be the word of the Lord to all.

<sup>23</sup> Hebrews 1:1–3.

men and women to repent and believe the gospel. Peter describes ‘the word of Christ’, by saying, ‘You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached’.<sup>24</sup>

In *The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ*,<sup>25</sup> P. T. Forsyth makes the claims that Christ did not preach the gospel in his preaching ministry in Palestine but he *made* it. Whilst he spoke of ‘the gospel of the Kingdom’, there was no gospel in the sense that we know it until Christ had completed his work, especially that of the Cross, the resurrection, the ascension and the session at God’s right hand. In this sense he made the gospel which the early church proclaimed. I cannot remember the reference of Karl Barth’s statement, ‘No man has ever heard the gospel from the lips of a man’, but this is what Forsyth claims in essence; that is, that no man can know the gospel except Christ, who is himself the gospel. Only he can proclaim it. This reasoning is irrefutable. How can one who has never been in the work of making the gospel tell fully and intimately the nature of it?

The objection that the gospel could never then be preached by the ascended Lord is immediately dissolved when it is seen that Christ, himself, preaches his gospel through human beings, through his Body which is the Church. In that sense we do hear the gospel from the lips of a human being. This is only so when the preacher is *in Christ*. The New Testament doctrine of ‘in Christ’ must be fully understood. The one believing has been crucified *with* Christ, has died *with* him, risen *with* him, lives *in* him and has Christ *live in* him. That is, this person is one with Christ and Christ one with him. By the gift of the Spirit who was given for witness<sup>26</sup> to Christ, the Spirit shows Christ, thus giving proclaimers the ability to ‘proclaim the mystery [testimony] of the gospel’. So then, the gospel *is* proclaimed by persons.<sup>27</sup> When we add to this the hierarchy of preaching–teaching gifts given to the church, of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher—all, I believe in tandem—then we see the gospel was proclaimed not individualistically but by the body of Christ from the fullness which he had given to his church. At the same time it is not incongruous for Paul to speak of ‘my gospel’, since he was one with Christ, Christ in him and he in Christ and Christ proclaiming through him. After all God had ‘revealed his Son *in* me’.

To these observations we add the fact that ‘the word of God’ is described in operation some 45 times in the Book of the Acts, where 26 passages are given over to its power and effectiveness. No less is this emphasis in the Epistles and the Book of the Revelation. I wish here to recommend reading ‘Section Two: The Doctrine of the Word of God’, (pp. 47–136) in my book *For Pastors and the People* (NCPI, 1989).<sup>28</sup> This may help us to see afresh the power of the word of Christ to bring faith to birth in a person, and then to enable the people of God to live in the obedience of faith. Faith keeps coming through what Christ keeps proclaiming. The word is always the word of Christ.

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<sup>24</sup> Acts 10:36–37.

<sup>25</sup> NCPI, 1987.

<sup>26</sup> Witnessing and testifying occupy a great part of the Book of Acts and the Book of the Revelation. All witness is by the power of the Spirit who reveals Christ to the believer (John 16:12–15), so that to proclaim the gospel by the power of the Spirit is to truly preach that gospel.

<sup>27</sup> I Corinthians 2:1.

<sup>28</sup> I think that to see Luke’s description of the preaching of the word—to say nothing of the writers of the Epistles and the Revelation—enables us to have bird’s-eye view of the action and efficacy of the word preached.

## THE CONFRONTATION OF GOD FOR THE ACT OF FAITH

This is the heart of the matter. In the Scriptures the person who is in unbelief—no belief in God and no belief in Christ—is called ‘the fool’.<sup>29</sup> One thing is clear from Scripture, that there have always been those who have believed that God exists,<sup>30</sup> and have had faith in him. The list of Abel, Enoch and Noah in Hebrews 11 does not indicate how they came to faith, or whether something brought them to faith. It would seem they always had faith, and doubtless the mystery of predestination is somehow present in this. Noah had faith in the face of an evil world around him. Abraham came out of idolatry. So we could increase the list. It is not for us, then, to inquire into the psychology of coming to faith—if indeed there can be a psychology. It is for us to see that coming to faith is an extraordinary experience, whether on the one hand it happens quietly in a person in a subterranean way which may not be detectable, or it happens in the way which is palpably soul-shaking. The true evangelical way of seeing this is to comprehend to some large measure the evil of the unredeemed, unbelieving man. This we can grasp by reading such passages as the following: Genesis 6:5, 11; 8:21; Proverbs 5:22–23; Jeremiah 17:9–10; Mark 7:20–23; John 2:24–25; Romans 3:9–18; 5:12–21; Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 2:1–3; 4:17–19; Titus 3:3.

Paul, in order to prepare his readers for the extraordinary act of having faith in the effective, propitiatory act of God in Christ so that they would be justified by grace through faith, takes us through from Romans 1:18 to chapter 3:23. In one sense it is a paradigm of the spiritual history of every person who is coming to belief, to faith, though it is not set out as a paradigm. Above all Man’s being drawn to faith is the dogma, “I will have mercy on whom, I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So it depends not upon man’s will or exertion, but upon God’s mercy’.<sup>31</sup> Paul tells us of the evil of the human heart, both of the ungodly, and those who consider themselves godly, such as the pious Jews. It is by the word and the Spirit that God unmasks the abyss that is *in*, and *is*, every sinner’s soul. Abraham was indulging in dreadful evil in being an idolater, and Stephen tells us ‘The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran’. We know that God’s appearance to Abraham before he is said to believe God was one which greatly bewildered Abraham, especially when the ‘horror of darkness’ came down at the time of cutting the covenant. Many have given testimony to a long period in which they felt their evil until it was intolerable, as they languished under the horror of the law’s judgment, being incredulous that they could be so evil. Paul was shocked that he had thought of himself as wholly righteous, only to discover this was not so. The church has always been tempted to the practice of intellectual believism, and self-righteousness dies hard. It has to be seen as the abyss before the sweet release of freedom can come to the person, through faith.

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<sup>29</sup> Psalm 14:1–4 and 53:1–2 both say, ‘The fool says in his heart, “there is no God”’. It seems the psalms are not speaking so much of an atheist *de jure* but one *de facto*. This person refuses the knowledge of God in the sense that he does not wish to seek God or obey him in true moral living. Not one of them does good, no, not one.

<sup>30</sup> The word ‘exists’ in Hebrews 11:6 is not quite the required word. ‘Is’ is not quite good enough except in the light of God’s ‘I Am’. It is what he is that matters and the context shows that we must believe he exists as the one who rewards those who seek him, knowing he is a rewarder of those who seek him. Devils believe God is, and doubtless there are no atheists *de jure*. All believe God is. It is what he is over which they differ.

<sup>31</sup> Romans 9:15–16. When we come to Romans 3:24 ‘they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus,’ then grace precedes the act of faith and, in fact, evokes that grace. God is sovereign; God moves on a person in grace to bring him to faith, the justification that is made possible by the act of propitiation.

We should then abhor ‘easy believism’, and the practice of rationalising the gospel as ‘eminently reasonable’, when, in fact, it is a scandal to the Jew and foolishness to the intellectual until Christ and his Spirit come and confront such with the gospel, showing that Christ crucified is both the power and the wisdom of God. Then, and only then, will the evil be dealt with and the abyss abolished. This is the true confrontation God brings to a person in order to bring that one to faith. It is God’s act of mercy to the sinner who will not move from his sin to repentance unless God cause him to turn.

## **THE WORD THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD**

At creation the word of God created all things. Created Man had faith in that word. Fallen Man lost that knowledge of God, but God has never ceased to tell that word through his various media, so that the knowledge of him *could* have been known had Man wished to know it. It was known to men and women of faith as Hebrews 11 shows us so well. It was known through covenant, and yet in a way not as before, when Christ the Messenger of the Covenant came and formed the gospel from his incarnation, life and ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and session at God’s right hand. The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to enlighten mankind as to the gospel, the full mystery of God.

Any attempts to rationalise, formalise, institutionalise and methodologise this mystery—the mystery of the gospel—always results in the deterioration of pew and pulpit, the atrophy of the life of faith, the life of the church. When the church, by revelation of the word and the Spirit, lives in faith, then there is true redemption and true power. This is because the hearing of the word of Christ takes us down into all the elements of Christ’s action in redemption. Through this intimate experience of his we come to see God as love, and so place our faith in him and are made strong in hope.

## **THE LIFE OF FAITH**

The life of faith has so many facets, as indicated by the New Testament, that in this short paper we can only deal somewhat superficially with them. Living by faith in Christ means one does not live by his/her own efforts, and is not caught up in any pride of achievement. The principle of Habakkuk declares, ‘Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the just shall live by his faith’.

### **1. Christ the Initiator and Completer of our Faith.**

Faith always has to have its object, and the quality of faith—if we may use that term—is always related to the nature of the object. Christ initiated faith in us by his person and work. He can rightly be called ‘the trailblazer’ of our faith. To have faith in him is to be led to the Father. It is to have faith in God, and a life of faith is based on the nature and promises of God. As we live this life, Christ brings us to the maturity of faith.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Hebrews 12:1 refers to the running of the race of faith. The many witnesses about us—such as those of Hebrews 11—are witnessing to the reality of faith. Christ is the Faithful One, and we look to him not only as exemplar and proof of the triumph of faith, but also as the Founder and Completer of our faith. In him alone faith has its life and its fulfilment.

## 2. Faith is Based Upon God's Promises

Hebrews 11:1 says, 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'. Faith is not 'things hoped for' but the *assurance* of them. In Hebrews 11 all men and women of faith have the *eschaton* and *telos* in view:

- (i) The things of the *eschaton* and *telos* have been promised. The basis of this promised *telos* is creation. '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';
- (ii) Faith is also based on the nature of God in receiving us, 'For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him'; and
- (iii) God's promises always strengthen faith in him. Both 'reward' and 'promise' give content to hope. The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks often of promises and of 'seizing the hope', and 'holding fast the confession of our hope'. *Faith, then, always has a future look*. It knows the plan of God for creation. Nothing is done which is not by faith in God, and in faith in him for the outcome of creation and redemption.

## 3. Faith Comes From the Faithfulness of God and Breeds Faithfulness in the People of Faith

Faith is a total relationship with God, the knowing of God as Creator, Redeemer and the One who totally renews creation. God is seen to be as he proclaimed himself, 'abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness'. In the Old Testament the idea of truth and truthfulness (*emunah*) is really that of faith and faithfulness. Hence 'we can entrust ourselves to a faithful creator'. In the sorrow that the prophet Jeremiah knew in the midst of the destruction of Jerusalem he could say, 'The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness'. Human faith is born of divine faithfulness. Hebrews 11 shows us the magnificent faithfulness of the people of faith, but we must keep in mind all the time God's covenant faithfulness and his covenant relationship with his people: they knew him in and by that relationship.

In the New Testament the same idea of God's faithfulness is present. He who promises is faithful to keep that promise. He is 'a faithful Creator'. For the apostle John he is one 'who is faithful and just to forgive us our sins'. Christ is 'a merciful and faithful High Priest' to his people and one who is faithful, also, towards God. In the Book of the Revelation he is often called 'the Faithful and True Witness' or just 'Faithful and True'. It is essential, therefore, that stewards of God's mystery be found faithful. Christians are addressed as 'the faithful in Christ Jesus', the word 'faithful' being applied to many, including martyrs. The encouragement is, 'Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life'. Paul often enjoined his readers to fight the good fight of faith and could claim he had done so. 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.' On the basis of this he can speak confidently, 'Henceforth is laid up for the crown of righteousness'.

## 4. 'The Faith' is the Body of Truth and Practice

When Paul said, 'I have kept the faith', he meant he had been faithful to the gospel, which was for him 'the whole counsel of God'. When he spoke of 'striving side by side for the faith of the gospel', he meant much the same thing. This was what Jude called 'the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints'. This could be described by Paul as 'the mystery of the faith'. Even so, the idea of the truth as the gospel, and the life of faith as practicing that gospel are not to be severed. 'The faith' is not just a creed or a body of theology, though it is not less than that, but it is the gospel lived out.

Life is the practice of faith. In this sense, then, by the craving for money, ‘some have wandered from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs’. One, therefore, has to ‘hold faith and a good conscience’, for ‘by rejecting conscience certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith’.

### CONCLUSION: LIVING IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

We have to see at the close that the whole matter of coming to faith, living in faith and being completed in faith is in Christ. He is the author and completer of our faith. In Galatians 2:20 we see that we have been crucified with Christ. If this had not been so, we would never have been able to understand any of the mystery of the crucifixion. Raised in Christ, we have been inducted into the mystery of the resurrection. We live, yes, but how? By Christ’s living within us, and by ‘the faith of the Son of God’. This translation is faithful to the text. We should understand by it that ‘the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in [the faithfulness of] the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me’. Apart from Christ we cannot live *by* faith and *in* the faith. This has sometimes been called ‘living in the vicarious humanity of Christ’. If we understand faith to be ‘trust, dependency upon, union with’ Christ, then the RSV, ‘by faith in the Son of God’, can stand. Even so we should think of it in the light of ‘dead with him’, ‘buried with him’, ‘raised with him’, ‘lives with him’, ‘glorified with him’ and ‘reign with him’. Faith, hope and love have no meaning and reality apart from our being in him.

I have taken the liberty of including some references used in our last Study, trusting that a perusal of them will be helpful in pursuing the matter of faith, hope and love as a living triad. We should not really divide faith into categories of ‘initial faith’ and ‘faith for living’, any more than we should do the same for love and hope, but ought to see faith as coming into life by God’s sovereign act of saving, and that union and relationship proceed in faith, as faith.

Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven (Col. 1:4–5).

Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thess. 1:3).

But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation (I Thess. 5:8).

We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, as is fitting, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing (II Thess. 1:3).

For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end (Heb. 6:10–11).

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 (Heb. 10:23–24).

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 (I Pet. 1:3).

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 (Jude 20–21).

## ADDENDUM TO THE STUDY OF SEPTEMBER 4, 1995 ON FAITH'S RESPONSE TO LOVE

(i) Galatians 5:5-6 shows faith as eschatological—‘through faith by the Spirit we wait for the hope of justification’. Faith is always being energised by love, and God is both the subject and object of love.

(ii) Philippians 3:8–15 also shows faith is eschatological in its action. Verse 12 is better translated/paraphrased, ‘I seek to grasp that for which I have been grasped’. So read Vincent Donovan in *Christianity Rediscovered* (pages 62–63) where faith is not something we do with eyes and brain, but is God coming upon us as the Lion (cf. ‘constraint’ in II Corinthians 5:14; the dynamic word in James 1:18). Faith springs from seeing the faithful God in the redemptive word of the Cross. Faith ‘came upon’ those of Hebrews 11:4ff. They believed he rewarded those who diligently sought him. Here God’s act triggers Man’s faith response. Note again Galatians 2:20 and Philippians 3:9 translations as ‘the faith of Christ’.

(iii) What are the ways in which God comes upon us? We have seen that he is ever uttering his word by various media, and in our Study we saw the dynamic of the ‘the word of Christ’. Primarily in time God came upon us in *creation* and with that act in its *covenantal* reality—we were to be in union with him in faith, hope and love. Primarily in dynamic—because of the Fall—it has to be ‘the word of the Cross’, for in the Cross we were all crucified. The spoken word of proclamation is rousing us to recognition that the Lion slew us in the Cross.

*Note:* (a) the constantly uttered word of creation (Ps. 19:1ff; cf. Rom. 10:18) and of covenant is dynamic for transformation for those who hear with faith (cf. Heb. 11:6); (b) Jesus asked, ‘Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot *bear to hear* my word’ (John 8:43) In this respect see Matthew 11:25–27; Mark 4:10–12; and the true hearing of John 5:24, ‘heareth and believeth’; that is, accepts the Lion (the Word of God) coming upon him to liberate him for this is true faith engendered by the word; and (c) the principle then is, ‘He who goes on hearing, goes on in faith and grows in faith. He hears all the mysteries of God and lives in them and does what is required of him by them’. Habakkuk 2:4 says the proud man shall not live but the man of faith rests on the word of God and so lives. He is not ashamed [of God] of the outcome (Isa. 28:16).

(iv) Man as Man must have faith in something, just as he must have love and hope, however deficient they be and however even evil this triad may prove to be. The root of it all is the subject and object of faith. When God is the subject of faith, then it is he who acts, and he who is the object of God as subject now has God as his object of faith; thus the life of faith proceeds. It is best to see this action spring from union, as also from the tug of the *telos*, the goal of God the subject. Man out of God will be his *own* subject and object, and must fail in achieving anything authentic and sustaining, for his love will be deficient and his hope in goals unsatisfying by nature of ontology. Hence his quick reversion to idolatry in which the idol is the subject and the object. As subject the idols can do nothing that is valid (cf. Isa. 40:18–20; 44:9–20; Ps. 115:3–8). Worship will be of the crass kind in a subject that cannot act. At the same time idolatry is never on its own and free-standing. Demonic powers infest idols and seek to emulate useful supernatural power so that they become objects in whom trust can be placed and to whom worship can be given. Here see Paul; I Corinthians 10:14–22. *Note:* The attempts to syncretise God and other lords (Isa. 26:12–14; cf. I Cor. 8:5–6).

# The Sanctification of Man and Living in Holiness Essential to Salvation—I

## INTRODUCTION: THE ORDER OF SALVATION

The *ordo salutis* or order of salvation is one which is much debated. For example, some Reformed theologians placed repentance before faith, and some faith before repentance. Both were of one mind that repentance and faith were essential to salvation. The matters of repentance, faith, reception of forgiveness and cleansing, justification and sanctification, as also regeneration and adoption, are treated as essential elements of the *ordo salutis* but the precise order of them is debated by theologians. We have said that, whatever that order may be, the forgiven, justified and adopted person lives in faith, hope and love. In this present study we will seek to see the place of sanctification in the *ordo salutis*, and to explore something of the nature of practical holiness of life of the believer. For the purposes of our study we will see sanctification as that act of God by which he consecrates a person, a people, peoples, things, or situations, thus declaring them holy. Such belong to him and are used by him for his purposes and such must not be profaned, for to profane them is to profane God and such profanation will bring judgment.

## THE ESCHATOLOGY OF SANCTIFICATION

All that God created was seen to be 'very good'.<sup>1</sup> 'Very good' is not spelled out, but we take it to mean 'flawless, perfect, functionally operative'. Of all creation we are told that God sanctified (hallowed) the seventh day. The creation must have been good; clean, and not unclean. We have no indication that the entire creation was sanctified although it may have been. Job 38:4–7 appears to indicate that all things celestial had been created before things terrestrial. If this were the case, and since celestial creatures are called 'holy' and the heavenly sanctuary is likewise holy, then it would appear that what is terrestrial has a future in which it will be sanctified. II Peter 3:12–13 speaks of the present elements being dissolved by fire and of a new heaven and new earth being prepared, whilst Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 prophesy this fact, and Revelation 21:1–22:5 speaks of its culmination.

Revelation 21:2 speaks of a 'holy city', and thus of a 'holy bride', whilst the temple is now 'the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb' and is thus holy. Only that which is clean may enter the holy city and we take it that they who do are likewise both clean and sanctified, especially as they constitute 'a kingdom of priests unto their God',<sup>2</sup> for all priests are sanctified. The throne and the river must likewise be called holy. Since all things are holy, then it appears that the eschatology of sanctification is established. This leads us to the conclusion that God had always intended the sanctification of all things.

The value of seeing this is that, whilst we will certainly be concerned with God's personal sanctifying of us and our consequent holiness of living, yet we will see what is personal in the light of the ultimate *telos*. This will free us from self-preoccupation, and help us to see our own sanctification in the light of the ultimate sanctification of all things. An example of this is the sabbath rest of God. This rest now obtains for us, if we will enter into it, since the seventh day had no close to it, and yet we will fully enter into it at the *telos*. Galatians 5:5 speaks of us waiting, by

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:31; cf. Ecclesiastes 3:11; Jeremiah 10:12; 51:15; I Timothy 4:4.

<sup>2</sup> Note Exodus 19:5–6; I Peter 2:9–10.

faith through the Spirit, for ‘the hope of righteousness [justification]’. The hope of sanctification must likewise be fulfilled at the *telos*. The *fact* of an eschatology of sanctification is seen not only from the *telos* as described above but also from the statements of Matthew 5:8; Ephesians 1:3–4; I Peter 1:2; II Thessalonians 2:13–14; I Thessalonians 5:23; and indications that holiness will be evident at Christ’s Parousia, such as Philippians 1:10–11; I Thessalonians 3:11–13; cf. Romans 13:11–14; II Peter 3:14. With this wide perspective in view we may now proceed with our study.

## CREATION, GOODNESS, AND PARTICIPATION IN GOD’S HOLINESS

We have seen that of creation only the seventh day is mentioned as being sanctified. Apart from the explicit statement of Genesis 2:1–3,<sup>3</sup> we have no clear mention in Genesis of anything being sanctified by God. Israel is the first nation, as such, which God nominates as holy, and to which he gives the cultus of worship such as we find in the Sinaitic covenant prescriptions. Was there, then, no idea of the ‘holy’ prior to this covenant? If there was no idea of this in worship rendered by the ancient fathers and the patriarchs then it would seem strange. Some have seen that the Man was first made and then put into the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:7, 15). It has been inferred that Eden was protological of the ultimate (holy) Paradise as found in Revelation chapters 21–22, that it was a type of the ultimate temple, and that Man being in union with God worshipped properly. The Fall separated Man from this Paradise but, yet, not from the presence of God (cf. Gen. 4:14).<sup>4</sup>

How did the matter of sacrifice arise with Cain and Abel? We know that Abel is the first nominated prophet in the Scriptures, and that the New Testament speaks of ‘his holy prophets which have been from of old’.<sup>5</sup> Abel is nominated as the first of ‘the children of God’ (I John 3:10–11) and the first of ‘the people of faith’ (Heb. 11:4). We have reason to believe that his sacrifice had a propitiatory element in it. Gordon J. Wenham<sup>6</sup> suggests that ‘shall you not be accepted?’ would mean, ‘Shall you not be forgiven?’ Our main point is that worship is always part of a cultus and that it would be intolerable for no cultus to exist. Noah offered a sacrifice which was pleasing to God.<sup>7</sup> Those who participate in God’s cultus are holy people. Sanctified people are those who participate in the true worship of God. In Israel it is propitiation which keeps the sanctified people in the state of sanctification. Enoch is designated in Jude 14–16 as a prophet. In Genesis 5:21–24 he is said to have walked with God after the birth of Methuselah, and he could not be other than sanctified. It is scarcely tenable, then, to hold that from Adam to Moses there was no cultus, no altar and no holy people. In I Peter 3:5 Sarah is spoken of as being among the holy women, and Abraham could have been no less a holy person. He had visitations of God, and on such occasions built altars or memorial cairns and made sacrifices.<sup>8</sup> To him appeared Melchizedek ‘the priest of the God Most High’, the same God as ‘The LORD God Most High’ of Abraham. He ministered to Abraham, and Abraham gave tithes to him, and the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that his order of priesthood was superior to that of Aaron.<sup>9</sup> One assumes that where there was such a priesthood there was a cultus and worshippers. Jethro, father-in-law of Moses, was a priest of Midian. As such he ‘offered a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20:8–11 speaks of the seventh day from a Mosaic covenantal aspect. We have no mention of created Man participating in the seventh day, though perhaps we can predicate it of the primal couple in Eden when in the state of innocency.

<sup>4</sup> Paul’s argument from Romans 1:18–25 suggests that there was a time when Man worshipped God, and that he turned from this to the idols and so formulated a different worship. Undoubtedly Paul is emphasising the culpability of Man for changing from authentic worship to false worship, and we may thus assume there was a true worship, a true cultus, a true sanctification.

<sup>5</sup> See Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21.

<sup>6</sup> G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Word Biblical Commentary 1, Word Books, 1987) pp. 104–106.

<sup>7</sup> Here we are faced with the choice of God’s establishing of the covenant with Noah as either being the first covenant mankind knew or being the covenant of creation simply confirmed. If there was always a covenant then there must always have been a cultus of worship and so of sacrifice and of sanctification of the worshippers.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac and Jacob also had such manifestations and theophanies. In Genesis 28:16–17 Jacob said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it’. And he was afraid, and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven’. The place was holy and he had been made a true worshipper.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Psalm 110:1–4; Hebrews 5:5ff; 7:1–28.

Moses' father-in-law before God'.<sup>10</sup> Jethro here plays the leading part. It appears that God had never left himself without a witness, without the knowledge of true sacrifice and so without a worshipping people and a cultus which was commensurate with his own holiness.

To this we might add that his law has always been holy (cf. Rom. 7:12) so that those who kept his law—as did Abraham (Gen. 26:5) and others—were holy people.

## ISRAEL, SANCTIFICATION AND HOLINESS

We might say there was nothing of a Divine sanctifying work until we meet the principle of sanctification in the Mosaic covenant.<sup>11</sup> When God begins to have dealings with Moses in the theophany of Exodus 3:1–6 his holiness is apparent—the very ground is holy (*qodesh*)—and in Exodus 15:11 God is described as 'majestic in holiness, doing wonders'. Even prior to this the memorial of the Passover is stated in Exodus 12:16 to be the occasion of holding 'a holy [*qodesh*] assembly'. Exodus 28:36 and 39:30 speak of a plate of pure gold fastened to Aaron's turban which is inscribed 'Holy to the Lord' or 'Holiness to the Lord'. Exodus helps us to understand the ideas of 'holy' and 'holiness' because of the building of the tabernacle and its furniture, the holiness of priestly garments, anointing oils and incense and the principle of 22:31, 'You shall be men consecrated [*qodesh*] to me'.

The idea of 'the holy' is set out in Leviticus in the same manner but all of it is in the light of God's *presence*. In Exodus 29:43–45 God says he will dwell in the tabernacle:

where I shall meet with you, to speak there to you. There I will meet with the people of Israel, *and it shall be sanctified by my glory*.<sup>12</sup> I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests. And I will dwell among the people of Israel, and I will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God.

In Leviticus this presence must be taken into consideration when discussing holiness. God is holy and God's people must be the same (cf. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:26). In 10:10,<sup>13</sup> Aaron and the priests are 'to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the clean and the unclean'.<sup>14</sup> In considering these distinctions we must keep in mind that they are within the Sinaitic covenant. Such distinctions are not made explicit prior to this covenant. Wenham concludes that there are things holy (sanctified), and things clean but not sanctified yet capable of being sanctified, but which may be defiled, that is, become unclean. Also there are 'holy items which may be defiled and become common, even polluted therefore unclean'.<sup>15</sup>

Generally, then, we gather that God alone is holy, and that he sanctifies or consecrates persons, a people and things, all of which pertain to the worship of him. In Israel this worship system, which we know as 'the cultus' was distinctly related to, and with the covenant. Out of a *cultus* comes the *culture* of a people.

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<sup>10</sup> Exodus 18:10–12.

<sup>11</sup> We need to address the fact that God has made a covenant with created man by reason of his own intrinsic nature, Man being made in or after that image, so that God's covenantal dealings with Man from the beginning require holiness of him since his being in or after the image would demand that. Even were we to begin basic covenantal dealings from the time of Abraham, we would have to understand the idea of the holy and of God's holiness would necessarily precede Sinai.

<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that God's holiness and his glory are often linked. See Isaiah 6:3 where the earth is full of God's glory. See also my *The Splendour of Holiness* (NCPI, 1985) pp. 25–26.

<sup>13</sup> See also Leviticus 11:47; Ezekiel 22:26; 42:20; 44:23; cf. I Samuel 21:5.

<sup>14</sup> See Gordon J. Wenham *The Book of Leviticus* (The International commentary on the Old Testament, Erdmans, 1979, pp. 15–37). This section speaks of the theology of Leviticus and should be read as a whole.

<sup>15</sup> See also Dr. John Kleinig's *Sharing in God's Holiness* (Lutheran Laymen's League, 1984), pp. 4–6.

## THE HOLINESS OF GOD

God alone is holy. That is why he can swear by his holiness, as swearing by himself.<sup>16</sup> That is why, often he is called ‘the Holy One’<sup>17</sup> and ‘the Holy One of Israel’.<sup>18</sup> His holiness, as we have seen, is associated with glory and so he is ‘terrible’ or ‘awesome’,<sup>19</sup> and so holy is he that Joshua said, ‘You cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God and a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins’. He said, ‘I will be jealous for my holy name’. ‘He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity and he cannot look upon evil’, must mean he sees such and must judge it and execute his judgment upon it. As ‘the Holy One of Israel’ he is the Redeemer. P. Bonnard<sup>20</sup> describes the two main aspects of God’s holiness in the Old Testament.

Firstly Yahweh is holy in the sense that he stands utterly above the created world; he is the wholly other, the incomprehensible, the unanalysable, the unfathomable. This ancient insight is already expressed in ancient narrative passages (Gen. 28:16ff.; I Sam. 6:19ff.; II Sam. 6:6ff.; Josh. 24:19;) and culminates in the declaration of the prophets (Isa. 6; Hos. 11:9; 12:1; Ezek. 1; 28:25; 36:22; 38:23: ‘I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations; then they will know that I am the Lord’). In this first sense the ideas of holiness and of the glory of Yahweh are often equivalent. But on the other hand Yahweh is holy inasmuch as he imparts himself, inasmuch as he wishes men to share in his own divine life as he brings them within the scope of his judgement and mercy. His holiness is dynamic, exacting; it confronts man to pour out upon him a new life.

## ISRAEL THE HOLY NATION

We pursue this part of our study with the thought that God made Israel his holy people,<sup>21</sup> something not explicitly done with any other nation, and that despite their offences against his holiness by their idolatrous bouts of worship which profaned his holy Name, he judged, executed judgment, but all the time kept a holy seed, a holy remnant<sup>22</sup> out of which the nation was to survive through the Messiah of whom it was to be the matrix. We have seen that Israel was taught holiness by the distinctions between holy, common, clean, unclean and unholy. The cultus took animals and divided them into clean and unclean, though, in the latter case, unclean never meant unholy. The significance of ‘the Holy One of Israel’ should be seen here.<sup>23</sup> The other nations (the Gentiles) were unclean. Even so there were prophecies of the restoration of the Jews after the judgment of exile, and also prophecies which spoke of the Gentiles coming to partake of the cultus of Israel, including worship in the temple. Isaiah 2:1–4 (cf. Micah 4:1–3) speaks of the nations flowing up to Jerusalem and the temple, and desiring the holy law of the Lord. Isaiah 56:1–8 speaks of the ‘foreigner’ and the ‘eunuch’ as qualifying for holy worship. Amos 9:11–12 (cf. Acts 15:16–18) speaks of the renewal of the Davidic kingdom which means the Messianic Kingdom:<sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> I Samuel 2:2. See also Amos 4:2; 6:8.

<sup>17</sup> Job 6:10; Isaiah 40:25; Ezekiel 39:7; Hosea 11:9; Hab. 1:12; 3:3.

<sup>18</sup> Psalm 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isaiah 1:4; 43:3; Jeremiah 50:29; 51:5.

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 15:11; 19:10–25; Joshua 24:19; Ezekiel 39:25; cf. Isaiah 6:1–4.

<sup>20</sup> In J-J. von Allmen’s *Vocabulary of the Bible* (Lutterworth, 1958) p. 156.

<sup>21</sup> Exodus 19:5–6; Deuteronomy 7:6: ‘You are people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.’

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 6:9–13; 11:1; 12:9; Psalm 14:7; Isaiah 59:20–21; 45:21; Jeremiah 12:15; Amos 9:11–12.

<sup>23</sup> In Isaiah 1:4 the people of Israel ‘have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel.’ In 5:19, 24 Israel suffers judgment because ‘they have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel’. In 10:17, 20 judgment is again pronounced. In 12:6 the Holy One of Israel is linked with salvation. In 17:7 Israel will abhor idolatry and exalt the true worship of the Lord. In 29:19 and 23 Israel will be blessed by the Holy One and he will sanctify his name. From then on the continuous mention of ‘the Holy One of Israel’ is accompanied by the qualifying term ‘your redeemer’.

<sup>24</sup> The institution of the Davidic covenant as set out in II Samuel 7:4–29 is important as it is the assertion of God’s continuing covenant with Israel. The statement of verse 16, ‘And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne will be established for ever’, is taken by David to mean ‘thou . . . hast shown me future generations’, which some translators have taken to mean, ‘This is the law for man’, or ‘this is the charter for man’ (*RSV* footnote; *NRSV* adds to the text, ‘May this be instruction for the people’, adding the footnote, ‘Meaning of this uncertain’). Walter C. Kaiser in *The Law and the Prophets* (ed. John

After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.

This brings us back to our statement regarding the eschatology of holiness. God has sought to impart his holiness to Israel his covenant people. Now he will restore this fallen people, and will widen out his impartation of holiness by both redemption and holiness to the nations of the world. In order to have the Holy City, the Holy Marriage, the Holy Temple and the Holy Paradise, it is essential that the Messiah come as the Holy One of God who will cleanse the unclean peoples and sanctify them, and purify Israel unto like holiness and bring all nations into pure worship. We remember that in Romans 9:4 Israel had all the gifts which pertained to God's holiness and the holiness of his people, namely, 'the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises'. Now these gifts are to be given to those of the New Covenant, those of the Kingdom of God.

### **GOD'S HOLY COVENANT AND SANCTIFICATION OF HIS PEOPLE**

The prophecy of Zechariah in Luke 1: 68–79 needs to be studied carefully. It speaks of 'the holy prophets from of old', of being 'saved from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us', of God performing 'the mercy promised to our fathers', and of God's remembering 'his holy covenant',<sup>25</sup> 'the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us, that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve [worship] him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life'.

'Holy covenant' and 'worshipping in holiness and righteousness' all spoke of a powerful covenant. What is important is that Zechariah's Song includes not only Israel but 'those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death', that is, the Gentiles (cf. Isa. 57:19), as also does Simeon's Song, 'A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to thy people Israel'.<sup>26</sup>

There can be no doubt that Christ, as the Son of God and Messiah, is 'the holy One of God'. This is from his birth, for he is 'the Son of the Most High', and 'the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God' (Luke 1:32–35). In Mark 1:24 the unclean spirit says he knows who Christ is, 'the holy one of God'. In John 6:69 Peter says, 'we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God'. 'The Father has consecrated [sanctified] him and sent him into the world' (John 10:36), and in John 17:19 he shows he has the power to consecrate himself. After his resurrection the disciples speak of him as 'the Holy and Righteous One' (Acts 3:14), and 'thy holy servant [child] Jesus'. As the Risen Lord in Revelation 3:7 he is 'the holy one, the true one' and his holy power is that he has 'the key of David, [the King of the Davidic Covenant] who opens and no one shall shut [etc]'. In I Corinthians 1:30 Paul says that God has made him to be 'our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and redemption'.<sup>27</sup> Most wonderful of all is that he calls God 'Holy Father!' in his High-Priestly prayer of John 17 in verse 11, thus denoting himself as 'the Holy Son'. In John 17:17 Christ sanctifies himself. The Old Testament has already testified to God as the God who alone is holy, and for Jesus to be his Son makes us tremble with wonder. It is with awe then that we think of the 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' and of Jesus as the Second Person of this 'three person'd God' as John Donne once addressed him.

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H. Skilton, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974, pp. 298–318) discusses the matter under the heading 'The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity'.

<sup>25</sup> The term 'holy covenant' is here only mentioned in the New Testament. It is also only used in the Old Testament in Daniel 11:28–32.

<sup>26</sup> cf. Luke 1:79; Isaiah 57:19; Luke 2:29–32.

<sup>27</sup> Probably this means 'Our wisdom in righteousness, sanctification and redemption', meaning God's plan in Christ, that is, his wisdom of Christ is righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

## Christ The Sanctifier of Both Jew and Gentile

We have seen above (i) that the Father has consecrated (sanctified the Son and sent him into the world, (ii) that God has made him to be ‘our wisdom, our righteousness, and sanctification and redemption,’ (iii) in his High-Priestly prayer of John 17 he prays the Father for the sanctification of his people in the truth, adding ‘For their sake I consecrate [sanctify] myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth’.

*The first teaching we meet in the Epistles is that our holiness was planned by God in Christ.* In Ephesians 1:4ff. God has planned our holiness in Christ. This is important. ‘That we should be holy and blameless before him’ is to be accomplished in Christ, although I Peter 1:2 links this, rightly enough (as in I Cor. 6:11) with the Holy Spirit. Colossians 1:21–23 makes this work to be effected through the Cross, as we see below. The basic verses I Corinthians 1:2 and 1:30 (cf. I Cor. 6:11) show that it is Christ who sanctifies us. Thus in I Corinthians 1:2 we read ‘To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified *in* Christ Jesus, called to be saints [holy ones]’, which in verse 9 is, ‘called into the fellowship of his Son’. Likewise in Philippians 1:1 and 4:21 the church is ‘the saints *in* Christ Jesus’. We quote these references simply looking at their statements regarding Christ’s power to consecrate a people for himself, the people who the Father has given him, that is those who are God’s ‘beloved ones’, the elect. Now we shall examine this work in more detail.

### CHRIST SANCTIFYING US

The references of I Corinthians 1:30 and I Corinthians 6:11 now come into play:

- (a) ‘*Christ is made unto us . . . sanctification*’. In its context of 1:17–2:5 it must mean that in the Cross, Christ has affected God’s wisdom in righteousness, sanctification and redemption. This triad is God’s wisdom. As in the Old Testament, God will have his people holy in two ways, (i) passively, in that they are consecrated to him, and (ii) actively, in that they should be holy in action, *by the enabling power of God*. We must see it in the context of the profane nations being sanctified, the unclean first made clean and then sanctified. In this sense they ‘join’ Israel as priestly people. See Romans 15:16.
- (b) *In the context of I Corinthians 6:9–11*. Paul speaks of how unholy his converts had been, but says that a change has taken place, ‘But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God’. ‘In the name of’ speaks of the power of Christ to wash, sanctify and justify. Again, both the passive and active elements are here present. Notice first that the believers are washed and then sanctified, that is, from ‘unclean’ and ‘common’ to clean and holy.
- (c) *An extremely interesting passage is Hebrews 2:10–18*. Commencing with Christ’s redemptive work it announces, ‘For *he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified* have all one origin’. Many explanations are given but the context tells us that the sons whom Jesus is bringing into glory are ‘those whom thou hast given me’ of John 17, and the sanctifier is Jesus. He is this as the true High Priest effecting their sanctification in propitiatory sacrifice (2:17), as is shown in the rest of the Epistle.
- (d) *Hebrews 9:14* speaks of the conscience being purified from dead works by the blood of Christ, but *Hebrews 10:8–22* includes not only purification but sanctification: ‘And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all . . . For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified’. Because of this sanctification we can now enter the heavenly ‘Holy of holies’ and come into the presence of the heavenly Father.

## CONCLUSION TO PART I OF OUR STUDY ON SANCTIFICATION

Having in mind the eschatological sanctification of all things, we will have to see the cleansing and sanctification of both Israel and the Gentiles. For the moment, however, we see that Christ is the Sanctifier of God's people. He first cleanses and then sanctifies as we have seen above. Without these two elements of the *ordo salutis* we would never enter God's holy sanctuary or see his face. Doubtless we need to live in holiness, but this is the natural outcome of purification from sins and sanctification to the God who alone is holy. As someone commented. 'I have always felt grubby. Now, knowing I have been sanctified, I will want to live a holy life, and am assured this is how it can be'. The saving sanctification bestowed by God's grace leads to the desire for, and practice of, a holy life 'without which no man shall see the Lord'.

# **The Sanctification of Man and Living in Holiness Essential to Salvation—II**

## **INTRODUCTION: THE SANCTIFICATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE**

### **Sanctification is a Gift of God to Persons of Faith**

We have seen very clearly from I Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11; Hebrews 2:10–17, 9:14; 10:8–22, that we have been sanctified. We will now add to this list other Scriptures which will underline and confirm this fact, but we first need to examine the significance of the statement, 'We are sanctified'. We saw in the Old Testament that the seventh day was sanctified. This means that it was set apart especially for God's use, was his, and was for our use: as Jesus said, 'Man was not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath for man'. We saw that all things designated by God as holy were his, set apart by him for the purpose he had in mind for them, whether persons, a nation, or objects. What we need to recognise here is that in some way or another these sanctified elements were linked with worship. This point really deserves a whole study on its own, which we hope to do, though not in this paper. If we do not link all sanctified things with worship we will miss the main point of sanctification.

For us as sanctified persons the significance on one level is that we are *not* unholy. We have been given the status or category of being sanctified, that is, consecrated to God's service, set apart for him. Our minds and consciences are relieved by this marvellous news. It is well known that many human beings seek to become holy according to what they think is being holy. Perhaps very few achieve their ambition according to their own ideas of holiness. The Christian has been told he is sanctified, and he or she works from that basis. Unfortunately there are Christians who are seeking to attain to the category of sanctification by the works of holiness they strive to accomplish and such working does not comprise sanctification. Sanctification, like forgiveness, adoption and justification, is a gift of God, all of which are one in the *ordo salutis*. The references we have quoted above verify this fact. Indeed, not to include sanctification as a status or category given to us by God is to deny the full nature of salvation. We now wish to underline this truth by other references not hitherto used.<sup>1</sup>

## **SANCTIFICATION EMBRACES GOD'S PEOPLE AS BEING CHRIST'S BODY**

By this we mean all Christians are sanctified, but that their sanctification whilst being personal is at the same time corporate. Another way of saying this is, 'The church is holy'.

(i) *All members of the church are designated as 'saints'*. This was Jesus' prayer, 'Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth . . . for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth'. Previously he had told his disciples 'You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you'. Being made clean precedes being sanctified; sanctification necessarily accompanies cleansing.<sup>2</sup> The term 'saints' is used many times of

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<sup>1</sup> See II Thessalonians 2:12–13; I Thessalonians 4:3, 7; I Peter 2:9–10.

<sup>2</sup> We need to keep in mind the fact that cleansing is from guilt as Jeremiah 33:8, Psalm 32:5, and Isaiah 6:7, so that forgiveness and cleansing are really the one.

believers in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> In the Old Testament the term ‘saint’ meaning ‘holy one’, is sparingly used of the members of Israel and is generally used of celestial creatures. In Daniel 7:18, 22, 25 and 27 it probably refers to God’s holy people. In Matthew 27:52 it is certainly spoken of humans who had died but now were raised from the dead. Saints are understood as those who have entered the temple, and have worshipped God, and continue to do so.

(ii) *All members of the church constitute the Bride of Christ*, which in Ephesians 5:25–26 is said to have been cleansed by Christ—‘that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word’. First washing, then sanctification. None of this is said to relate to works of holiness which members might do, but is the work of Christ himself. To be part of the Bride is to be sanctified, a point brought out in Revelation 19 and 21 where the Bride is holy.

(iii) *All members of the church constitute the new, true temple of God*. This is made clear by Paul in I Corinthians 3:16–17 when he writes, ‘Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are’. In Ephesians 2:18–22 he tells his readers that on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ being the corner stone, all members are growing ‘into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you [they] are also built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’. In II Corinthians 6:14—7:1 he calls for separation from all forms of uncleanness, asking, ‘What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God’. This can mean no less than sanctification of all members. Indeed, in I Corinthians 6:19, Paul says that ‘your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit’. In both the body as the church, and the personal bodies of its members, the true worship of God is constantly conducted—a most solemn and wonderful thought!

In I Peter 2:4–10 the church is again seen as the living temple. All its members are *living* stones constituting the temple. In the same breath they are described as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation’; the New Testament equivalent under the New Covenant of Israel under the Mosaic covenant, for now Exodus 19:5–6 is applied to the new people of God in Christ.

### **THE UNCLEAN PEOPLE HAVE BECOME BOTH CLEAN AND HOLY**

The Gentiles were known as unclean, and therefore could not be holy. God had not sanctified them to himself. We saw in our last study that many Old Testament prophecies pointed to the time when the nations would be oriented towards Jerusalem, flow to that holy city, and worship in the holy temple. Following Pentecost when Jews only belonged to the church, tension mounted and conflicts occurred when the Gentiles responded to the gospel and became members of the new community. In Acts 10–11 Peter was shown that the formerly unclean people, the Gentiles, were now pronounced ‘clean’ by God. This was the basis of them being cleansed by the *water* (baptism) and the *word* of apostolic proclamation unto sanctification. They received the Holy Spirit and were to be counted sanctified. Paul and Barnabas were sent by the church at Antioch in Syria to preach the gospel everywhere. This church was a mixture of Christian Jews and Gentiles. In Acts 15 the whole matter of the Gentiles’ admission to the church was discussed and resolved. Henceforth the Gentiles were to be seen as clean and, doubtless, as ‘saints’; that is, as sanctified. Their hearts had been ‘cleansed by faith’. In Acts 20:32 Paul spoke of ‘the inheritance among all those who are sanctified [by faith]’, and the words of Christ are similar in Acts 26:18 ‘among those who are sanctified by faith in me’. There can be no doubt that Paul has in mind ‘the obedience of faith of the nations’ and that it would lead to the sanctification of the peoples of the earth—not universalistically, of course—by faith and repentance.

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<sup>3</sup> John 17:17, 19; 15:3.

Paul knew he had been commissioned to preach the gospel to the nations, and so could use the language of Romans 15:16, ‘to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit’.<sup>4</sup> ‘The offering of the Gentiles’ can mean either Paul’s offering them up as the fruits of his ministry, or the Gentiles offering up of themselves, but in either case the sanctification is the work of the Spirit. What we must not pass over lightly is the historic and universal significance of the Gentiles being made clean, and then being given the gift of sanctification. Now they may be included in true worship, as against their unclean and unholy worship of the idols. As we have said, they have been introduced into the cultus of the New Covenant.

### Sanctified by Faith in Christ

We need to pause here a moment and consider this heading. Its meaning is simple: when persons believed in Christ they were justified by faith and at the same time sanctified by faith.<sup>5</sup> There can be no question that these two elements of the *ordo salutis* were not simultaneous. To be justified is to be sanctified, to be included in the people of God and set apart from the world, and now qualified to worship God in the New Covenant. To separate these two elements by a space of time can cause harm, as some may think they are not yet sanctified and will seek to rectify this either by striving to do holy works, or making ‘sanctification by faith’ a kind of ‘second blessing’ experience, thus denying the initial grace of God in sanctification. Sanctification is as much monergistic in nature as justification.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF SANCTIFICATION

I Timothy 4:1–5 exemplifies the principle of sanctification:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

Paul says that ‘everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving’, meaning that nothing God has created is unclean (cf. Rom. 14:14: ‘I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself’), so that thanksgiving does not *cleanse* food since it is already clean. It does, however, *sanctify* it. Thanksgiving—the word of God and prayer—acknowledges from whom the food came, and *consecrates it to the service of the Giver*. This parallels Romans 12:1–2 where Paul exhorts the presenting of our bodies as ‘a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship’. To offer the body as a living sacrifice is to recognise that it already belongs to God (I Cor. 6:19) and that one is now acting in that knowledge by the dedicated use of one’s body. Seen along with Romans 6:12–22, it means the body is sanctified to the Master’s use on the basis of God’s gift of sanctification, and is now a holy body, and in line with I Corinthians 6:19, a holy temple. The world about us dedicates what it has to itself and against God. This is not *spiritual*, but *carnal* worship.

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<sup>4</sup> In II Thessalonians 2:12–23 Paul uses similar language. Here he says, ‘God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth’. This is similar to I Peter 1:2. Certainly both references refer to an act of the Spirit in conversion by which the recipients were sanctified.

<sup>5</sup> We note that the use of the term ‘sanctified by faith’ in Acts 26:18 does not refer to a second work of faith, but to the faith which comes from hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17) and so equates with Acts 20:32, ‘those who are sanctified’.

## THE HOLY LIVING OF THE SANCTIFIED PEOPLE

There can be no question that ‘without holiness no man shall see the Lord’, and so the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers to ‘follow [reconciliation] with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord’.<sup>6</sup> He may have some reference to being sanctified by the blood of Christ as he has set the matter forth in 10:10–14 and 13:12, 20, and doubtless such would be the basis for holy living of those now called saints, but it does seem that in this case he is pointing to that very action of holy living. It is axiomatic that to be sanctified by the death of Christ means one would then pursue holiness of living. A similar emphasis is found in I Thessalonians 4:1–7:

Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we solemnly forewarned you. For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness.

In this passage Paul says, ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity’, and he may be referring sanctification (*hagiasmos*) to the sanctification to which we have so far referred, but more probably he is thinking of the outworking of that sanctification in what we might call ‘practical holiness’, in this case by abstaining from unchastity. In verse 7 Paul refers back to being called in holiness, which must work out in the present in cleanness and not in uncleanness. It is right then not to divide the gift and status of sanctification from the action of holiness. The latter has power and action in the light of the former.

In *Romans chapter 6* it has been said that Paul moves from justification to sanctification as though one follows the other, as though the two are layered. This is not the case. Paul argues that union with Christ means we have both his justifying death (v. 7, ‘He who has died is freed from sin’) and his empowering life (v. 10, ‘the life he lives he lives to God’), and we have died as he did and live as he does, so that sin has lost its power. Verse 13 bids us present ourselves to God as those who know what has happened—that we are freed from the power of sin. Verse 19 tells us that as we have yielded (presented) our members to God and have become willing slaves of God so now we are to ‘yield [our] members to righteousness for sanctification’. This is practical holiness in its outworking. In verse 22 the return we have from this loving slavery and acts of righteousness is ‘sanctification and its end, eternal life’.<sup>7</sup> Holiness of living is no mere practice, no slavish conformity to correct ethical action, but rich holiness in the present and the promised outcome of eternal life.

Another passage dealing with present holiness (II Corinthians 6:14—7:1) is one which emphasises separation from what is unclean and unholy:

Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Be'lial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,  
‘I will live in them and move among them,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.  
Therefore come out from them,  
and be separate from them, says the Lord,  
and touch nothing unclean;

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<sup>6</sup> ‘See the Lord’ is a statement which aligns with Matthew 5:8, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God’, and Revelation 22:3–4, ‘And his servants shall worship him and they shall see his face’. This is the goal of the deepest yearning of the human heart, and it is the reward of holiness (cf. Rom. 6:22; Gal. 6:8). On the other hand they who persist in uncleanness shall never enter the Holy City (Rev. 21:27; 22:11).

<sup>7</sup> This is similar to Paul’s statement in Galatians 6:8 ‘he who sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life’. It may be seen as a commentary on Romans 6:22.

then I will welcome you,  
and I will be a father to you,  
and you shall be my sons and daughters,  
says the Lord Almighty’.

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.

Sanctification as inclusion in the holy people of God and separation from all others must now be enacted in one’s present situation. In 7:1 this holiness is assumed, but it also lays upon the saint the demand of present, personal cleansing of the saint for every defilement of body and spirit. The saint is himself or herself to put away things which are unclean. Here the will and the holy action of the person are to be exercised. Thus practical holiness is presently perfected. This reminds us of II Timothy 2:20–22:

In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble. If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart.

Paul may be saying that vessels for ignoble use are to be shunned and his readers are to be only those fitted for noble use, or he may simply be saying each believer is to be a purified vessel, ‘consecrated and useful to the master of the house’. The way in which to be this is to ‘shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart’. In other words the consecrated vessel must live consonant with its given sanctification.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HOLY LIVING

In I Thessalonians 4:7–8 Paul says, ‘For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you’. ‘Who gives his Holy Spirit to you’ is not unrelated to the practical holiness Paul has demanded in the passage. I Peter 1:2 states, ‘Chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ’. ‘Sanctified’ here means ‘given the status of one sanctified by God for his worship and service within his holy people’. In Romans 15:16 Paul talks of the offering up of the Gentiles as a sacrifice, ‘sanctified by the Holy Spirit’, since the Gentiles, although declared ‘clean’, had not been sanctified. In II Thessalonians 2:13–14 we read:

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, *through sanctification by the Spirit* and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

‘Through sanctification by the Spirit’ must mean the same as in Romans 15:16, that is, those being sanctified are those being saved, this sanctification being given at the point of receiving salvation. Likewise in I Corinthians 6:11 Paul wrote, ‘But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but<sup>8</sup> you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God’, and that certainly refers to God’s initial work in bringing his people into salvation. Even so, this initial work, as we call it, cannot be wholly separated from the

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<sup>8</sup> Note that the text in Greek has these three adversative ‘buts’ which emphasise the three actions of God’s grace—washing, sanctifying and justifying.

continuing work of the Holy Spirit such as we find in Romans 8:1–4, for here we see the action of the Spirit with Christ in justification in that ‘The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death’, This is the Spirit applying the work of Christ, the gospel, setting the person free from the condemnation of the law—‘the law of sin and death’. This action sets the person free to fulfil ‘the righteous demand (*dikaioma*) of the law’, and since the law is holy (Rom. 7:12), obeying the law<sup>9</sup> is the true way of living a holy life.

This is brought out very clearly in Galatians 5:16–26:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

In this passage to be under the law as a way of self-justification is to produce the works of the flesh which are, in fact, *against the law*. The law is against the works of the flesh. To walk in the Spirit and be led by him is to bear the fruit of the Spirit. Paul says, ‘against such there is no law’, that is, these fruit are really the true fruit of the law. They are this only because they have been produced by the Spirit which is really the same as fulfilling the ‘righteous demand of the law’ as in Romans 8:4. This, then, is to live the life of holiness in the Spirit. In this regard we also need to mention that it is the Spirit of sonship who now indwells us, causing us to cry ‘Abba! Father!’ and to hallow the name of God as Father as prayed in the Lord’s Prayer. Peter says, ‘And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile’. He had previously said, ‘As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct’.<sup>10</sup>

Living the life of the Spirit encompasses all we are and all we do as Christians, and this study cannot possibly cover all elements. What is clear, however, is that by the Spirit we can live a holy life. Romans 7:13–25 teaches us that we cannot defeat sin *of ourselves*, since sin *of itself* is stronger than we are *of ourselves*. Romans 8:1–27 shows us that *by the Spirit* we can accomplish what God desires of us, a holy life. When we realise that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and that together we constitute a spiritual temple and a spiritual priesthood, then we will seek to be led by the Spirit and walk in the Spirit for the life of holiness.

### **‘STRIVE FOR . . . THE HOLINESS WITHOUT WHICH NO ONE WILL SEE THE LORD’**

This injunction of Hebrews 12:14 alerts us to the truth that holiness is no mere by-product of being Christian. It is at the heart of that life. For this reason the teaching of the Epistles is of great value, and much of its teaching for practical holiness we have denoted above. Romans 6:12–22 with Romans 12:1–2 have shown us that justification and sanctification are together and are by no means layered. There is a clear yielding of one’s body and faculties for the

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<sup>9</sup> Obedience to the law is not for justification—since Christ and the Spirit have effected that—but the believer ‘delight[s] in the law of God after the inward man’ (Rom. 7:22), or it is the true way of living a holy life.

<sup>10</sup> Thus further showing that those of the church were to be holy as were those of Israel (Lev. 11:44; cf. Deut. 14:1–2).

action of holy living.<sup>11</sup> Along with this is the third chapter of Colossians which is most helpful for what we might call ‘the practical way of holiness’. It is sufficient to note the following points:<sup>12</sup>

- (a) Our *concentration* (cf. Heb. 12:2; II Cor. 3:18) is upon ‘things above’, where Christ is Lord.
- (b) Our life is hid with Christ in God. This is called *habitation*.
- (c) Because we died with Christ we can put to death all forms of sin and unholiness by the power of the Cross. This is called *mortification*.
- (d) We can *put off and away* all things not consonant with the new nature we have in Christ, who is himself ‘the new man’, for in him we are ‘being renewed in knowledge after the image of its [our] creator’. Note that Ephesians 4:24 says, ‘created after the likeness of God *in true righteousness and holiness*’. This is part of *vivification*. To *mortify* is to *vivify*.
- (e) We now *put on* all things proper to a holy life. This is further called *vivification* for it is the way of renewed life.
- (f) Injunctions for worship and practical corporate living. As we will see these are things which are present but also eschatological.

Note that whilst our minds may take in the many injunctions of the New Testament for ways of holy living, yet we need to be alive in the Holy Spirit so that injunctions do not become a new set of laws which may be fulfilled legalistically. Only the Spirit can keep us sensitive to God’s holiness and our need to be one with that. Then it is we will ‘worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness’. Our lives will be those of ‘holy array’ and high sensitivity to that holiness by which we shall one day see his face.

### **CONCLUSION: HOLINESS AND THE HOLY *TELOS***

We need to keep in mind the plan God has always had in mind for his creation, which is its total renewal in holiness, so that history will climax with a Holy People who are the True Holy Temple of God which shall become one with ‘God and the Lamb’ who will themselves constitute the Holy Temple, and whose worshipping people shall be ‘a Kingdom, and priests unto their God. At that time the Holy City (the New Jerusalem) will be open to all the cleansed and sanctified of all nations and they will bring their (given) glory into it. It will also be the time of the Holy Wedding Feast of the Bride and the Lamb. Paradise will be holy, indeed, and as Eden was once the place of intimacy and worship between God and Man so shall it be forever the place of joy and of seeing the face of God the one who is ‘Holy! Holy! Holy!’

#### **All Present Life Proto-prophetical of the Holy Life to Come**

We pursue holiness (Heb 12:14) because God himself is holiness, and not in order to evade the judgment which is upon unholiness. So-called ‘ordinary living’, when lived in thanks-giving

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<sup>11</sup> We should note, again, that since sanctification and worship are linked inseparably that no study of practical holiness is complete without seeing its relationship to worship and the practice of worship. This cannot be covered in the present paper, but will be the subject of a future study.

<sup>12</sup> See my little book *The Christian Doctrine of Holiness* (CTS 7, NCPI) for an expansion of these spiritual exercises in the life of holiness.

on the principle of I Timothy 4:4–5, is proto-prophetical, in that eating and drinking is of the eating and drinking in the coming kingdom, marriage is of the Heavenly Wedding Feast to come, worship is of the Holy Temple which will be God and the Lamb—and so on. This is a powerful insight for it takes the so-called ‘ordinariness’ and invests it with continuous eschatological meaning. Almost unconsciously one is achieving enriching holiness in the everyday things of life. One is witnessing to God’s holy *telos*.

If, then, we forget that we are already the sanctified people, and that practical holiness is not a painful stint to be executed but a joy to be lived, then the eschatological view will enliven us with its great hope, and we will be grateful to be one with the Holy Triune God. We must have a wholesome understanding of the life in the Father, the Son and the Spirit. We must rouse ourselves from ‘lesser ways’ to the grand and noble ways of present worship that we may live in the fullness of the beauty of holiness, that our inner beings may be in true, holy array, and that all the treasures given to us may be explored for their present joy, their authentic holiness and their encouragement for ‘things to come’.

Outside of worship nothing of this is truly so. All holiness is doxological, and is known fully only in worship of him who is called ‘Holy! Holy! Holy!’

# The Sanctification of Man—III: Holiness and Worship

## INTRODUCTION: WORSHIP AND HOLINESS FROM BEGINNING TO END

### The Sanctification of all Things the True Goal of God

We have seen that of all creation the only thing nominated as holy, that is, as being sanctified, is the seventh day. All creation was 'very good' but only the seventh day was sanctified. It remains sanctified as we shall see below. Hebrews 4:1–10 makes it clear that the sabbath rest is available now to people of faith but is fully entered into in the *telos*. It was at the point of the sabbath that created Man could enter the sanctifying action of God: that is, he could partake of God's holiness via the sabbath.<sup>1</sup> Rightly speaking the new heavens and the new earth and all such elements together constitute that eternal sabbath rest. Just as at creation the sabbath was the final act of God, so that Man could enter it and partake of it, so in the new creation it will constitute the creative final act of God and redeemed Man will thus be able to enter into it and partake of it. 'There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads'.

Herbert W. Richardson argues, 'The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Sabbath. For this reason, *God's establishment of the Sabbath reveals His ultimate purpose for His creation; namely the sanctification of all things*'<sup>2</sup> (emphasis mine). He quotes Hugh of St. Victor:

Whoever in this present life shall keep this Sabbath so as to consent to no evil will arrive at the future life at that eternal Sabbath of God where he will perceive no evil just as was said: 'And there shall be month after month, and Sabbath after Sabbath' [Isa. 66:23]. Thus that precept seems to refer especially to the person of Holy Spirit when it is said: 'keep holy the Sabbath day,' that we may indeed accept Him in the present and . . . possess him in the future unto the joy of life.<sup>3</sup>

It may well be argued that glorification is the goal of God for his creation, and that would be true since God's holiness and his glory are inseparable. Alec Motyer comments:

This transcendent holiness is the mode of God's immanence *for the whole earth is full of his glory!*<sup>4</sup> 'that which fills the whole earth is his glory', *i.e.* it is not only the one thing that is capable of filling everything but the thing which actually does so. Holiness is God's hidden glory; glory is God's all-present holiness.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note in Hebrews 12:10(a), 'he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness'. Here God who has sanctified us maintains the soteriological status quo by discipline, whereas participation in the sabbath rest of God (cf. Matt. 11:28) was participation in the holiness of God. Gordon Wenham speaks of the seventh day as 'a day of blessing and sanctity on which normal work is laid aside'.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert W. Richardson, *Theology For a New World* (SCM, London, 1968) p. 113. We ask why God did not sanctify all things at creation: the answer must be that all things were 'very good'—that is, good enough—and that sanctification comes in the *voluntary* surrender of Man to his Maker to worship him and to serve him. By participation in the Sabbath that sanctification could have proceeded. That sanctification was God's *intention*, is argued, below, in our Study.

<sup>3</sup> *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, R. Deferrari, trans. I.12.8 (Cambridge Mass., 1951) p. 195f.

<sup>4</sup> Note Habakkuk 2:14, 'For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea'; Numbers 14:21, 'But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord'; Psalm 72:19, 'Blessed be his glorious name for ever; may his glory fill the whole earth!' The seraphim are saying the earth is filled with the glory of the Lord, but it is not seen by men and women (cf. Romans 1:19ff.) yet 'the knowledge' of that glory will come, and what presently obtains will be seen eschatologically.

<sup>5</sup> Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP, 1993) p. 77.

For all things to be glorified must mean that all things will be sanctified, and present sanctification is with a view to glory, the glory which man virtually lost at the Fall. There can be no doubt that in the New Testament ultimate sanctification, whilst highly regarded, is not the immediate hope believers hold so much as the ‘hope of glory’, that is, of glorification. Passages such as Romans 8:17–30, Ephesians 1:17–22, and the many references to hope in the Epistle to the Hebrews, tend to the idea of glorification. Even so, the phrase, ‘his glorious inheritance in the saints’, seems to catch up both ideas in the one utterance. It is also clear from Romans 6:19, 22 (cf. Gal. 6:7–8), that the outcome of the present life of holiness is ‘sanctification, and its end, eternal life’.

### The Prophetic Emphasis on the Ultimate Sanctification of All Things

Prophetically this transformation is shown as the goal of the *telos*. For example Isaiah 56:1–8 shows the temple of the Lord open to all as the house of prayer for all nations; Isaiah 2:1–3 shows all people moving up to Jerusalem for worship; Isaiah 60:10–11 equals Revelation 21:24–27. Isaiah 65:17f. and 66:22–23 speak of the new heavens and the new earth and all flesh coming to worship the Lord. In the New Testament the text of Ephesians chapter 1 speaks of the holiness of the saints predestined before time (cf. I Peter 1:2), and passages such as Colossians 1:19–22, I Peter 1:13ff. and II Peter 3:10f. speak of the holiness which will be that of the saints, and indeed, of all creation. All of this is seen in the Book of the Revelation in which (i) all that is profane is judged and destroyed, and (ii) all things are established in holiness, the temple now being ‘God and the Lamb’, so that the worship of the redeemed is *in* God.

This surely means that God’s goal for all creation as it becomes the new heaven and the new earth is that of the sanctification of all things. The beginning of the end is the holy sabbath and the end of the beginning is the holy sabbath; see Isaiah 66:22–23, ‘For as the new heaven and the new earth which I shall make . . . from new moon to new moon [from month to month] . . . all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD’.

### The Protological Elements of Worship

In the first of our three studies on Sanctification we looked at an eschatology of holiness. This is also apt for this study but we need to envisage the whole scope of God’s action and purpose of sanctification. We can conclude that God created all things so that he might, and would ultimately, sanctify them. Of all that he created the one thing said to be sanctified was the seventh day, so that Man who was then unfallen,<sup>6</sup> might participate in this aspect of his holiness. Without doubt we see all things sanctified at the *telos*. Peter speaks of the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwells righteousness (II Pet. 3:11–13). That this relates to holiness is seen in II Peter 3:11, ‘Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of *holiness* and godliness’. Revelation 22:1–5 makes it clear that ultimately all things will be holy and in this holiness the elect shall worship. All will be worship in that time, as verses 3 and 4 make clear:

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.

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<sup>6</sup> When we include the Sabbath as the final part of creation (Gen. 2:1–3) we need to see the principle of Sabbath rest in Israel applied to the land, the vegetation and the animals, as well as to Man. It is surely reasonable to conclude that the Sabbath was also made for all creation as for Man; cf. Mark 2:27, ‘Man was not made for the sabbath but the sabbath for man’. Jesus’ treatment of the Sabbath was shown to be for the benefit of Man, e.g. his healing of the sick in the interest of the Kingdom, and so, as part of the Kingdom principle.

## The Beginning of Man's Worship of God

Where does pure worship commence in Man's history if not in Eden? Yet Eden is preceded by the seventh day, the day of God's rest. Genesis 2:1–3 makes it clear that God's final work of creation was to sanctify the seventh day. The other six days are not sanctified, though doubtlessly they are clean since all that God has made is (together; Gen. 1:31) really 'very good'. What, then, is the significance of the seventh day? It is the rest of God from his works, and he both blesses and hallows it. As this is an unended day it means that in the time of history Man may enter into it, and he who enters it participates in the holiness of God for it remains *his* day, *his* rest, in which others are enjoined to participate. Chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews explicate the meaning of God's rest in which Man participates: it is both that in which we can now participate and that in which we shall fully participate at the *telos*. Its inception for Israel as God's holy people and holy nation is based on (i) covenant, (ii) deliverance from Egypt, and (iii) the creational event, for it is still referred back to creation as a creational ordinance. It is, then, none the less a covenantal ordinance for Israel, but salvation has had to enter to bring back holy (worshipping) people to true sabbath rest: God's own, innate rest. For Israel not to observe the sabbath rest is for them to profane it and so profane God and thus to be unholy.

## Sabbath Rest Both Creational and Covenantal: The Primal Cultus

The principle of covenant and sabbath-keeping is brought out in the inceptive passage of Exodus 31:12–17:

And the LORD said to Moses, 'Say to the people of Israel, "You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; every one who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed"'. .

It is surely reasonable to conclude that the participation of the primal couple in this seventh day rest was their participation in God and his worship. To say that Man, created, came to no-worship and no-participation in his holiness is to pose a mediocre concept of creation.<sup>7</sup> Karl Barth says, 'The goal of creation and at the same time the beginning of all that follows, is the event of God's Sabbath freedom, Sabbath rest and Sabbath joy, in which man, too, has been summoned to participate'.<sup>8</sup> If we see this as part of the covenant of God innate to God's nature and therefore innate to creation, then we can see how significant an event it is. Whilst being ontological to the creation it is also protological of the ultimate Sabbath rest into which creation shall enter. Our point, here, is that man's participation in God's holiness began with creation.

## Eden the Primal Place of Man's Worship of God

We have pointed to Eden as a special construction of God for Man's benefit. In Genesis 2:1–3 the rest of God takes place and proceeds. In 2:7, as though an explication of the rest of

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<sup>7</sup> Claus Westermann says, 'What is peculiar to the holy day in the course of every day happenings is that it points to the goal of the creature which God has created in his image. The work which has been laid on man is not his goal, his goal is the eternal rest which has been suggested by the rest of the seventh day'. *Creation* (London, SPCK, 1974), p. 65, as quoted by Dumbrell—see footnote 9 below.

<sup>8</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 1 (T. & T. Clark, 1958), p. 98.

God, the creation of Man is described after which the making of Eden is recounted, including the river that has its source in this paradise, though it flows into the world outside of it. Then the putting of Man into Eden is described, the purpose being for him ‘to till it and keep it’, ‘keep’ possibly being a cultic word and work linked with worship. William Dumbrell says of Eden, ‘It also operates as a divine sanctuary, the point where the immediacy of the divine presence was encountered and enjoyed’.<sup>9</sup> When we think of the Paradise of Revelation chapters 21 and 22, and see the elements of the new creation such as the river of life, the tree of life, the marriage of the Bride and Lamb and the presence of God—then we feel justified in saying that the earthly Eden (‘place of delight’), whilst being ontological in itself, is protological of the ultimate Paradise, of its worship and of its sabbath rest. That is, whilst being protological, it is, nevertheless, the actual place of intimacy for the primal couple—God being present in it, to Man. It was this fullness of life in God’s special holy sanctuary that Man lost at the Fall.

### **Post-Fall, Post-diluvian and Patriarchal Worship**

In regard to post-Fall worship we have previously noted that the worship of Cain and Abel shows us that true worship is propitiatory, since God’s word to Cain was ‘If you do well shall you not be forgiven?’<sup>10</sup> The other side of the sacrifice we see is that it is also thanksgiving for all God’s gifts. Not to offer thanksgiving is to demean all that God has given: it is to make Man the source of all that he has and so to profane God’s holiness. Post-Fall worship fell away when ‘the sons of God married the daughters of men’, and corruption—the antithesis of cleanness—spread across the face of the earth and was met with the judgment of the Flood. In regard to post-diluvian worship, the offering of Noah’s sacrifice to God was pleasing to him and so the creational covenant was established—some would argue, re-established—and affirmed to Noah and his family.

Patriarchal worship was given in the context of the Abrahamic covenant, and altars were made, sacrifices were offered and memorials were established. Especially significant is Jacob’s worship at Bethel. Jacob, following his sleep and dream, says, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it . . . This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven’. His sanctifying of the pillar of stone—‘this stone will be a house of God’<sup>11</sup>—causes Wenham to comment, ‘the sacred stone represents the holiness of the whole area’. The priestly ministry of Melchizedek was a sign that God had not excluded all but Abraham’s seed from true worship. The later priesthood of Jethro the Midianite is also sealed as authentic in holiness.

In contrast to this worship in holiness of the covenant people, there was the idolatry of those opposed to God. The dreadful nature of idolatry is the attributing of God’s holiness to these deities and idols.

### **The Covenantal Cultus: Worship and the Life of the Community**

Within the scope of this paper we do not have time and space to discuss the *cultus* of the Mosaic covenant, and that of the New covenant. It has been observed that the life of the community—which we call ‘the culture’—derives from the *cultus*, that is, from the principle and modes of worship of the deity of that clan or nation. We can observe that Israel was founded as a nation (i) on God’s (covenantal) choice of it (Deut. 7:6 *et al.*) and his sanctification of the people (Exod. 19:5–6), (ii) on his acts of redemption which consolidated it as a nation (Exod. 15:11; 20:2ff.), (iii) the cutting of the covenant (Exod. 24), (iv) his Presence within his chosen people, (v) the prescribed worship (the *cultus*) which was

<sup>9</sup> *Covenant and Creation* (Paternoster Pr., 1984), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Wenham’s comment on Genesis 4:7 in his Word Biblical Commentary, *Genesis 1–15* (Word, 1987), p. 104f.

<sup>11</sup> Wenham’s comment on Genesis 28:18ff. in his Word Biblical Commentary *Genesis 16–50* (Word, Dallas, 1994), p. 224. Wenham on this passage needs to be read to see the principle of sanctification in patriarchal times.

appropriate, and (vi) the covenantal promises which find their fulfilment in Christ (II Cor. 1:20). This is summed up by Romans 9:4.

The New covenant could virtually be summed up in the principles of the Mosaic covenant as stated immediately above, but there are differences. These are discussed fully in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The transition from the Mosaic to the New was not a simple one, but it was effected, as we see in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, and it was effected by ‘the mediator of a better covenant’, Christ. The exact *modes* of the New covenant *cultus* are not set out, but they can be discovered by examination of the appropriate biblical texts. *That* there was a new *cultus*, and *that* it brought a new culture to the community—the *ecclesia*—is not in doubt. The difference in the dynamics of the new community lay in the fact of Messiah and his cosmic victory achieved by the Cross and the Resurrection. At the same time it lay in the presence of God in his community in Emmanuel—‘God with us’—through Christ and the Holy Spirit. The present status of the sanctification of his people was actively achieved by the Atonement, brought to present reality by the Holy Spirit as he applied the work of Christ to the believer, and so established ‘the hope of sanctification’. Just as Christ is ‘the hope of glory’, so he is ‘the hope of sanctification’.<sup>12</sup>

## GOD’S WAY OF SANCTIFYING HIS CREATION

### Sanctification Not by Any Sheerly Metaphysical Power of God

Our three studies all presuppose that the creation was ‘really very good’, that it was clean but not sanctified (cf. Lev. 10:10), and that God sanctified the seventh day and its sabbath rest, but not the other days. Participation in this sanctified day was and is true participation in the holiness of God. How, then, does he sanctify wholly the whole creation?

A view often taken of God’s omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence envisages God as able to accomplish anything and all things by assertion of power.<sup>13</sup> We have said that sanctification is the consecration by God of the things of creation to his service and worship. Such consecration demands the willingness of the object to this sanctification. Thus, whilst Israel is God’s holy people because he has chosen them, dwells amongst them, and has called them into his worship and service—all within the context of covenant—yet they are to be willing for such consecration,<sup>14</sup> and are often enjoined, ‘Consecrate yourselves’.<sup>15</sup> Indeed their participation in the worship of God demanded continuing acts of the cleansing of themselves through the sacrifices and the self-consecration mentioned just above. This was part of their being ‘holy people’. They were in the position to live holy lives consonant with their being the holy people of God.

So much then for the forms of worship which we call post-Edenic, post-diluvian, patriarchal and Mosaic-covenantal. We might almost say, ‘So much, then, for the worship of the New covenant’, since what we are now concerned with is (i) the sanctification of all things, and (ii) the ultimate worship a sanctified creation renders to God.

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<sup>12</sup> ‘The term ‘hope of sanctification’ is not found in the N.T. ‘The hope of righteousness’ is found in Galatians 5:5. Because we walk by faith and not by sight, we have the hope for all things, since ‘faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’. It is correct, then, to believe the sanctified community will have its eschatological sanctification which will be essential for eschatological worship.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Richardson (op. cit., p. 124) says that if God’s authority is seen to be ‘in His mere power (an attribute of nature), then a theocratic theology becomes demonic’. He is stressing the point that God’s dignity and authority lie in his glory (*kabod*), that is, in his *nature* rather than in some (supposed) *attribute* of power. Holiness is God’s very being, and not an attribute.

<sup>14</sup> For example the cutting of the covenant in Exodus 24 required (i) for them to know the meaning and significance of the binding of the covenant, and (ii) their willingness to accept the law of God and to be obedient.

<sup>15</sup> The injunction to ‘consecrate yourselves’ is preceded by God’s consecration of the people as his covenant congregation. Thus the act of self-consecration issued from the fact that God had consecrated them, and they must be consonant with that act and (now) status of sanctification. See Exodus 19:22; Leviticus 11:44; Numbers 11:18; 32:29; I Chronicles 29:5; II Chronicles 13:9; 29:5.

***Excursus: The Incarnation of the Son, Itself Sanctifies the Creation***

Herbert Richardson and other theologians argue that the Incarnation of the Son was essential to the sanctification of all things. That is, if all things were clean but not yet sanctified, then the divine Presence in humanity by the Son becoming incarnate was indispensable to the sanctification of creation.<sup>16</sup> It may be asked how the presence of the Son in the human race would effect that sanctification. It is simple to see that the incarnation which is with a view to the purification of sinful humanity could effect sanctification, because the Son in his atonement identifies himself with humanity in its sinful being and redeems it. This is brought out powerfully in Romans 5:12–21 where Christ is the true new Adam, a point followed through in I Corinthians 15. In what other way could the incarnation sanctify, supposing Man had never sinned? What we will attempt to see now must be, at least in part if not in whole, the answer to this question. My view is that the incarnation, of itself, could not sanctify creation even if it were to be ‘squeaky clean’. If we are going to speculate the act of God in Christ’s incarnation, then we are only on safe ground when we see it was God’s intention to have holiness redeem and sanctify Man, thereby showing the immeasurable riches of his grace in Christ Jesus’ and that his love is a holy one, his holiness a loving one.

**THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE CREATION BY CHRIST,  
THE SON OF GOD**

Those holding to the evangelical work of Christ would never deny that the ‘all things’ of the New Testament are redeemed by Christ. This would be the tenor of Colossians 1:15–23, but note his work of the Cross, whilst redeeming sinners does not end there. It accomplishes their sanctification:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order *to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him*, 23 provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister (emphasis mine).

This passage shows Christ as the Creator, the Protocreator, and the head of the Church. It shows that his work of Atonement is ‘to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him’. This links with Ephesians 1:3–8, where (i) God’s plan before time was that ‘we should be holy and blameless before him’, and (ii) this being linked with the blood shed for forgiveness. Again, then, not only redemption but sanctification stems from the work of the Cross:

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,

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<sup>16</sup> Herbert Richardson (op. cit., pp. 117–118) says ‘In American Puritanism, as in Judaism, the Sabbath is regarded as the exemplar of the world to come’. Richardson agrees on the necessity for the redemption of fallen man, but argues that the incarnation would have been necessary in any case for the sanctification of the creation.

that we should be *holy and blameless before him*. 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. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace<sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us (emphasis mine).

We have seen that Christ is the Sanctifier in such scriptures as I Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; Hebrews 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12. I Corinthians 1:30 says that Christ is made our sanctification. Before examining how the death of Christ could accomplish this sanctification we should note the ministry of the Spirit in the work of applying to the believer/s the sanctification wrought by Christ, as in I Corinthians 6:11, II Thessalonians 2: 13–14, and I Peter 1:2, and as Christ continues to be our sanctification, so the Spirit continues to work within the category of our ‘sanctification by faith’ to keep us in consonant holiness of life. The Father, too, is the Sanctifier in that he is our Holy Father, and we are his holy children. He sanctifies his Name to us, and us to his Name. Thus we can conclude that a Triune work of the ‘Holy! Holy! Holy!’ assures us of our category of sanctification from the beginning, and our being kept in holiness of life until the end. In this paragraph describing that work it is clear that it was/is by the Father sending his Son into the world, the Son sanctifying us and the Spirit—who attended and aided Christ in all his incarnation—being present in that sanctifying work which convinces us that without the incarnation such work could not have proceeded.

### THE BLOOD THAT SANCTIFIES

In Hebrews 10:10–14 the writer says (i) the offering of the body of Christ has sanctified us, and (b) that that single sacrifice has sanctified us. In 10:29 the writer speaks of ‘the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified’, and in 13:12 says, ‘So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood’.

What, then, is this offering of the body of Christ, this bloody sacrifice, this blood of the covenant which has the power to sanctify?

First of all we see that the blood is said to ‘[cleanses the] conscience from dead works to serve [worship] the living God’ (Heb. 9:14). This blood in I John 1:7 cleanses us from all sin. In Revelation 1:5 it ‘frees us from our sins’. In I Peter 1:18–19 it is ‘precious blood’ that has redeemed us ‘from the futile ways inherited from your fathers’. The shedding of the blood was destined before the foundation of the world, or, as Revelation 13:8 may well be saying, ‘the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world’.<sup>17</sup> That the blood was intended to cleanse from the guilt of sin and brings forgiveness is attested by Hebrews 9:22, ‘Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins’. This matter of forgiveness of sins is stated in Matthew 26:27 and Ephesians 1:7; cf. Colossians 1:14, 20–22.

If, then, we stop at the cleansing and the forgiving but do not go on to the sanctifying power of the Atonement, we have a Cross limited to the redemption of Man in his conscience. We have seen in previous studies that in the New Testament there is no saving cleansing without resultant sanctification. Blood was used in the sanctification of the tabernacle, the furniture of the whole sanctuary and the priests and Levites.<sup>18</sup> So it is the blood which sanctifies. Cleansing and forgiveness without sanctification would leave Man without any

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<sup>17</sup> It can translated as the book of life having names written in it before the foundation of the world, or the Lamb being slain (proleptically?) before the foundation of the world. The two are so linked as to be inseparable. There is a similar connection of two ideas in I Peter 1:11–19.

<sup>18</sup> In Hebrews the writer seems almost to take the act of purification by blood in the Old Testament as simply the act of purification when, in the Old Testament—relating to the sanctuary and priesthood—it is used for the sanctification of the things and persons of the sanctuary. The blood for cleansing from guilt and forgiveness of sins is of a propitiatory nature since it is constantly said, ‘the priest shall make atonement for him for his sins and he shall be forgiven’. Undoubtedly the custom of the priest to sprinkle the blood seven times ‘before the Lord in front of the veil’ assures that it is sacred blood.

participation in the holy climax of history, the holy things of eternity for which he was created to inherit.

If Christ had simply *visited* the human race and had not shed his blood in an act which was at once representative, identificatory, and substitutionary after the manner of being vicarious, and had all this been merely Docetic, then there could be no sanctification of Man. It not only seems to be factual that Christ died and rose in this identificatory, substitutionary way, but that he remains the High Priest, that he was in the act of death in the resurrection, ascension and session at the right hand of God. This makes for the new *cultus* which is now related to the true, heavenly sanctuary, for it is coming into this sanctuary that we are enjoined by Hebrews 10:19–22:

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 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.

It is as though we can quote Habakkuk aptly at this point of Man in the *cultus* of the New covenant, ‘But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him’. In that spirit we come to the revelation of the worship of the sanctified in Hebrews 12:22–24, 28–29:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel . . . Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

### **THE HIGH COST OF SANCTIFICATION AND THE NEW WORSHIP**

Do we realise how vast a task it is for God to redeem Man from the ultimate judgment of sin? Do we realise that there was no other way than through the incarnation of his Son which had the Atonement in view? Do we realise what it meant for the Father not to withhold his Son, but give him up to sin and death for us all, and to suffer the judgment we would otherwise have to suffer? Do we even begin to comprehend what is entailed in the Son suffering the guilt and purifying even the pollution of one person, let alone the entire human race? Do we realise the vast task of bringing the elect to sanctification that they might forever participate in the holiness of God, and become the true royal priesthood, serving the Godhead and the new creation as kings and priests unto their God? What demands were made upon the holy Victim on the Cross that he might sanctify his Bride unto pure and shimmering holiness, that she might become the jewel of creation, the prize of the Holy Father?

These questions make us pause and set aside the trivial and the flippant, the ecclesial activities which we raise and which beset us with their vanity and emptiness. ‘But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him’. We mean the redemption Christ wrought for us unto sanctification and ultimate glorification can be treated in a merely cerebral way, so that the whole being of a person is not shaken by it; is not moved to weeping and true repentance; is not formed to the faith which comes from ‘the word of Christ’ (Rom. 10:17); does not receive with trembling the vast suffering of Christ; does not realise the powerful movement of the whole Godhead to redeem, sanctify and glorify; does not respond in the depths of the spirit of his/her being to magnificent holy love which accomplishes the transition of the sinner to authentic sainthood. Only when, by the Holy Spirit, this understanding of the Cross comes through, will gratitude and thanksgiving become a fountain of life in the believing person.

**CONCLUSION: THE NEW CULTUS IN THE NEW SANCTUARY,  
THE HOLY SABBATH AND THE HOLY PARADISE**

We have noted in these three studies that culture results from the *cultus*. We have sensed that from the beginning there has been the *cultus* of God, purely exercised in Eden, recognised only dimly or perversely by a Cain, but purely by an Abel, so that it is exercised by faith in the propitiation-providing God (cf. Lev. 17:11). If we recognise the nature of God as covenantal, and his creation as being innately covenantal, then the realisation of the true *cultus* is logical enough. Through all the vicissitudes of post-Eden, post-Flood, patriarchal, Mosaic and New covenant situations the true *cultus* obtains. We saw in the theology of Leviticus<sup>19</sup> that the Mosaic covenant *cultus* was seen under the elements of the presence of God, holiness, sacrifice, the covenant. We also saw, that, rightly understood these are the theological components of the New covenant *cultus*. In this we were assisted by the writer of Hebrews who showed us the New covenant not only outmoded, but transcended the Mosaic covenant, in that there was a change in the law of the former covenant; a change in priesthood, so a change in *cultus* and thus a radical change in the new culture, the new community, the true house of God. Life was now to be lived in the new sanctuary, the heavenly in which Christ was/is the true, interceding High Priest in the house of God. In some way our present worship is linked with the heavenly, the copy of the heavenly being done away with so that participation in the heavenly could be established and practiced. In this ‘the Father of spirits’ disciplines his children that they may be ‘partakers in his holiness’ and they are to ‘follow after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord’.

**The Consummation of Holy Things**

The end of the beginning is now seen to be fulfilled in the eschatological action. We are conducted to this in a special way by the Book of the Revelation. It is here we see, then, the power of the sanctifying blood. It is the One who has ‘loosed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father’, who is the Slain Lamb and in whose hand is the book of sanctifying history.

- (a) *It is a sanctifying action of Christ up to the telos* (the End) in that through him the three cycles of sevens—of seals, trumpets and vials—eventuate and are effective. Through this Lamb all judgments which vindicate God as righteous and just, as King of all the nations and as their Judge, are completed. The beast, the second beast, the unholy city of Babylon, the ten kings, the devil and his followers—all are destroyed in the lake of fire. All who have sinned against God and refused to repent are also cast into this lake. Through this action the defeat of evil once accomplished at the Cross is now worked out to its complete end and fullness.
- (b) *The temple is involved in that all things proceed within the heavenly sanctuary*, from the throne before which is the altar of worship, of incense, in which the Redeemed ‘worship [serve] God day and night’, in which, at one point the Ark of the Covenant is revealed and which, as the New Jerusalem, descends from heaven so that God’s dwelling will be with men; that is, all earth will be holy as the temple, the bride, the holy city is holy, having been built in heaven.
- (c) *As is the Temple so is the Bride, holy*. When all evil has been destroyed, especially Babylon, the evil counterpart and counterfeit of the Bride, so there is joy withal because she is then made ready as the Bride for Christ her Husband, the Holy Slain Lamb, the Holy Warrior-King and the Holy Bridegroom.

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<sup>19</sup> βGordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Eerdmans, 1979) pp. 15–32.

- (d) *The Holy City is shown to be Holy Paradise.* Into it come all the nations who have come ‘to the obedience of faith’, and their kings bring the glory of those nations into it. In this Paradise is the river of life, of living waters, flowing from the throne, and on either side the Tree of Life ‘whose leaves *were* for the healing of the nations’, so that the incoming, indwelling nations are healed!
- (e) *The temple as the people of God, in which they worship, and from which issues the sanctifying power of the Slain Lamb is no more the temple in that form.* In the Holy City God and the Lamb are the Holy Temple, as they are at the same time, those who are seated on the Throne. This means that God’s people as the Holy Temple are now contained *within* God and the Lamb! They now worship Him—God the Triune—and behold his face! This is indeed being ‘hid with Christ in God’, is having ‘fellowship . . . with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ’, is ‘participating in the divine nature’, and it is ‘sharing in his [the Father’s] holiness’. The Lamb has brought his Bride, his Holy Body to dwell within the Godhead, forever. Only thus can his people be ‘a kingdom, priests to God and his Father’, that is the Holy Royal Priesthood throughout the new heaven and the new earth.

Thus the ‘all things’ of creation are sanctified, that is, are in the service of God, ‘useful to the Master’ and so one with him in his plan for all time and eternity. This is why the new worship in the Holy City is pure, is holy, is congruous with the holiness of God, and constitutes the doxological joy of all his creatures.