



In God's Image

God's purpose for humanity

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Preface

There are a number of goals I hope to achieve by writing this book. The title, “In His Image” is taken from Genesis 1:26, ***“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.’”*** The overall theme is based on this verse and this should be regarded as God’s mission or purpose statement. Everything that subsequently transpires in the biblical account is devoted to God’s purpose of creating human beings in His image. Rather than regarding the first humans, as already in God’s image, I will argue that this is a process that unfolds over the centuries with the critical role of achieving God’s purpose being carried out by God Himself. It is His desire to, not only make us in His image, but also to share the same type of eternal existence that Father, Son and Holy Spirit enjoy with one another. It is, at times, a painful yet fascinating story, not only for humanity, but also for God.

Another goal I hope to achieve is to change one’s impression of God. It’s popular in today’s world for God to get a bad rap. Questions about a supposedly good God who allows horrifying evil is a common question that has puzzled both theologians and philosophers for centuries. We will at least look at this difficult question although we may not get a completely satisfactory answer.

Another misconception of God is the unfortunate way some Christians have come to portray Him. He has come to be regarded as the great arbitrary judge somewhere off in heaven that determines our eternal existence based on our “good” or “bad” works. In this scenario, the good go “up” and the bad go “down.” The fear of hell is used as the motivating factor in shaping behaviour. Some Reformation theologians didn’t help matters either with their theory of predestination. This theory divided humanity into two groups, those predestined by God to go to heaven, while the second group, also predestined by God, go to hell. Neither group had any say in how this was determined and they could live their lives as they chose as God Himself had predestined this decision. Of course this theory didn’t portray God’s nature in the most flattering terms either, but has led to Him being regarded as an arbitrary and capricious tyrant. Again, these theories have done great damage to God’s reputation as well as to Christianity in general. However, as we shall see, the nature of the true God of Christians, rather than wanting to dispense any to hell, has gone to extreme measures to include all in His grand purpose of sharing His heavenly existence with all. God may well be our judge, but He is also our Savior, a Savior who didn’t confine Himself to save us from the safety of heaven, but chose instead to join us in our fallen state here on earth. Well-meaning Christians have not helped themselves either when they try to aggressively impose their beliefs on non-Christians, especially when they lead with frightening scenarios of eternal hellfire. Jesus Himself said, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”(John 3:17). Society might hold Christians in higher regard if we followed Jesus’ approach and let them know they have a Savior who is hell-bent on saving them rather than condemning them to eternal hellfire (if there is in reality such a thing).

Back to God’s mission of making us in His image: The question of our human existence is another one of those philosophical questions that have challenged mankind since the beginning of human consciousness. Theories abound as to “why” we are here. Is this life all there is, or as Emil Brunner put it, “Are we more than just carbon-based parasites infesting the surface of the globe hemmed in by birth and death?” Or do we dare listen to that hope buried deep in our souls that there has to be a higher purpose for this earthly experience? Do we really live in an uncaring universe or as Sam asked Frodo on their trek to Mordor, “I wonder what sort of tale we’ve fallen into?” Christians dare to believe there is a higher purpose even though at times we too are consumed with doubt and confusion especially in the midst of life’s difficulties. This belief goes back to God’s statement, “Let us make man in our image!” Any theory to address this difficult question of our existence has to take into account the complex and perplexing environment we earthlings find ourselves in, and

present plausible answers that satisfy the criteria. We will make the bold statement that the Christian perspective provides the best answers to these big questions of life. It presents answers to both the “Who” and the “Why.” We do live in a caring universe and all the joys and sorrows, pain and pleasure, good and evil, living and dying we experience count for something - they will not be wasted. God will see to that. There is a purpose to it all.

My hope is by the end of this series that we will have a more accurate and positive concept of God’s true nature rather than the negative impression one gets as a result of the misconceptions mentioned above. Far from being the God who is far removed from us, or one to be held in dread, we will find He is a loving God who is intimately involved in the life of every human being. So determined is He to share eternity with each of us, He willingly left His glory in heaven, entered humanity and offered Himself in the place of sinful humanity to satisfy the justice of God. The result of this act of grace means the death penalty for our sins has already been paid. God no longer holds us guilty, but pardoned sinners. That ought to be good news for us all, and that is what the word “gospel” means, “good news.” My hope is that you will also come to regard the Christian story as “good news.”

As we all approach a subject from our own unique perspective, I should mention a number of points that have shaped my approach to the topic. Reading the Bible from beginning to end can be a daunting project especially when we run into lengthy sections that don’t seem to contribute too much to the overall scheme of things. My hope is this series will provide a context that will draw the various aspects of the biblical story together and in the process give us a better understanding of the “tale we have fallen into.”

I have chosen to use a chronological approach for the sake of simplicity. The story of salvation begins long before the Garden of Eden, and these developments are crucial to understanding the context in which we humans find ourselves. So the story begins with God and traces the steps He has initiated in carrying out His purpose of creating us in His image. The story ends with humanity joining God in eternity, although by that stage we will have a completely different and vastly improved nature to the one we presently have.

There was a special emphasis on the Old and New Covenants as I grew up in a church community that had a distorted perspective of God and His Law. This led to a performance mentality similar to the one mentioned above where the good go “up” and the bad go “down” depending on their deeds. As we work through the material, we will replace this performance mentality with the refreshing and liberating truth that God accepts us not on our performance, but rather on Christ’s performance on our behalf. This simple statement completely changes our distorted impressions of God and His true nature. This truth is what it means to receive God’s grace.

As expected, the subject matter is based on what Christians believe to be the inspired word of God, the Holy Bible. Quotes are extensive and come from the New International Version unless otherwise noted. The material was originally composed in sermon format and reworked into the book version.

Other source material for this project has come from respected Christian scholars as well as university professors who teach for the Great Courses and Recorded Books programs. For those who wish to pursue a deeper study of the various subjects mentioned in this work, I highly recommend these sources. I also gratefully acknowledge their significant contributions to this project. The source list follows.

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Chapter 1 – Eternal Time and Chronological Time

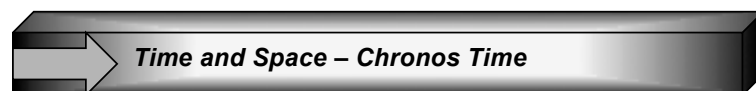
Just before renowned cosmologist Stephen Hawking died, he released his latest theory on the beginning of the universe. According to this theory the universe, which began with the “Big Bang”, or singularity, when time, space and matter came into existence, began from a different dimension of time called “Imaginary Time.” Now please don’t ask me to explain this, because other astrophysicists and cosmologists have trouble understanding it. This theory of “Imaginary Time” is the latest attempt by Hawking and others to get around the thorny issue of trying to explain how time, space and matter came into existence at the beginning of the universe. Where did all this stuff that makes up the universe today with all the related forces, energy and matter come from? Especially when there is nothing measurable in the universe that can bring a universe into existence. This has been one of the most difficult and unresolved questions facing the scientific community since the Age of Enlightenment attempted to provide a scientific answer to all of life’s questions.

Rather than speak of an “imaginary time” theory, I would like to talk about a “Divine” or “Eternal Time” theory. This theory has been around long before the Enlightenment and as the title implies, speaks of a dimension that cannot be measured scientifically. This may seem like an unusual way to start this series on this subject, but it is imperative we understand the differences between the two dimensions we are dealing with when we deal with the subject of God and humanity. This series is entitled, “In His Image” with the emphasis on “His” Image, not “our” image. We have to resist the temptation to create God in our image rather than the other way around. We need to recognize there is a vast gulf between who God is and the dimension He lives in to who we are and our four-dimensional world of time and space. We will deal with God’s nature in due course; in fact, one of the major goals of this project is to address the misconceptions (usually negative) surrounding humanity’s concept of God and His nature. For the time being though, we need to focus on the two different dimensions inhabited by God and humanity.

Chronological Time

We’ll start with the subject of time. We will learn there are two types of time; Chronological time and Eternal time. We humans live in a four-dimensional world, three of space and one of time – we occupy space and we are moving through time. This is chronological time and looks something like this.

(See figure below).



Eternal Time

As the name implies, chronological time has a beginning and an end. Things get a little more complicated when we begin to talk about Eternal time because our only experience of time is in the four dimensional world in which we live. However, there was a “time” when our four dimensional world of time and space did not exist. This was back before the “Big Bang.” For the Big Bang to happen, three separate components had to come into existence at the same time. These were, chronological time, space and matter. None of these three components along with their various properties could exist without the other two. Outside of a belief in a Creator who was able to create these three components simultaneously, there is no theory that adequately explains how the universe came into existence. All scientific theories about the cosmos, including the one mentioned above, start with the universe in existence as though it has no beginning. To admit

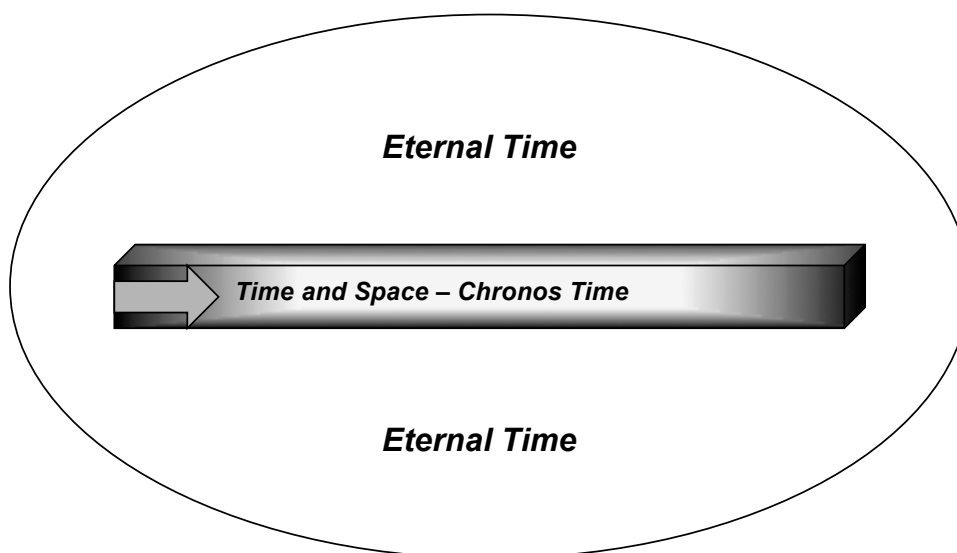
otherwise is to acknowledge a higher power with the capacity to bring into existence all things including time, space and matter and to bring them into existence simultaneously. This stance, however, denies the fact that scientists also tell us there was a beginning - the "Big Bang."

The Bible narrative begins with the simple statement, "***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth***" (***Genesis 1:1***). We learn two things from this statement. First, we learn of a Being that has the capacity to bring a universe into existence without working with prior materials. If we are going to make something in our four-dimensional world like a cake, we have to use existing materials; flour, sugar, milk and eggs. Not so with God. He simply speaks it into existence.

Hebrews 11:3 "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."

This means there is another mystifying component or force that exists outside of our physical universe that is able to perform inexplicable (from our point of view) events. The second thing we learn from the statement, "***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,***" there was a time prior to the existence of the universe in which God dwelt. We will call this eternal time and we will represent it this way.

(See figure below).



Unlike our time, God's time does not have a beginning or an end and it encompasses and fills all things, including our chronological time. But it is not just eternal time that encompasses all things. Along with time, God's presence encompasses all things. King Solomon at the dedication of God's temple acknowledges this fact.

2 Chronicles 6:18 "But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"

God doesn't so much as occupy space, but rather fills it with His presence – He is everywhere; He is what makes time, space, and life possible and as scripture tells us, He sustains it.

Acts 17:22-25 "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things."

Again, here we have another reference to a mystifying component or force that exists outside of our physical universe that is able to not only create life, but also to sustain it.

Like the men of Athens, we struggle to understand these concepts because they are foreign to the four-dimensional universe in which we live and cannot be scientifically measured or explained. But just because they can't be scientifically measured doesn't mean they don't exist. Closing off the voyage of discovery based on one's preconceptions guarantees we will never learn anything new or unique. We can thank the Enlightenment and empiricist philosophers like John Locke and David Hume for disregarding any knowledge that can't be seen, touched, felt or measured. We will run into similar problems later when we consider the subjects of the appearance of life on earth, the human mind and consciousness, none of which can be scientifically measured or explained; yet we acknowledge they exist. There is a metaphysical component in the cosmos that transcends physical existence. This is the dimension in which God exists and as such He is everywhere, occupying and sustaining both dimensions.

Isaiah 57:15 "For this is what the high and exalted One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place."

Scripture labels this dimension the spiritual realm and those that occupy this realm are called spirits. God labels Himself this way.

John 4:24 "God is spirit..."

It is a failure to acknowledge this spiritual dimension that has theists and atheists arguing in circles. Unless there is an acknowledgement of this otherworldly component that transcends the physical realities of our universe, theists and atheists will continue to argue past each other as they are operating from totally different premises. Atheists who want empirical evidence reject any extra-dimensional talk and Christians who accept it on faith can look foolish if we try to argue it on their grounds. A more mature approach would be for atheists to admit there is not enough proof to refute the existence of a higher power, and Christians to admit there is not enough proof to prove God exists. Both positions rely to a large degree on faith. So the first thing we need to understand is God and humanity occupy two separate dimensions and as already mentioned, there is a vast gulf between the spiritual and physical dimensions.

Living in our four-dimensional world has its limitations

As creatures in the scheme of things, we have limitations. We need air, food and water to sustain us. Adam was made from dust showing our attachment to the earth, but this is also a reference to our mortality, ***"for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19)***. And as to the question, "Were Adam and Eve created mortal?" The answer is, there would not have been the need for the tree of life if they were created with an immortal soul. Everything in the physical world is subject to decay and eventually disintegration (Second Law of Thermodynamics). We have no control over where we are born or who our parents are, we just show up. We have little control over our health. We can do some things to improve our health but sometimes it is just a matter of defective genes, where we were born, or the latest life-threatening epidemic. We live in a world of natural disasters over which we have limited control. We are subject to time and chance, car accidents, terrorist bombings, and the life-threatening activities of others. We are subject to the tyranny of time. We can't stop it, we can't go back and undo it, it is relentless – "stop the world I want to get off." Our activities are primarily restricted to this earth – the best we can do is put a man on the moon...forget about the next planet or galaxy. So despite our many achievements, man has his place in the scheme of things and is limited in what He has mastery over.

God is not limited by time and space.

God too has his place but his activities are not constrained by the forces and limitations of the four-dimensional world. That is because He is the Creator of these forces and not constrained by the created realities because He transcends them as we read in Acts 17. This creative capacity allows God to supersede physical realities in what we call miracles. Even the Devil knew this. In the temptation of Jesus, Satan challenged Jesus to defy these physical restrictions because he knew Jesus could (Matthew 4:1-11). He did have the power to fly. He did have the power to live without

physical sustenance. He did have the power to overthrow governments and someday He will, but at his time and choosing, not Satan's. He also showed He possessed the power to harness and control the elements – He stilled the storm (Mark 4:35-41). He showed by His many miracles He was able to control sickness by healing the sick and raising the dead (Matthew 9:18-26). He showed by His resurrection He has the power over death and decay – in other words, He can redeem the damage of the passage of time (John 11:25).

Unlike us who inhabit Chronological time, spirits who inhabit Eternal time transcend both dimensions. Jesus demonstrated by His first coming He had the power to move from the spiritual dimension to the physical dimension. However, in our present state we are restricted to the world of time and space (1 Corinthians 15:50). The fact God is not constrained by the forces and limitations of the physical world ought to be good news for humanity. Just as Jesus demonstrated His power over the forces of nature at His first coming, He will perform the same healing miracles at His second coming only this time applying them to the whole cosmos. He also demonstrated by His resurrection and His return to heaven He has power over death and for a human to move from the physical to the eternal realm.

Capacity for Relationships

However, there is one important aspect God has given to humans that transcends both dimensions and that is the capacity for relationships. According to Paul, despite the limitations of our four-dimensional world, God has given humanity the capacity to not only relate to other humans, but to also reach out and relate personally to the one true God.

Acts 17:27-28 "God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

We are His "offspring" in the sense we have the ability to relate to one another, as He is able to relate to others. Of all God's creation, it is only angels and humans who can "know" and "love." God has blessed humanity with a mind and consciousness which is unique in the four-dimensional world so we can relate to each other and more importantly with our Maker, Creator and Father. As Paul says here, he makes Himself near to all people with the hope we will reach out, to touch him and develop a relationship with Him. So the good news is, this God who inhabits the spiritual realm has taken steps to reveal Himself to us.

As mentioned, His purpose is to create us in His image and if He is spirit, that means an eventual movement from the physical realm to the spiritual realm. In other words, we will end up in heaven sharing the spiritual realm in a relationship with God.

So just in this short analysis we begin to get an insight into what God gets up to each morning in His eternal dimension of time. We find ourselves involved in something much grander than we can ever imagine in our four-dimensional world because it transcends our limited comprehension. But it is not beyond the comprehension or ability of the God we have just learned about. If He has the capacity to bring a universe into existence out of nothing and sustain it, He will bring to pass His purpose of creating us in His image so we eventually end up spending eternity in relationship with Him. But this fascinating journey is not without suffering and heartache, not only for humanity, but also for God.

Chapter 2 – A God of Unity, Relationship and Love

In his best selling book, “The Shack,” author William P. Young portrays God the Father as a big, buxom, motherly, black American woman. There have been many adjectives used to describe God over the centuries. But this was probably the first time He’s been described in these terms. Last time we started a series on “In His Image,” based on the scripture, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26). We learned God lives in a completely different dimension to the one we humans occupy. He lives in eternity while we live in our restricted four-dimensional world of time and space.

However, despite the limitations of our four-dimensional world, there is one important aspect God has given to humans that transcends both dimensions and that is, the capacity for relationships. God has blessed humanity with a mind and consciousness which is unique in the four-dimensional world so we can relate to each other but also to reach out and relate personally with our Maker, Creator and Father. Of all God’s creation, it is only angels and humans who can “know” and “love.” The ability to relate to others spans both the spiritual and physical dimensions. This fact alone ought to tell us something about what God considers very important to Him. It tells us He is a relational God, as He wouldn’t give us this capacity unless He wanted to relate to us.

And despite the criticism levelled at William P. Young for describing God as a buxom, motherly, black American woman, I’m sure his intent was to help change people’s perception of the way God is normally portrayed. We rarely hear about this God whose very nature can be categorized as “relational”. Normally God’s nature is portrayed by words that accentuate God’s power and authority. Words like Sovereign, Omnipotent; Almighty; All-Powerful; Omniscient; All knowing; Wise; Holy and Just. These are all very important characteristics of God and we should not overlook them but sometimes there is the tendency to over-emphasise these characteristics to the detriment of other important relational characteristics of God, such as Father; Savior; and Redeemer.

The Trinity

The mysterious description of God being called a Trinity is, at heart, a relationship, and a close loving intimate relationship between the three persons who comprise the Godhead. The relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is so close they act as one without losing their individuality. The Doctrine of the Trinity is summed up in the simple phrase, “One God in three persons.” Don’t ask me to explain how that is possible; it is a mystery in much the same way Eternal time and Chronological time is a mystery to those of us who live in the four-dimensional world of time and space. Our puny inferior brains cannot comprehend these spiritual mysteries. But someday when we are welcomed into that dimension with our new spiritual bodies with a mind to match, we will be able to comprehend how three can be one and one, three (1 John 3:2). Until then, we have to accept this reality on faith.

I don’t want to spend a lot of time on this as much has been written on the subject over the centuries, but just want to go through a few scriptural references to show the dilemma the concept of the Trinity presented to the early New Testament church. Up to Jesus’ first coming, the Nation of Israel believed in one God because this was the way He revealed Himself to them (Deuteronomy 6:4). Then Jesus comes along and quoting from the Old Testament confirms what the Old Testament says about God.

Mark 12:28-29 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” 29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’

Then Jesus goes about performing miracles, something only God can do, i.e. forgiving sins, healing the sick, raising the dead, etc. He is also called Emmanuel - God with us (Matthew 1:23). So the obvious conclusion, if you believed Jesus was indeed God, was to think this was the one God from the Old Testament manifesting himself on the earth or else He was an imposter. Then to confuse the issue even further, John the Apostle comes along in John 1:1 and says, ***The Word* (Jesus) *was with God***, suggesting that the two can be distinguished from one another.

So we begin to see the obvious problem - now there are supposedly two gods! But then Jesus confuses the issue further by saying, ***"I and the Father are one"* (John 10:30)**, reinforcing the "oneness" of God. Then on the evening before His crucifixion Jesus introduces a third player - God the Holy Spirit.

John 14:15-18 If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

So again in this section we see the three persons of the Trinity conundrum identified. One of the common misconceptions about the Holy Spirit is He has come to be regarded as the power of God rather than one of the persons of the Trinity. However, the apostle Peter clarifies this misunderstanding by accusing Ananias of lying to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:3-4 Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.'

Of course it is not possible to lie to a power, it has to be to a person and in these two verses Peter links lying to the Holy Spirit with lying to God. Jesus also prescribed baptism in the name (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the three persons who are the one God (Matthew 28:19). So this was the dilemma facing the early church and the result after nearly three hundred years of wrestling with the issue they came up with what we call today, the Doctrine of the Trinity – summed up in the simple phrase, "One God in three persons". Understanding the doctrine does not try to explain the mystery of the Triune God, in fact it tries to preserve a mystery that cannot be explained. As mentioned, one day when we inherit the spiritual realm and we see God face to face, we will understand this mystery.

The Trinitarian Relationship

However the main point we want to emphasise about the Trinity is not so much trying to understand the mystery of one in three or three in one, but to underscore the unique aspect of the Trinitarian relationship. If we were to sum up the type of society we come to embrace and value in our western world we would have to say it is "individualism." Individualism is the political and social philosophy that emphasizes the moral worth of the individual. Although this may have started off as a worthy goal, in reality it has been hijacked by extremists to the point that individual rights are now placed before the overall good of the community.

This "new" individualism has only become more blatant with the rise of smart devices. We withdraw more and more into our own electronic world of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and computers. In the social and political arena we withdraw into groups whose causes we identify with and so the word "Identity politics" was coined. In this "post truth" era, truth no longer depends on the facts or empirical evidence but rather on emotions and how I feel about something at a particular time. We tune into TV stations, news networks and websites that support our particular point of view further reinforcing our personal views.

Relationships too have suffered. No longer are relationships based on commitment, but rather on what is convenient and self-gratifying. As a result of these changes, our societies are becoming more disconnected, alienated and fragmented with the resulting dehumanising consequences. Yet despite our increasing means of communicating with one another, “social isolation” or loneliness is one of our major social problems. This great big relational hole we were created with has only grown larger under the world’s present trinity of individualism, secularism and relativism.

In contrast, the Trinitarian reality of three in one and the unity they exhibit points to a totally different philosophy. This can be summed up in the phrase, “Unity (One) in Relationship (Three) through Love”. We get an insight into the inner life of the Trinity in Jesus’ prayer the night before His crucifixion. Notice how these three Trinitarian aspects of “unity” “relationship” and “love” is repeated.

John 17:20-23 My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

The Trinitarian relationship is a fellowship of three co-equal beings perfectly embraced in love and harmony and expressing an intimacy that no one can humanly comprehend. God is love. He is not just a God who loves, but rather a God who is complete love itself. Complete love itself includes a lover (the Father), a beloved (Jesus Christ), and the act of loving that flows between the lover and the beloved (the Holy Spirit). One God in three divine persons who make up complete love.

We have trouble expressing this in human terms but here are a couple of feeble attempts. One word that has been coined to capture this intimate relationship is the Greek word, *perichoresis*. *Perichoresis* means “mutual indwelling” or as some have described it, the “great dance”- *peri*, which means “around” and *chorea*, which means, “dance.” *Perichoresis* has been called the “divine dance”- that profound union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit that has gone on since eternity past, goes on now, and will go on forever. I particularly like this word because once again this gives us a totally different concept of God’s nature than the ones that usually accentuate God’s power and authority. Sure He is a God of great power and authority, but He is also a God who likes to have a good time and party.

Another analogy that may help us to understand this uniquely intimate Trinitarian relationship in a limited way is through the use of music. Imagine for a moment you are sitting in an auditorium with 1200 others listening to a choir and orchestra performing an inspiring piece of music such as the Hallelujah Chorus. As the music soars, the music draws the audience into a similar state of mind. We are all on the same wavelength, all moved and inspired by the music. People forget about their aches and pains, no one looks at their watch. For a moment we might say we experienced “eternal time.” We were so involved in the music it seemed as though time ceased. You might say, for a few seconds we experienced “heaven.”

Now if we substitute “love” which God is, for the part the music played in this scenario, we may get a brief insight into how the three individual personalities of the Godhead are on the same wavelength at all times and in all circumstances. Love is the music that flows between the individual members of the Godhead that allows this intimate relationship to exist. Perfect love is the lifeblood of God, and the reason the decisions that are made are always in perfect unity is because all three persons are governed by these principles of love that flow between them.

The amazing truth is, as we read in John 17:21-23, it is into this society based on these three principles of unity, relationship and love, that the Trinity has created and invited humanity to join.

In order to be truly human, we were designed and created by this same God to function in a Trinitarian manner. However, as we look around the world today, we see something has gone terribly amiss. We have somehow fallen a long way from this ideal and instead have become de-humanised as a result. How did this happen?

Chapter 3 - God's Mission Statement and the Problem of Evil

Last chapter we discussed a God who lives in a unique Trinitarian relationship characterized in the simple sentence, "One God in three persons." This one God in three persons can be summed up by the phrase, "Unity (One) in Relationship (Three) through Love." This unique relationship is united by and governed by the love that constantly flows between the three persons. This is why they are always in complete agreement. But, because this loving relationship within the Trinity is so wonderful, so awe inspiring, and this is where the story gets personal, they just had to share this unique love inherent in themselves with other beings.

The Source of Love

Have you ever given any thought to where the emotion of love we humans enjoy originated from? Well, here is the answer. This godly love is an overflowing love - there is no limit to its capacity, and the Trinity is the fountainhead of love. Jesus metaphorically describes this love that flows from God the Holy Spirit as "living water" in John 7. (John 4:13-14).

John 7:37 On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Later in Galatians 5 the first of the fruits ascribed to the Holy Spirit by the apostle Paul is "love" (Galatians 5:22). At the end of time, Jesus shepherds the redeemed masses to the healing "living waters" which flow from the throne of God.

Revelation 7:17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

We can only imagine what it will be like for this great mass of hurting humanity to be engulfed by a flood of God's love at that time. We may experience brief moments in this life where we feel totally secure in the love of another person, the warmth, the comfort, the assurance, the security where we don't want for anything. But this will be the ongoing reality when humanity joins God in eternity.

God's Mission Statement

So sometime back before the creation of chronological time, God came up with this incredible statement, ***"Let us make man in our image" (Gen 1:26)***. This effectively became God's mission statement. Martin Luther King had a dream that black and white children would walk together hand in hand as sisters and brothers. God's dream is much more ambitious. His dream from within the depths of the Trinity has been to share His eternal existence with a bride who would respond to His overtures of love by saying, "yes" to Him and willingly participate in the great dance of triune love. So when God said, "Let us make man in our image," this is His goal – people who will respond voluntarily to his offer to "love as He loves."

This is the type of person who will eventually occupy heaven, and it is precisely this quality of love that makes heaven, heaven. It's not the streets paved with gold or the buildings of precious stones. Heaven's real jewels are the human beings in God's image who have accepted God's invitation to join Him in heaven *"living love willingly"*. And like the Psalmist we should be gobsmacked by this honor of participating in the life and love of the Godhead itself.

Psalms 8:3 When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers— the moon and the stars you set in place— 4 what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? 5 Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.

The Process of Creating Man in God's Image

So once this momentous decision was made, then the question became, how do we go about creating man in our image? How do we go about creating sons of God who display the same qualities of love that we exhibit? This is a very important question because it gives us the context to explain all that subsequently follows. This does not mean we will always get a definitive answer, but at least it gives us something tangible to help us see the bigger picture especially when we confront the difficult questions of life, evil, pain, suffering and death. We might not like, agree with, or understand the process, but it helps us to understand all that is happening on this earth is for the sole purpose of creating man in God's image. However, one day when we arrive in heaven as the finished product, we will understand and be grateful to God for the process.

Before we get to man though, we need to back up and look at two other aspect of God's creation, as both of these will play a critical role in the process. As mentioned, the goal of the whole process is the creation of a bride who would respond to His love by saying "yes" to Him and willingly participates in the great dance of triune love. So if love is the goal, then what are the circumstances that need to be in place to secure this outcome? The first and most critical aspect of love is, *it must be freely chosen*. Love by its very nature cannot be forced or coerced, it must be chosen. But in order for it to be chosen, there must, by necessity be the possibility of an alternative. This means creating agents with the freewill capacity to either accept or reject God's overtures of love. We will shortly see examples where freewill agents, angels and humans, exercise this prerogative to say "no" to God.

However, there is a risk involved. The choice to say "no" to God opens up the possibility of evil. You can put actors on the stage and give them a script, but there is no guarantee they will stick to the script. But notice this is only possible in the sense God chose to create a world in which love was the goal. It is the free agent's choice to go off the script and say "no" to God that introduces evil. Evil therefore arises solely from creaturely freewill and cannot be attributed to a holy God. The possibility of evil then is the risk God was willing to take in order to obtain the higher goal of creating beings in His image that willingly say "yes" to Him and willingly participate in the great dance of triune love. God will persevere with His goal of sharing His triune love with His creation even if it means tolerating this creaturely induced evil for a time and be willing to subject Himself to it's horror so as to obtain His desired goal.

A Moral Cosmos

Love also implies a moral cosmos. In contrast to the indifferent universe proposed by atheists, we have a caring Creator who has engineered a cosmos where free agents have been given self-determining freedom and the power to make morally responsible choices. This is one of the marvels of creation we usually don't think too much about. We tend to focus on the beauty of creation without thinking too much about how God has orchestrated everything within that beauty to revolve around choice. This development is testimony to God's profound wisdom and His creative ability to engineer an environment whereby He balances two competing interests. On the one hand, God has to preserve the freewill of the agent so as not to control or predetermine his decisions, but on the other hand introduce a system whereby choices have consequences. A moral law achieves this goal.

The agent is left free to make the choice but his choice may result in either good or bad consequences. Agents who have been given this power have to operate in an environment that includes viable options from which to choose and a time of temporary duration to exercise their influence for better or for worse. It is easy to see the operation of this moral system at work in our modern societies. We don't need to extrapolate too much but here are some examples where our choices can result in good or bad consequences. All of the following were given to humanity by God as a benefit, but we know each of them can be misused and can result in negative consequences: relationships, finances, health, sexuality, alcohol, drugs, food, possessions,

industriousness, education, technology, political authority, entertainment, etc. To see the design and consideration needed to engineer a creation that satisfies these moral criteria across such a broad spectrum of human behavior is one of the clearest proofs to me there is design behind our existence and that a Creator exists.

This carefully designed system allows for two things to happen. It allows God to remain at arms length so as not to interfere with the agent's freedom to choose, but on the other hand there is a regulation or control on the agent's behavior in that pain and suffering act as a deterrent, while reward and gratification act as an incentive. The prime scriptural example of this process in action is the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The father of the prodigal remained at arm's length in honoring his son's independent freedom to choose, while at the same time recognizing the path his son had chosen, although painful, would eventually aid in the process of bringing about reconciliation. But it also meant the father had to endure a period of his son's misuse of his freedom. Experiencing life without God will play a crucial role in the process of creating us in God's image.

The possibility of evil

There are a number of important points we should take from this section. First, God's goal in the whole process of making man in His image is the creation of a bride who will respond willingly to His love by saying "yes" to Him. Second, if love is to be genuine, *it must be freely chosen*. Love by its very nature cannot be forced or coerced, it must be chosen. Choice by its nature implies an alternative, and this involves a risk, the possibility of the created agent saying "no" to God. This in turn opens up the possibility of evil. However this evil arises solely from creaturely freewill and cannot be attributed to a holy God. All evil proceeds from wills other than God's.

This introduces the age-old question that has plagued theologians and philosophers for millennia, "If God is all-powerful, all-knowing and yet Omni-benevolent, why doesn't He do something about the problem of evil?" Well, as we have discussed, there must be something that is more important to His purpose besides the elimination of evil? As we saw, God's wish is to share His triune love with humanity, but love requires a response that is freely chosen. God is unwavering in His commitment that love will prevail despite the heavy cost of evil. If the free agent willingly chooses to say "no" to God, the path to God's goal becomes more torturous for both the free agents and for God, but that doesn't mean God abandons His plan. The story of Christianity is the story of God's response to humanity's "no".

There is a second aspect to this question of evil that now needs to be addressed as this too plays a critical role in understanding the process.

Chapter 4 – The Heavenly Rebellion

There is a second aspect to this question of moral evil that now needs to be addressed as this too plays a critical role in understanding the process. In preparation for the creation of the man who would be in God's image, God created other supernatural spiritual beings - angels. We know from the book of Job that the angels were around prior to the creation event, as they sang for joy when it happened.

Job 38:4–7 *“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. 5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? 6 On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone— 7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?”*

These “morning stars” were supernatural agents or as their name implies “messengers.” God created them with specific functions. They are there to worship God – **Psalms 148:2** *Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts!* They are there to render service to humans. **Hebrews 1:14** *Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?* They guard believers **Psalms 34:7** *The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them.* Watch over children **Matthews 18:10** *Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.* Scripture reveals they were created for at least two important tasks, to praise God and to minister to humans.

The Heavenly Rebellion

But it appears from what subsequently happened that they too were given free will, because scripture reveals some of these angels exercised their free will and rebelled and sinned against God.

2 Peter 2:4 *For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;*

If God is perfectly good and He created these angels, how is it then that they have the capacity for evil? In the same way human sinfulness is the result of a free decision to rebel against their Creator, so it must be with these rebellious angels.

Jude 6 *And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;*

Jude, like Peter, assumed angels are capable of sin, just as humans are and will be held morally responsible for their sin. We do not know exactly what precipitated this uprising but again scripture gives us some clues as to who instigated this rebellion and why.

Revelation 12:7-9 *And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, 8 but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.*

In this frightening heavenly battle we are introduced to the angelic leaders of the two conflicting armies: Michael who fought on God's behalf and a fierce “dragon” that led the rebel forces who is then identified as Satan the Devil.

V.9 *So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

Satan the Adversary

So let's take some time to explain just who this Satan is and what his sin was. The name Satan comes from the Aramaic word “Adversary.” God represents all that is holy and good while in contrast the Devil represents all that is evil and wicked, but he did not start off this way, as we will see. Scripture also gives him a number of aliases: Devil, Dragon, Destroyer, Accuser, Tempter, Roaring Lion, Serpent, Liar. We get a clue as to the motive for the Devil's rebellion in 1 Timothy 3:6.

1 Timothy 3:6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.

Paul, in giving advice to Timothy about appointing spiritual leaders in the church, warns against choosing someone who is new to the faith as he may fall into the same pothole of pride and conceit as the devil. A similar analogy is made in a prophecy against the conquering king Sennacherib after conquering Babylon in the book of Isaiah. In the midst of the passage is a section that would seem more appropriate of Satan than to an earthly king.

Isaiah 14:12-15 How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! 13 You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds I will make myself like the Most High." 15 But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit.

While it may in fact be referring to an earthly king, the story illustrates there is a cosmic dimension which draws on a previous example of an illegitimate rebel who tried to overthrow the ruler of the heavenly realm. As we saw in 1 Timothy 3:6, the sin, both of Sennacherib and his spiritual counterpart are guilty of is the sin of pride. Also, when it comes to the situation in the Garden of Eden, we will see the same motive revealed here in this "morning star" ("**I will make myself like the Most High**") as the serpent that peddled the lie to Adam and Eve, that they too, could be their own gods (Genesis 3:5).

Another example comes from the book of Ezekiel. Again this passage appears to carry a double message. It is written to a literal King of Tyre, about whom things are said which seem to go beyond what is applicable to a human king. The first ten verses of Ezekiel 28 are directed at a human king, but again the scene switches abruptly from an earthly king to a cosmic rebel.

Ezekiel 28:12-19 "Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty 13 You were in Eden, the garden of God;

This identifies someone who was extremely wise, beautiful and was in the Garden of Eden. The only other player in the Garden of Eden story besides God and Adam and Eve was the serpent, Satan (Revelation 12:9). It also tells us that if he was in the Garden, he was created prior to this event.

V13...on the day you were created they were prepared. 14 You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones.

We know from other passages in scripture that this is a description of the throne room of God (Revelation 21:10). So this individual was not only in Eden but also at the very throne room of God and he was appointed as a guardian archangel.

V.15 You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

Something happened along the way to turn this beautiful created being from a source of good to a source of evil.

So what exactly happened? It would appear he exercised his freedom to say "no" to God and rebelled against his Creator.

V.16 Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones.

Greed, pride and his lust for power corrupted this archangel's thinking. This great angelic being who was created to worship God instead began to worship himself. And instead of rendering service to mankind he later became their sworn enemy (Revelation 12:9). We can *speculate* that

his downfall may have come about as a result of the revelation that God was about to create beings whose status would eventually be higher than that of the angels, including this archangel. **Hebrews 2:5-8** *It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. 6 But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? 7 You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor 8 and put everything under their feet." In putting everything under them God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them.*

It's easy to comprehend why the early church came to see these sections in both Isaiah and Ezekiel as referring to both the downfall of earthly kings and the fall of Satan.

There is also a parallel between Ezekiel 28:17 and Revelation 12 as to the fate of these two rebels where nearly identical language is used.

Ezekiel 28:17 *Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.*

Revelation 12:4 tells us Satan enticed a third of the angels to join his rebellion and these fallen angels now called demons, were banished to this earth.

Revelation 12:3-4 *And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.*

Both were thrown to the earth. Again the scene abruptly changes back to the literal King of Tyre.

Ezekiel 28:18-19 *By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. 19 All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more."*

Even though this incineration may refer to a human king it also bears a close description of what is eventually going to happen to Satan the devil.

Revelation 20:10 (NKJV) *The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

So what have we learned about this adversary, this dragon, this devil?

- ◆ He was created sometime before the creation of man.
- ◆ He was most likely a cherub, the highest rank of angel.
- ◆ He was extremely beautiful and gifted.
- ◆ He had an honored position standing at the very throne of God.

However, he allowed pride, ambition and greed to pervert his thinking, and with the aid of one third of the angels he mounted a rebellion against God Himself (Revelation 12:3-4). He, of course, failed. A created being is deceiving himself if he thinks he can defeat His Creator. As a result of his rebellion, he was banished to this earth and eventually he will be punished for his rebellion and thrown into the lake of fire.

We should not underestimate the seriousness of this rebellion on the part of this archangel and the affront this was to God. He was in the privileged position of experiencing the ecstasy of heaven, yet even in this privileged position, decided to say "no" to God. We talked earlier about being washed over by a flood of God's love, of never having a doubt of being loved, of the security and assurance of never wanting for anything, of literally experiencing the beauty of the heavenly realm. For this extremely talented being to then turn his back after experiencing the honored privilege of serving at God's court in the heavenly realm is an unpardonable insult. And perhaps this is why there is no redemption available to these supernatural beings that have already

experienced the life and love of almighty God and willingly rejected it. This story of rejection on the part of created beings will be a recurring theme throughout the story, as we shall see. Later God levelled the same criticism at the children of Israel when they rejected Him as their Father and Creator.

Deuteronomy 32:5-6 They are corrupt and not his children; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation. 6 Is this the way you repay the Lord, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?

As we will go on to see these two titles of God, both Father and Creator, will play a crucial role in the events that unfold in our story. And what was their sin?

Deuteronomy 32:20 "I will hide my face from them," he said, "and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful." (See also Malachi 1:6).

Their sin was a failure to trust their Creator and Father who had created them for the purpose of sharing in His love. Faithfulness or allegiance to God is also going to play a crucial role in our story.

The stage is now set for the introduction of man into this scenario. But it's interesting that prowling around on this same earth is this adversary, this roaring lion as the apostle Peter calls him, and although he is a defeated devil with limited power, he is permitted by God to play a key role in the drama which is about to unfold.

Chapter 5 – The Creation

Although the focus of this series of sermons is on creating beings in God's image, so far we have not really said much about events occurring here on earth. Now we return to the creation event. As mentioned earlier, about 13.8 billion years ago, God brought the universe into existence. Astronomers and astrophysicists theorize there was a huge explosion, the Big Bang, and all matter that was compressed into the size of an atom by enormous gravitational forces was blown out into what we today call the universe. Scientists also tell us the temperature of the universe just a few seconds after the Big Bang was trillions of degrees hotter than our sun. However, if that exact extreme temperature had been just a tiny bit hotter or colder, carbon molecules would never have appeared yet all life is based on carbon. For those of us living in our four-dimensional world, we struggle to understand how all the matter in the universe came from a pinhead along with the accompanying forces that first created the Big Bang and then pulled matter back together into the various bodies that make up the universe today.

In a classic understatement, the Bible leaves out all the scientific details and simply says, ***"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,"*** and leaves all the questions unanswered. However, in the midst of the estimated two trillion galaxies in the universe, one particular planet came in for special attention. It probably took a little divine prodding, as this planet was positioned with extreme precision in relation to the other heavenly bodies so as to sustain the fragile life forms we see on the earth today.

Isaiah 45:18 For this is what the Lord says—he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited—he says: "I am the Lord, and there is no other."

One of the most fundamental requirements for a planet to sustain life is to orbit in the "habitable zone" of a star, the so-called "Goldilocks" region, where the temperature is just right and liquid water can exist. Earth's precise distance from the sun, the diameter of the planet, its axis tilted at 23.5 degrees, the 24-hour day, and a conducive atmosphere are crucial in producing this "Goldilocks" factor. A recent statistical analysis by astrophysicist Erik Zackrisson from Uppsala University in Sweden arrived at this staggering figure that despite there being around 700 quintillion planets in the universe, that is a 7 followed by 20 zeros, there is only one planet like earth. It was one thing for planet earth to miraculously appear in this "Goldilocks" region, but now we are faced with another mystery - the arrival of life on this planet. If the probability of earth being positioned just right is practically impossible to measure, then the probability of life appearing by chance from nonlife is even more remote.

Paul Davies, an astrobiologist at Arizona State University in a candid admittance has said, *"We don't know the mechanism whereby nonlife turns into life, so we have no way of estimating the odds ... It may be one in a trillion trillion (it's easy to imagine that), in which case, earth life may be unique in the observable universe."* This potentially explains why humans haven't yet managed to create life in the lab even though it appears in nature in as simple a form as a seed. If all this isn't difficult enough to comprehend, then we have the development of intelligent human life on this unique planet.

Over the millennia, the task of interpreting the Genesis creation account has been a challenge for both Jews and Christians alike and has even led to conflict in defence of certain positions. So it is with a certain amount of apprehension that we look at the circumstances surrounding the creation event. In our introduction, our focus has concentrated on a scientific view; big bangs, goldilocks regions, and mechanisms whereby nonlife turns into life.

It is natural for those of us living in our advanced scientific and technological world of the 21st century to view our world through a materialistic lens where we have to understand how things work and how they came into existence. However, if we rewind our lens a few thousand years we may find the peoples of the ancient world viewed things from a totally different perspective.

Materialistic or Functional Lens

It is from their perspective that we need to understand the Genesis account of creation. We need to imagine Moses (relaying the creation account) sitting down with the Israelites (his audience) somewhere near Mt. Sinai and explaining to them the enormous privilege it was for them to be chosen by God to be His special people. Recent archaeological finds and more accurate translations of ancient documents now give us a better understanding of the mindset of ancient near eastern peoples. Based on extensive research conducted by Dr. John H. Walton, these new findings have given us a unique insight into the mindset of these ancient people. Rather than viewing the world through a scientific, technological or “materialistic” lens, as we tend to do in the 21st century, Dr. Walton proposes these ancient people viewed the world through a “functional” lens.

Let me explain the difference. Take for example the seats we use to sit on. We can view the seat as an object made of a certain kind of material such as wood or metal, whose pieces have been crafted and assembled together, which are then covered with foam rubber and fabric. This description would be viewing the seat through a purely “materialistic” lens. However, if we shifted our focus to the use of the now assembled chair, we would be shifting our focus to the “function” of the chair – to be used as a comfortable reclining space for humans. Although understanding how the chair is constructed is interesting, its primary function is its use to humans after it has been assembled. It is through this “functional” lens that Dr. Walton has based his interpretation of the creation account in Genesis. Up to this point in time, interpretation of the Genesis creation account in the Christian community has primarily focused on reconciling the creation account in Genesis with current scientific knowledge. This has led to a number of competing creation theories. These include, young earth creationists, old earth creationists, gap or restoration creationists, evolutionary creationists and the intelligent design movement. Each of these theories tries to reconcile the Genesis account with the present astronomical, anthropological, geological, and biological sciences. They rely primarily on a materialistic interpretation rather than a functional interpretation. In other words, they are looking at the creation account through 21st century eyes rather than through the eyes of the children of Israel living in the second millennium BC.

The setting for the Genesis account is also important. Moses is introducing the recently freed children of Israel to the God who had delivered them from Egyptian slavery. As such, the emphasis is on the God who provides for and delivers humanity from slavery, both from Egyptian slavery and the slavery of sin. The message God wants to portray through His spokesman Moses is of a God who has both created humanity and provided all that they need for their existence. To frame the account in the usual materialist paradigm would also be irrelevant to the scientifically ignorant children of Israel who would be more concerned with how they were going to survive in the inhospitable Sinai wilderness.

With that background we can now look at a brief overview of the text from a functional perspective. Genesis 1:1 serves as a literary introduction of the subject matter it is going to discuss - what we would today call a “subject heading.”

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The account of what God did therefore begins in verse two where we find a description of the *pre-fashioned for habitation* condition.

V.2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

What we find is, and this is significant, material is already present; we have a planet covered in water and obscured in darkness. The words “Tohu” and “Bohu” are used to describe the planet as a wilderness or wasteland that is uninhabitable and in a present state of chaos that lacks function or order. Notice too, this creation account given to the Israelites does not give any indication of when or how the planet or the cosmos came into existence. Rather it only describes events pertinent to them. The account then goes on to describe how God brings order out of this state of chaos and creates the functions that make it possible for humanity to inhabit the earth. This is confirmed by the verse we read earlier in Isaiah 45.

Isaiah 45:18 For this is what the Lord says—he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited—he says: “I am the Lord, and there is no other.”

God did it but the text does not offer a scientific explanation of how He did it. Instead, we are told what functions He brought into existence in order to make the earth habitable for His special project of creating “beings in His image.”

Day One – Time (Genesis 1:3-5).

Genesis 1:3-5 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

The normal emphasis of the materialistic theories focus on the source of light, but in reality, the emphasis should be on the function of “time.” After all it was God who called the light “day” and the darkness “night” showing the emphasis should be on a period of time rather than on the source of light.

Day Two – Weather System (Genesis 1:6-8).

V.6-8 And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” 7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

The focus of day two was to create the space in which humanity would live, and how the weather so necessary for survival was to be regulated. As water came from above as well as from the earth, ancient people considered the sky to be solid and this is why this verse is written according to their understanding and why it is called a “vault.” Ancient civilizations relied much more than we do on the reliability of the weather for their existence and this was an important aspect for the next day’s function - the production of food.

Day 3 – Production of Food (Genesis 1:9-13).

V.10-11 God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so.

The land and seas were separated and the cycle of living plants to produce food was set up - a critical function for sustaining life. Non-fruit bearing trees and flowers would also be a constant source of enjoyment and a reminder of the gracious God who provided both sustenance and pleasure for His people.

In these first three days we see God setting in motion the three great functions necessary for sustaining life; time, weather and food. Again, the focus is not on how He brought these functions into being, but rather an orderly process of restoring order to a chaotic wasteland. We also need to make a comment on God’s statement recorded at the end of each day, ***“And God saw it was good.”*** Some have interpreted this as a moral statement as it is used later in relation to the creation of man, but really it should be regarded as a comment on the success of the functioning process He had just set in motion e.g. time, weather, food. Now that God has provided the

functions for life to exist, days four through six are populated with the various life forms we find in the now habitable environment. The days four through six are parallel to days one through three.

Day 4 – Lights to regulate the seasons (Genesis 1:14-19).

Gen 1:14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years.”

Notice the emphasis is not on the lights themselves, but rather on their functions - to regulate time and seasons, an important function in an agricultural based society.

Day 5 – God fills the habitat of sky and sea with bird and sea life according to their respective realms (Genesis 1:20-23).

Genesis 1:20 And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.”

The emphasis again is on their function to “teem” and “fly”, to be “fruitful” and “multiply.” Like the vegetation before them, they are created to provide sustenance and pleasure for the impending arrival of man (Genesis 1:29-30).

Day 6 – God now fills the landmass He has provided with animal life and humankind (Genesis 1:24-31).

Genesis 1:24 And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so.

Like the sea and bird life before them the animals were to reproduce after their kind; that amazing feature built into creation, the miracle of reproduction and birth. When it comes to the creation of humanity, their function is spelled out in verse 26.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

The function of the newly created humanity is to populate the world in the same way as the instruction given to the animal kingdom. But they have an additional function in that they have a responsibility to the rest of God’s creatures, to subdue and rule over them (Genesis 1:28). God grants humanity another important function in that they are created in His image so they can relate to Him and one another. The arrival of humanity is the climax of the creation account as God assigns these functions to them to rule over the rest of His creation.

Day 7 – God rests from His all His work and makes that day holy.

Gen 2:2-3 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

God sat back, surveyed His creative work and saw that it was functioning well just as He had divinely planned (Genesis 1:31). But more needs to be said about the words, “work”, “rest”, and “holy”, used in these two verses. We will come back to look at these important words as the story progresses as they are crucial to understanding the story of salvation.

Let’s summarise the creation account: Days one through three pertain to the three main functions necessary for life; time, weather and food. Days four to six pertain to the functionaries that will inhabit the various areas made for them and their role in those domains; plants, bird and sea life, land animals and humans. Day seven changes focus from the creation to the Creator who surveys His handiwork, declares it “very good” and “rests.”

Viewing the creation account from the perspective of functions rather than from a materialistic or scientific perspective removes the need for Christians to defend their belief that God is the ultimate Creator. When various scientific theories are presented they need to be evaluated on their own merits, not on how it reconciles with a materialistic version of the Genesis account. The creation event in Genesis is not a scientific treatise. It’s a message delivered to a scientifically

ignorant group of slaves about the God who has both created humanity and provided all they need for their existence. There is no question God is the Creator. He designed and created all that exists and is testimony to His creative handiwork. Precisely how He did it, though, is not revealed in the Genesis account or in the rest of scripture. He may have brought some things into existence instantaneously, while with others He may have brought into existence through a long and complicated process. Regardless of how human life developed on the earth, the reality is, we are here and that is testimony to the creative ability of our God.

A good principle to remember in the ongoing debate is to remember the author of Genesis was not so much concerned with *how* we got here but more with the question of *why* we are here. Unfortunately a preoccupation with the materialistic view, the *how*, has diverted attention away from the *who*. The functional view rightly focuses the attention on the *who*. Having said that, there is also a caution here for those proposing a scientific theory of man's arrival on the planet. They need to recognize science is in a constant state of flux as new discoveries replace old theories. Today's theory may not pass muster in 100 years time just as the theory of a geocentric universe, or later, a static universe have been debunked by new discoveries.

However, what is revealed over and over again as the salvation account unfolds is the purpose for which humanity was created. If God wanted us to know all the scientific in's and outs, that would have been His focus. In fact, if He wanted to do this, He had the perfect opportunity to do so in His confrontation with Job (Job 38). Instead, when God finally speaks, He skips the "how" and impresses on Job the "Who" behind the marvels of the physical creation and the need to trust Him as He carries out His higher purpose of moulding and shaping humanity into His very image. (We will look at the case of Job later). The Christian community would do well to heed this same message today. Instead of being diverted by arguments over how God created the physical universe, we need to learn to trust our heavenly Father and Creator and concentrate on the more important function of allowing Him to create His spiritual purpose in us. God's purpose for humanity and how He goes about achieving it should always be the major focus when studying the biblical account. In fact, His most creative achievement is still a work in progress - the creation of beings in His image. In this debate, God's ultimate purpose for this whole process of creation is too often overlooked, but it is recorded right here for us in Genesis 1:26, "**let us make man in our image.**" God's title of Creator is not a one-off title. He remains and continues to create and sustain the whole universe (Acts 17:25), and as we will see, remains committed to achieving His supreme creative achievement.

Chapter 6 – The Pre-Adamic World

Last time we talked about the creation event where God created order out of the chaotic wasteland that existed on the face of the planet making it habitable for the various life forms with which He populated the earth. We looked at this process through a functional lens rather than a materialistic one. The emphasis was on the functions God puts in place for the inhabitants of the planet rather than a scientific explanation of how He brought them into existence. We now return to the creation account in Genesis 1:2 to examine the question as to how the earth came to be in this chaotic condition prior to this creation account.

As we read in Genesis 1:2, the account of what God did begins in verse two where we find a description of the pre-creation condition of the earth.

Genesis 1:2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

What we find, and this is significant, material is already present; we have an existing planet covered in water and obscured in darkness. The words “Tohu” and “Bohu” are used to describe the planet as a wilderness or wasteland that is uninhabitable and in a present state of chaos that lacks function or order. This creation account given to the Israelites does not give any indication as to how the planet or the cosmos came into existence. We know God brought the cosmos into existence, but again the bible is silent on the process He used or what transpired prior to the Genesis creation account. However, after the care and precision taken by God in positioning the earth in the habitable Goldilocks zone we talked about earlier, this verse’s description of the chaotic state of the earth doesn’t seem to resonate very well with what we discussed. How do we reconcile this chaotic state of affairs with the belief that the Creator God has the ability to call the universe into existence just by His word, yet now we find the earth which was **“formed to be inhabited”** in this chaotic condition? (Isaiah 45:18)

We need to look at this question in more detail as it may shed more light on the question as to the source of evil in our present world. And it is now to that question that we return to the confusing scene of Genesis 1:2, and ask the question, “How did the earth come to be in such a state of chaos and disorder?” Of course this is one of those areas where we need to tread carefully as we can’t read too much into this primordial and obscure past. We simply don’t know. However the pre-creation condition of the earth has given rise to a couple of theories which attempt to explain how God’s good creation ended up in the chaos of Genesis 1:2.

Speculation centers on one of two events. The first theory as to why the earth is in this chaotic state is as the result of the devastating impact the spiritual war between God and the rebellious angels had on planet earth when Satan was cast down to earth from heaven (Revelation 12:7-9). Genesis 1:2 describe the chaos that resembled the morning after the battle. Or to take it one step further, if it wasn’t the result of the spiritual battle, it came about as a result of Satan and his demons being imprisoned on this earth in much the same way our earthly prisons become hotbeds for violence and mayhem.

Speculation regarding a second cause involves a cataclysmic natural event such as the one that occurred about 65 million years ago that caused dinosaurs to become extinct. While there are several theories as to the cause of their demise, the fossil record has led scientists to believe a huge comet or asteroid six to 12 miles wide slammed into the region that is now part of the eastern coast of Mexico which at the time was covered with water. The impact of this object would have caused something equivalent to what we today call a nuclear winter following a thermonuclear exchange. Darkness would have covered the entire earth for many months, due to the huge amounts of vapor and dust that were thrown into the atmosphere and the earth would

have sunk into a deep freeze while the dust hung in the air. A global wildfire would have destroyed half of all living things and water would have been poisoned in most places. In any event, the account of Genesis 1 describes God's renewal of the earth's functions bringing order out of chaos.

Although these are only theories, there are a number of benefits that make them worth considering. In subsequent developments, God gave the newly created Adam and Eve a couple of curious commands. First, "to subdue the earth" (Genesis 1:28) and second, to "keep" or "guard" the garden (Genesis 2:15). Later on we have the appearance of the menacing serpent that tempts Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. These commands would seem puzzling unless there were forces at work in opposition to what was going on in the newly created garden. These become more apparent as the story progresses. Another benefit of these scenarios is it avoids running into conflict with modern scientific theories concerning the age of the earth estimated to be 4.55 billion years old. The time span between God's original creation of the universe and the renewal after the subsequent destruction allows for a wide range of possibilities which removes the pressure to reconcile the Bible narrative and modern scientific theory. The break between these two or other cataclysmic events allows for the millions of years of fossil evidence revealed from geological and paleontological discoveries. These discoveries point to a landscape dominated by flesh eating dinosaurs, volcanoes, earthquakes and other natural disasters. One has to ask the question, did the presence of the now deposed Satan and his demons have something to do with fashioning this terrifying "red with tooth and claw" landscape.

This scenario introduces another reoccurring theme in scripture. There are times when God allows evil to run its full devastating course before finally stepping in and destroying the source of the wickedness. We have the example of Noah's flood where the wickedness of man had become so depraved and pervasive, God had to take the drastic step of obliterating its source and starting over again with righteous Noah's family (Genesis 6-8). It's interesting that in both cases, floodwaters were used to bring an end to the wickedness engulfing the earth (Genesis 1:2). We also have the example of Sodom and Gomorrah where evil was allowed to run its full devastating course before God finally stepped in and wiped out it's source (Genesis 18:20-19:29). Bible prophecy predicts a time at the end of history when the "dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan" who has been locked up in the "bottomless pit" for a 1000 years will "be released from his prison" and will once again be allowed to wreak wickedness on the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 20:1-2,7-8). However, this is the devil's and evil's final desperate act. But in this case, before evil is allowed to run its full course that would result in the annihilation of humanity, God steps in and destroys him and his followers in the lake of fire.

Matthew 24:21-22 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. 22 "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

Never again will this vile creature plague the cosmos with his loathsome evil. And as was the case back in Genesis 1, the Lord will create a "new heaven and a new earth," one without any evil or wickedness of any kind (Revelation 21:1). Throughout scripture there is this pattern of creation to chaos to renewal. God steps in to restore order out of the chaos created by evildoers.

But as to the question about the cataclysmic event which brought an end to the Pre-Adamic landscape of the dinosaurs, could it be possible God used this event to bring an end to this demonic inspired terrifying "red with tooth and claw" landscape in the same way He brought an end to the evil in these other accounts? This chaotic carnivorous world by all accounts seems incompatible with the nature of peace, love and perfection of the Creator God and instead points to a cosmic rebel who now misuses his power to corrupt God's good creation. Regardless as to how this chaotic landscape came about, it would have been necessary for God to bring an end to this chaos before creating man. We will come back to this thought later when we discuss the

subject of “natural” evil. However, what we are left with is a scenario where there is a powerful cosmic rebel who is still confined to God’s good earth into which God is about to create mankind.

Chapter 7 – The Creation of Man

Last time we finished with God restoring the earth in preparation for the creation of man. However, we need to remind ourselves that in spite of an environment that was infested with evil influences, God is in complete control of the process whereby his special creation, man, would eventually blossom into the image of God. This is where we now pick up the story.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” 27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

In our earlier session on creation we talked about two amazing realities that makes life on earth possible. First was the precise positioning of the earth in the so-called habitable “Goldilocks” zone, and secondarily the unexplained miraculous appearance of life itself on the planet. Now we encounter another extraordinary event that defies our understanding, and that is, “human consciousness.” Understanding how our brain causes human consciousness is the holy grail of both philosophy and neuroscience and has challenged philosophers from pre-Socratic times. The challenge has been to understand the relationship between the physical and the mental. In his opening statement from his first lecture on Mind, Body and Questions of Consciousness, Professor Patrick Grim outlines the hard problem of consciousness for philosophers and neuroscientists.

“How do our physical brains produce our subjective experience? If we opened up your skull we would find about three pounds of grey matter. Look closer and we would find distinct layers within the folded grey mass. Look even closer and we would find an unfathomably complex tangle of specialized cells, but that’s all we’d find, three pounds of matter.

Okay, I’ve told you what we would find if we opened your skull. Now you tell me what you find when you open your eyes? You open your eyes in the morning and you see the glow of the sun streaming in the window. You feel the warmth on your cheeks. You hear the chatter of birds outside. Perhaps your spouse is already up and you smell the coffee. On the one hand three pounds of grey substance, something we can hold in our hand and publically probe from the outside, weigh, map and measure, on the other hand something we can’t publically probe from the outside the phenomenon of your subjective experience - the way the sun looks, how it feels on your cheeks, the sound of the birds and the smell of the coffee. The major question for both philosophers and scientists is how those two things go together. How can three pounds of matter produce not merely the objective phenomenon of electro-chemical impulses across synapses but also the subjective phenomena of sights, and feels and sounds, and smells? It sounds like we perform a little bit of Aladdin’s magic every waking moment. We produce a subjective genie from an objective lamp. The question is, how that magic happens.”

Despite major advances in understanding how the brain functions and new innovative ways of measuring brain activity, the question of how three pounds of grey matter can produce the complex phenomena mentioned above remains elusive. And we haven’t even begun to address the brain’s capacity to produce emotions, its ability to reason, to communicate, and its creative capacity. The problem facing neuroscientists is, they can explain the easy part, and that is, how much of the physical brain functions; the hard part is discovering how these functions are transformed into conscious or subjective experience.

William James, a 19th century philosopher and psychologist who is widely regarded as the founder of American psychology, summed up the difficulty facing the hard problem of consciousness this way with this brutal assessment; “The same atoms that chaotically dispersed make up the nebula

of the universe now jammed and temporarily caught in peculiar positions form our brain – how can that produce consciousness?” Although advances in neuroscience have come a long way since William James, the hard problem remains. Scientific analysis fails to explain the consciousness that transcends the physical processes of the brain. The failure to explain the hard problem of consciousness has left the scientific community with little option but to resort to using terms like, “There’s hope for a miracle”; “It may take a radical change in our physics by adding ‘consciousness’ to concepts like mass and space-time”; “This is a problem we cannot solve, ever and in principle, simply because our brains lack the intellectual capacity in the same way a raccoon doesn’t understand scientific principles.” Once again we find science banging up against a mystifying component or force in the universe that cannot be explained or measured by empirical means. Their efforts have instead concentrated on purely physical means to explain subjective phenomena. To do otherwise is to venture into the realm of “superstition.”

This has not always been the case. French philosopher René Descartes introduced the concept of “dualism” which divides the universe into two distinct realms - the thinking mind, and the physical body. In his “Discourse on the Method,” Descartes argues, “I think, therefore I am” and concludes, “the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from body.” Descartes is quite explicit about identifying the mind with the thinking soul. He may be closer to the truth than he realized when this statement is looked at in the context of the two realms we spoke about earlier - a spiritual realm in which God inhabits and a physical realm humans inhabit. There is no doubting the fact there’s something “magic” going on within the human brain and the solution has to do with this statement from God, “Let us make man in our image.”

Earlier we spoke about the special relationship of unity and love enjoyed between the three persons of the Trinity. Although they exist in a totally different dimension to us, the one thing that transcends both the eternal and physical dimensions is the ability to relate not only to other humans, but also to God. Following in the dualism concept of Descartes, I would suggest “consciousness” is the unique capacity with which God has gifted humanity in order for us to relate to one another and to God Himself. After all, the capacity to communicate is the most essential component we need for relationships and it is this factor that makes humanity unique in the natural world. As mentioned earlier, of all of God’s creatures, it is only humans and angels who have been given this capacity to “know” and to “love.”

Genesis 2:7 Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

This breath from God was more than a simple breath that gave him the capacity to breathe like other animals. There is no mention of this occurring with the other living creatures and as the verse goes on to explain, the man became a “living being” which implies all the unique characteristics associated with human life including consciousness. We see God’s breath and human consciousness linked together in the book of Job.

Job 32:8 But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding.

Just as God defines Himself as a person by using the term “I”, (“I AM WHO I AM.” Exodus 3:14), we too have been given the capacity to define ourselves as a person by also using the term “I.” No other animal has been given this unique capacity. Later on in the New Testament we see it is with this God-given human spirit that the Holy Spirit of God relates to us across the two dimensions.

Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

God in creating us, built into us both the ability and need for relationships - both on a physical, emotional and social level with other humans, and also on a spiritual level with our heavenly Father. Even after sin entered the world, these drives are still very much a part of our make up. Much of what drives us and leads to both happiness and heartache is the pursuit of a relationship with another human being. This gift of the human spirit to humanity may also explain the quantum leap in human development recorded in the fossil record. However, agreement in the

scientific community breaks down completely on the question of when, where and how these anatomically modern humans began to manifest creative and symbolic thinking.

The Holy Spirit's connection with New Beginnings

Another reoccurring theme we see introduced here is the connection of the Holy Spirit with new beginnings. As mentioned earlier, we saw the Spirit of God hovering on the face of the water at the beginning or renewal of the physical creation (Genesis 1:2). Now here at the creation of Adam and Eve, God breathed life into mankind (Genesis 2:7). And later we will see this same action repeated at the beginning of God's spiritual creation, the New Testament church.

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

So we see the work of God the Holy Spirit active at these important milestones in God's plan of salvation - the first at the physical creation, and second at the new spiritual creation.

In His Image

With the creation of Adam and Eve there is another important aspect we need to emphasize which is crucial to the process. Although God has given humanity this amazing gift of consciousness that gives us the unique ability to relate to one another and to Him, we should not assume Adam and Eve were the finished product, complete in God's image at this stage. Although God did classify His newly created humans as being "very good," they were a long way from reflecting God's perfect nature of love, joy, mercy, grace, holiness, righteousness, justice, peace, etc.

This "very good" was not a moral judgment but rather a comment on the marvellous functioning of the human body He had created. Of course, if they were the finished product, complete in God's image, they would never have sinned in the first place. This was simply the beginning of the process. If it takes years of study to become a doctor or engineer, we would have to assume it might take some time to become true children of God. So we should regard this statement, "Let us make man in our image," more like, "Let us turn this young man and woman into fully created sons and daughters of God!"

The Two Trees

The question then needs to be asked is, "How does God develop the same holy characteristics that distinguish Him as God into His human creation? There are two possibilities - the easy way or the hard way. One involves humility and trust, the other pain and suffering. Either way, God is committed to the process. The decision comes down to how one exercises their freewill and on two trees situated in the middle of the Garden of Eden. It is here that we pick up the story.

Genesis 2:8 Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9 The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

Into this ideal landscape beautifully created by God Himself, man is placed. The implication of God having to place Adam and Eve in the garden implies a world outside of the garden. But, two trees in this garden were different. They did not have botanical names, but rather moral names.

V.9 "...In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

We spoke earlier about a moral universe. We have a caring Creator who has engineered a cosmos where free agents have been given self-determining freedom and the power to make morally responsible choices. Consequences, either good or bad based on those decisions, have been carefully engineered into the process. It's more than coincidence the subject of good and evil is introduced right here at the beginning of humanity's creation. God's placement of these two trees in the garden creates the possibility of choice. But with that choice there comes both a prohibition and a warning from God.

Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

The Garden of Eden played a unique role in God's good creation. It was the place set aside by God where humanity could come and commune with Him face to face (Genesis 3:8). Just as God designated other holy sites as places of worship such as Bethel (Genesis 31:13), Shiloh (Joshua 18:1), and Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 5:2), the Garden of Eden played this role for Adam and Eve. God's presence along with the tree of life confirmed this location was holy ground (Genesis 2:9; Exodus 3:5; Revelation 22:1-2). By God placing Adam and Eve in this holy location with the instruction and responsibility **"to work it and take care of it"** they were the forerunners of those who would later become representatives of God's people in their interaction with God, i.e. "priests of God." But as we will see in the case of the two trees, this "representative" principle will play a very important role in the events that unfold.

Sabbath Rest

We mentioned earlier the importance of the three words, "holy", "work" and "rest" mentioned on day seven of the creation account (Genesis 2:1-3). Now we begin to understand the full implication of what God was referring to when He designated this seventh day "holy" and a day of "rest." For six days He had been "working" preparing a suitable habitation for His special creation, man. But God's goal was not just the creation of man, but to be in "holy communion" with His newly created beings. This is what He had effectively achieved as He sat and "rested" with them in this holy place on that seventh day. All was at peace between God and man as they dwelt together in intimate relationship with one another. Unfortunately this idyllic scene did not last long, and God would have to begin "working" again in order to achieve a permanent rest with His created beings. We will come back to this subject when we look at the subject of covenants.

What is unique about this event is what it reveals both here at the beginning of scripture and at the end of scripture; God is sitting down enjoying intimate relationship with His special creation - human beings.

Revelation 21:2-3 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

God's is committed to His plan of securing this end but it will only be achieved through much pain and suffering for both God and humanity.

There are two other important principles at work here we need to understand about this situation before we proceed any further. We will look at these two principles next time.

Chapter 8 – The Fall of Man

Before we look at the “fall of man”, we need to understand two important principles before we proceed any further.

First, God makes two comprehensive claims on His Creation. In an earlier session we saw God criticizing ancient Israel for being unfaithful to Him, their Father and Creator.

Deuteronomy 32:5-6 They are corrupt and not his children; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation. 6 Is this the way you repay the Lord, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you? (See also Deuteronomy 32:20; Malachi 1:6)

When we create or make something, whether it is one of my wife’s world famous desserts or this series of sermons, the creator is credited with ownership; they are Susan’s desserts or Gary’s sermons.

The creator of something has an exclusive and comprehensive claim on that product. God by creating Adam and Eve exercised an exclusive and comprehensive claim on them as their Maker or Creator.

The second claim God makes is, as He is the one who has brought them into existence, He has the additional claim of being their Father or parent.

Ephesians 3:14-15 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

As mentioned, we were created to be in relationship with our heavenly Father as His special children. We of all the earthly creation have been given the capacity to understand this special relationship of “fatherhood” in both a physical and spiritual sense. Paul by kneeling to the Father is acknowledging God’s claim on his life. On a side note, it is only this aspect of fatherhood, that is, as the one who brought us into existence that we should ascribe to God. We should not ascribe biological, male, patriarchal or sexist characteristics to God the Father. These are characteristics used to describe humans while God is divine. The only characteristics we should ascribe to God are those divine characteristics demonstrated by Jesus Christ who came to reveal the Father (Luke 10:22, John 14:7). So God as both Creator and Father exercises two exclusive and comprehensive claims on His newly created children in much the same way we as parents exercise these claims when we decide to have children. Society recognizes and expects parents to take responsibility for the children they bring into the world. Our place in the scheme of things is to recognize we are God’s creation, and His children.

Humanity’s response to these claims

The second important principle we need to understand is, “Will His created beings accept these claims?” Despite having these two legitimate claims on their lives, as God’s purpose was to create “man in His image” (humans who would think and act only as God would by their own volition), He created them with the ability to reason, to question and to choose. In addition to offering the possibility of them saying “yes” to God, it opened the possibility of them disagreeing with, or worse, saying “no” to their Creator and Father. Faithfulness or trust in Him is a big deal to God and we will see one’s allegiance being put to the test throughout the biblical narrative. This is an assumption, but we can speculate Satan’s allegiance was put to the test when God decided to create man that would have placed humans above angels (Hebrews 2:6-8). The patriarch Noah was asked to build an ark on a plain nowhere near the ocean and then wait 120 years for the flood to happen (Genesis 6:9-22). Job suffered terribly, but refused to curse God although he thought he was being unfairly singled out (Job 2:9). The father of the faithful, Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son to test his allegiance (Genesis 22:2). The children of Israel were tested 40 years in the desert (Deuteronomy 8:2). Jesus subjected Himself to 40 days and 40 nights of temptation by the

devil to demonstrate His allegiance to His Father (Matthew 4:1-2). And when we get to the end of this series we will see the theme of the book of Revelation is one of allegiance. So when we look at the context of what transpired with Adam and Eve, we have to view it from this perspective, a test of their allegiance.

Last chapter we saw God placing Adam and Eve into the special garden designated by God as holy ground where humanity could come and commune with their God. By placing Adam and Eve in this holy location with the instruction and responsibility **“to work it and take care of it”** they were the forerunners of those who would later become representatives of God’s people in their interaction with God, i.e. “priests of God”. Priests had the responsibility to act as representatives on behalf of the people (Leviticus 16). The responsibility then of how the newly created human beings would respond to their Creator and Father fell on Adam and Eve’s shoulders. Their response to this test of their allegiance would determine the fate of their descendants (1 Corinthians 15:22). So this scenario involving the two trees was much more than just a moral issue about fruit; it was a test of humanity’s allegiance. Would they put their trust and dependence in the One who was their Father and Creator by acknowledging Him in determining how they would think and act as His children by partaking of the tree of life? Or would they ignore their Creator and Father and instead determine for themselves to be their own gods, “knowing good and evil” represented by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? In other words, by trusting in their own selves rather than God, they were effectively saying, “We will be our own gods”. This display of independence also opened the door to the possibility of them creating “evil”. This scenario is nothing new to those of us who are parents. We want the best for our children and do our best to raise them to be responsible adults, but things don’t always turn out how we would like. God knows what it’s like to be a wounded parent, after all, He has suffered a long history of His overtures being rejected - Satan, Adam and Eve, children of Israel. It would seem we won’t say “yes” to God before we first satisfy our curiosity with evil and perhaps this is the point.

Humanity’s Failure to Trust

Returning to our story. Drawing attention to something is a sure-fire way of piquing someone’s curiosity and by God singling out these two trees this is exactly what happened. Most of us who have raised children have gone through the exercise of giving prohibitions to our children. “Don’t touch the remote control.” Then one day you come in and you see your child standing there with his quivering hand poised over the remote. But this is not just a child’s problem is it? Suppose you walk to work every day in the city. On the way you walk past a construction site which is surrounded by a metal fence which prevents you from seeing what is going on inside. Half way along the fence is a small hole with a sign that reads, “Whatever you do, don’t look through this hole?” Every day you walk past that hole with that dumb sign posted there. What do you think is going to happen? Every day, Adam and Eve walked past this intriguing tree with beautiful fruit dropping to the ground uneaten – you get the drift! So we have this curiosity problem playing on Adam and Eve’s mind.

But in addition to this intriguing tree messing with their minds there’s another potential menace lurking in the bushes.

Genesis 3:1 (NLT) Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the creatures the Lord God had made.

In an earlier session we learned who this serpent is, and to where he and his rebellious angels were banished! Now, he suddenly appears in God’s beautiful garden and starts talking to the woman. And again the question has to be asked, is there a reason God allows this evil menace access to the woman unless there is a part for him to play in this great drama of creating man in God’s image? We have to assume God as their Creator and parent warned Adam and Eve about the potential danger of listening to any voice with a different message to His. Plus He had given them the command “to subdue the earth” (Genesis 1:28) and second, to “keep” or “guard” the garden

(Genesis 2:15). These commands would seem strange unless there is something ominous lurking in the bushes.

We also know from the book of Job that Satan is allowed to play a part in these tests of faithfulness, but is restricted by God in just how far he is allowed to go. Circumstances are always under God's control.

Job 1:8-12 *Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." 9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." 12 The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."*

There are a number of things we can learn from this exchange. First, Job's faith in God is being tested as mentioned earlier so there is a higher purpose in what transpires. Like love, faith in God is a virtue God is not going to compromise with and He is unwavering in His commitment that both will prevail despite the heavy cost of evil. God will even persevere with His goal even if it means tolerating this creaturely induced evil for a time and even subjecting Himself to its horror so as to obtain His desired goal. Second, Satan is allowed by God to play a role in these tests. Third, God restricts him in how far he is allowed to go. Fourth, because of His decision to grant freedom to His creatures, God has to remain at arm's length in order for Job to be free to exercise his freewill.

The same scenario is being played out here in the Garden. The devil is shrewd enough to exploit the vulnerability of Eve while also recognizing the influence a woman has over a man.

Genesis 3:1-4 (NLT) *Really?" he asked the woman. "Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden?" 2 "Of course we may eat it," the woman told him. 3 "It's only the fruit from the tree at the center of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God says we must not eat it or even touch it, or we will die." 4 "You won't die!" the serpent hissed.*

The serpent sows the seed of doubt (distrust) and questions God's credibility. In other words, it goes back to this question of "trust" or "faith". "You don't have to trust God to determine what is right or wrong, you have the smarts to work it out for yourself", in other words, you can be your own gods. Then the serpent goes on to make it appear as though God is withholding something from them and keeping it all for Himself.

V.5 *"God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil."*

Satan is using the same perverted thinking that motivated him to rebel against God, thinking he too could ascend, replace God, and be his own god (Isaiah 14:12-15). Well, we know what happened. Instead of putting their faith and trust in their Creator and Father, they exercised their God-given prerogative, exercised their independence and chose instead to trust themselves.

V.6 *The woman was convinced. The fruit looked so fresh and delicious, and it would make her so wise!*

Even before Eve tasted the fruit, we see her exerting her independence, making her own judgment about the fruit and the prospect of gaining wisdom through her own efforts. She took the bait, and allowed the **lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life** (1 John 2:16) to get the better of her and she succumbed to the serpent's temptation. This is the dark side of our nature. We begin to dwell in those things that we know are wrong but seem unable to stop ourselves from flirting with those evils. When we find ourselves dwelling on something prohibited, we need to remember this story (James 4:7).

V.6 *...So she ate some of the fruit. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her. Then he ate it, too.*

Now we see another ominous development, solidarity in their rebellion as Adam joins his wife in exerting their independence. This rebellious attitude of solidarity against God would manifest

itself later as a political movement in the story of the Tower of Babel when the whole community rose up in defiance of God's will.

V.7 At that moment, their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness.

In this one respect Satan was right. By the very act of disobedience, Adam and Eve discovered the difference between good and evil. However, instead of becoming like God, they became "sinners," and as history would determine, learning what is right or wrong apart from God is a painful and confusing path and would eventually lead to death.

Right away their sin began to pervert their thinking and whereas before they were unconscious of this nakedness, now suddenly they were ashamed and vulnerable. They had moved from a position of other-consciousness to self-consciousness a situation which would open them up to others taking advantage of their perceived vulnerabilities. It's hard for us to imagine what it would be like to live in a world where our thoughts, words and actions were other-centered and not self-obsessed by how they would reflect back on us. Yet it would seem this was the nature of Adam and Eve before sin was introduced. Now this self-conscious vulnerability introduced a new weapon to be used against others, the ability to inflict harm on others by pointing out their vulnerabilities. And mankind has adopted this weapon with great gusto to the detriment of many relationships.

Instead of attaining the mastery they hoped they would achieve by choosing to be their own gods, in its place they found themselves in servitude to spiritual, emotional, and physical forces way beyond their control. We see this dynamic exposed in the all it's ugliness just a short time later when Cain rose up and murdered his brother Abel. This was despite God's warning to Cain to master his evil intent.

Genesis 4:6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

But back to the garden. Not sure if you remember the feeling as a kid of being found out after disobeying your parents. You might say Adam and Eve's true nature was "exposed"! And this seems to be the direction human nature takes from this point forward. The gift of freewill seems to default and be dominated by self-will with the resulting consequences (Romans 7:14-25).

V.7 ...So they strung fig leaves together around their hips to cover themselves. 8 Toward evening they heard the Lord God walking about in the garden, so they hid themselves among the trees.

Notice who it was who first hid from God? Yet man is quick to blame God when calamity strikes – "Where was God? Why didn't He stop it if He is a God of love?" We will look at that question shortly.

V.9 The Lord God called to Adam, "Where are you?" 10 He replied, "I heard you, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked."

When my brothers and I were kids, about six or seven, we broke a glass pane in a door and we thought we would avoid punishment if we went to bed early, even though it was about 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon. Little did we realize that by our actions we were signalling our guilt – "What are you kids doing in bed at this hour? What have you done?"

V.11 "Who told you that you were naked?" the Lord God asked. "Have you eaten the fruit I commanded you not to eat?" 12 "Yes," Adam admitted, "but it was the woman you gave me who brought me the fruit, and I ate it." 13 Then the Lord God asked the woman, "How could you do such a thing?" "The serpent tricked me," she replied. "That's why I ate it."

So the blame game starts. Self-will wants to protect self, and human beings have been playing this game ever since. Not only was there a rupture in the relationship between God and man, but now by their improvised clothing, they show they are not only hiding from God but also from each other. This is further demonstrated by their haste to blame the other for their sin. Once a rupture with our relationship with God occurs all other relationships suffer irreparable damage. Instead of cooperation and altruism towards others, individualism and self-interest dominate man's thinking.

Instead of attaining the mastery they hoped they would achieve by choosing to be their own gods, instead they found themselves in servitude to spiritual, emotional, and physical forces way beyond their control.

What was the consequence of their decision?

Genesis 3:22-24 (NLT) 22 Then the Lord God said, "The people have become as we are, knowing everything, both good and evil. What if they eat the fruit of the tree of life? Then they will live forever!"

Sitting there in the garden all this time is the tree of life with no prohibition or warning associated with it. If they had eaten of this tree instead of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve would have acknowledged God's claims on their lives and in effect submitted their lives to His direction and will. It is the height of arrogance to think we, as the created, can rise to be in the image of God without the help of our Creator. It would be left to the second Adam, Jesus Christ, to humbly submit His life to God's will on behalf of humanity and undo the debacle of the first Adam (Romans 5:12-21, 1 Corinthians 15:22).

V.23 So the Lord God banished Adam and his wife from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made. 24 After banishing them from the garden, the Lord God stationed mighty angelic beings to the east of Eden. And a flaming sword flashed back and forth, guarding the way to the tree of life.

Adam and Eve, now as sinners, were escorted out of the holy Garden and effectively severed the unique relationship mankind enjoyed with God up to this point. By turning away from and denying their Creator and Father, the very source of their being, they forfeited the unique connection that lies at the heart for which they were created, intimate relationship. Instead of "rest" and "holiness", it is now "work" and "sin." It will be up to the saving "work" of Jesus Christ to restore this unique characteristic of relatedness that is essential to being in the image of God.

However, before they leave the garden, notice what God does for them, as this is very important to the story of restoration.

Genesis 3:21 (NLT) And the Lord God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.

The coverings Adam and Eve had made for themselves, (fig leaves) were totally inadequate to cover their shame along with their sorry excuses. So God made coverings for them from animal skins indicating that something was going to happen in the future where blood would be shed and a life sacrificed to adequately cover their sins. God does not stop loving his creation when they mess up any more than we stop loving our kids when they mess up and His intention all along remains the same - to bring them into that unique relationship enjoyed by the Godhead (Romans 8:38-39). It also foreshadowed things were going to get a whole lot more complicated, messy and painful before the ultimate goal was achieved.

Responsibility for introducing evil

Before we leave this section, we need to ask the question, "Who was responsible for evil? Was it God? No, the blame for evil lies entirely with the exercise of free will on the part of both Satan and Adam and Eve. It was their desire "to become like God" to know for themselves "good and evil" which led them down the path of sin. They were effectively usurping a position that is God's alone, as He alone knows what is good and evil for His creation. And sadly this devastating trait has plagued mankind ever since. Instead of trusting God for guidance and help, we become our own moral instructors and judges setting our own standards of "righteousness".

Romans 10:3 Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

As a consequence, we now live in a world where rulers, politicians, bureaucrats, journalists, businessmen, clergy and actors all compete to impose their assessment of what is good and evil on the rest of society. And there is no one more dangerous than those who are sure they know both for themselves and for everyone else what is best for society. They too have usurped a position

reserved for God alone, believing they have been especially ordained with superior wisdom and virtue to judge and correct those they regard as less brilliant than themselves and to mould them into their image. In their arrogance and self-deception, they become immune to advice from others and pursue their own policies, which eventually become self-destructive. Rather than trusting and relying on the One who alone knows good from evil, they reap the confusing and painful consequences we witness in today's world.

This is the unfortunate consequence when people take on this desire to be their own gods "knowing good and evil." It is only when we learn that regardless of how morally upright, law abiding and even religious we are, we are still regarded by God as miserable sinners (Isaiah 64:6). Adam and Eve follow in the footsteps of the "Adversary" the devil by rebelling against their Creator and Father and chose the path of self-reliance and independence apart from God.

Chapter 9 – The Question of Moral Evil

Last chapter we finished with Adam and Eve being banished from the Garden of Eden so they couldn't eat of the tree of life after they had sinned. This again raises the subject of evil. Evil is a very difficult subject as it goes back to the question, "How can God, if He is holy and righteous, create something capable of evil when evil is precisely what God is not?" This subject of evil presents theologians with a dilemma and they react in different ways to the question. Some are loathe to broach the subject clasping their hands over their mouths; liberal theologians want to speak about a figurative devil, while others simply start by accepting the reality of evil without any explanation, e.g. Satan in the Garden of Eden, but won't speculate as to how he got there. Jesus, of course, had no doubts about the existence of the devil. We have his own personal account of His temptation at the hands of the devil in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11); his accusations against the Pharisees being the children of the devil (John 8:44); and His rebuke of Satan when Peter suggested a way other than the cross (Matthew 16:23). According to Jesus, the evil that was unleashed at the beginning of history will be there until the end of history before it is finally removed.

As much as each new generation hopes, history is not the story of gradual human progress where there is less evil and more good. Instead history is littered with and recorded in history books as the progression of the power of evil that threatens the destruction of human civilization. But when we take a realistic look at the world and see this endless procession of evil, the question has to be asked, "Why, if God is all-powerful, doesn't He do something about it, and what is the source of this endless parade of wickedness?" As discussed earlier, we have addressed the first part of that question, as to why an all-powerful God does not do something about the evil in the world? For a holy and righteous God to allow evil to exist, there must be something more important to His purpose besides the elimination of evil. We saw that this something was God's wish to share His triune love and existence with humanity. Love by its very nature involves choice. God will do all He can to *persuade* His creation to respond to His love, but He will not *compel* them. Compelling by force is not an attribute of love and therefore is not a godly characteristic. If the free agent willingly chooses to say "no" to God and His love, the path to God's goal becomes more torturous for both the free agents and for God, but that doesn't mean God abandons His plan.

The Source of Evil

With that background we now need to go back to the two trees in the Garden and again address the second question on evil, and that is, what is its source? The source of evil can be traced to three sources. So far we have only spoken about moral evil, an evil that is caused by intentional human will, the inhumane suffering we see imposed on our fellow humans every night on the evening news by other humans. In the last session, we were introduced to the corresponding opposing supernatural will operating temporarily in the Garden, Satan the Devil. His evil too is moral evil as it is caused by intentional will. Now in addition to this evil adversarial spirit, we now have two humans who also have the capacity for evil. And in the same way we saw how the serpent was able to influence Adam and Eve temporarily in the garden, now they had to live in that part of the world dominated and ruled by this supernatural adversary. We will learn more about this later but, it would seem when Satan was cast out of heaven to this earth following his rebellion, he either reassumed a position of authority he had previously been given by God in preparation for the creation of man, or in a further affront to God he usurped it illegally. Either way, during the temptation of Jesus, when Satan claimed he could give Jesus all the authority and splendour of the kingdoms of this world, Jesus did not dispute this claim (Luke 4:5-6). Also the apostle Paul refers to Satan as "***the ruler of the kingdom of the air.***"

Ephesians 2:1-3 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit

who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Paul gives us a very clear indication of the source of evil in the world (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan is identified as the source behind the dark forces of evil that prey on and appeal to the now dehumanised self-will of humanity. We saw how the serpent sowed the seeds of distrust in the freewill of Eve in the Garden that eventually led to her's and Adam's sin. And if we understand the scenario in the garden correctly, we would have to conclude Adam and Eve were created with a susceptibility to temptation. As we read in Genesis 3:6, Eve was tempted by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

Slaves to Sin

Now because of their distrust and sinfulness that effectively cut them off from their Creator, even their freewill is compromised and they fell into a condition that scripture describes as being "slaves to sin".

Romans 6:16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

To now argue humans still possess the freewill capacity to choose between good and evil is experientially unrealistic and unbiblical. Our own experience tells us that even Christians struggle to be the faithful, loving, trusting children of God we should be. Like the overweight Christian who decided to stop going to the donut shop on his drive to work each morning in order to lose weight. A week into his diet, he prayed to God that if a parking space was available in front of the shop, it was God's sign he should stop and have his favourite bear claw. Sure enough, the third time around the block, a parking space became available! Christians too find ourselves driven by all sorts of fears, anxieties, suspicions, hostilities and rebellion, all of which play into the hands of our own self-interest and make us susceptible to the schemes of the devil.

But before we raise the objection, "the devil made me do it," we need to recognise we humans too are complicit in the act of sin. The devil may have planted the seeds of doubt in Eve's mind, but it was the human decision that initiated the act. The devil may influence in much the same way other people can influence our behaviour to some extent, but it does not take away the responsibility for the one most directly involved in the decision. That is why Adam and Eve were held accountable for their sin despite the fact the devil was complicit in the decision (Genesis 3:13-15). So we can't claim the "devil made me do it" any more than we can claim, "the television made me do it," nor the scriptwriters, nor the producers of the show although they may bear some moral responsibility. The seductive messages of the serpent and the inquisitive nature of Eve combined to generate evil desires in the human heart.

Genesis 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

So humanity does not escape condemnation as it too plays its part in the sordid affair of sin, as we are the ones who ultimately submit to the base desires of our selfish nature. And the more we submit to these base desires, the more difficult it becomes to shake these bad habits. Our choices become our habits, and eventually these habits determine our character. In this sorry state, our choices now choose us and we become addicted to those sinful habits.

This also explains why God, in certain situations, chooses to use the wicked characteristics already developed in some human or spiritual instruments to further His divine plan. God used the already hardened heart of Pharaoh to eventually free His people from Egypt (Exodus 7:1-4, 9:34-35), and the already treacherous heart of Judas to betray Jesus (John 13:21-27). The base cravings of our thoughts, attitudes and desires of our hearts exert such a powerful influence on us that they

override our freedom and determine how we choose (Romans 7:17-20). Paul sums up the hopeless condition humanity found itself in cut off from their Creator and Father.

Romans 1:21-22 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.

Adam and Eve by taking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil opened up Pandora's Box and released on humanity a terrible brew of knowledge mixed with both good and bad options without the God-given capacity to comprehend the difference. The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD) who was well acquainted with the machinations and scheming of human nature while ruling over the Roman empire made this telling comment in his Meditations, "When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself, the people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous and surly. They are like this because they can't tell good from evil." This would be humanity's natural inclination and would remain this way until God provides us with the means to throw off the bondage of sin and instead become slaves to righteousness.

The two sources of evil

The source of wickedness we experience in the world today then, can be traced back to the rebellion of these two sets of created beings, one supernatural, the powerful adversary, Satan the devil, the second, creatures of this earth, represented by Adam and Eve. Both parties wilfully rejected the overtures of their Creator's love and provision, exercised their creaturely freewill and introduced evil into the cosmos. These are the two sources of moral evil at play in the cosmos, a rebellious devil bent on destroying God's good purpose, and a fallen humanity with a now darkened, futile and foolish heart. Instead of a beautiful tapestry of morally responsible free agents interlocking with other free agents to create paradise living with their God, we now have free agents with darkened, futile and foolish hearts with the destructive potential to wreak havoc on each other and God's good earth.

If these two terrible evils weren't dire enough to contend with, there is another frightful evil waiting for them outside the security of the garden – "natural" evil. We saw how the two trees were used to present Adam and Eve with the possibility of choice so as to test their faith in God's providence. But there was another important aspect to these two special trees and that was, their choice would determine where they would live. If they chose the tree of life, they would have remained in the garden under God's care and protection, safe from both moral and natural evil. But now as they were being marched from the garden, they discovered they would live in a totally different landscape to the one they enjoyed in the garden. In keeping with their decision to determine for themselves what was good and what was evil, this new landscape would provide them with that ominous prospect. Dark forces in opposition to God ruled this landscape. And instead of having the comfort and security of faithfully relying on their Creator and Father, they would now have to rely on their own wits for survival.

Chapter 10 – The Question of Natural Evil

Natural evil has been described as the dark side of God’s good creation. It is the evil that comes from natural causes such as earthquakes, floods, volcanos, droughts, disease epidemics, birth defects, etc. They are part of the natural processes of the environment that originate independently of human motives or decisions. Modern science has made great strides in both explaining and countering some of the harmful effects of natural evil, but nevertheless, it remains a serious threat to the well being of the inhabitants of our planet. We have to be realistic and face the fact there is a structural evil inherent in nature as pain and destruction are part of the natural order.

Again the question arises, as to the source of this “naturally” occurring evil. To attribute this source of evil to God, again seems so out of sync with His character. The Garden of Eden was more in sync with God’s character. Yet it is not just humans alone who suffer at the hands of nature. The animal kingdom is made up of both predators and prey. Survival of the fittest reigns in the animal kingdom. It seems Alfred Tennyson’s memorial phrase, nature is “red in tooth and claw” reflects the reality of life in the wild. Yet this seems to have been the nature of things long before humans arrived on the planet. The fossil record reveals a pre-humanoid world of terrifying flesh-eating dinosaurs that roamed the earth millions of years ago devouring other creatures. Carnivorous dinosaurs weren’t the only threat as the fossil record reveals many came to a premature end through natural causes such as meteorites, volcanic activity, mud slides, earthquakes, tar pits and dramatic climate change. Even though the earth was “cursed” after the fall of man, this seems to be the existing state of affairs prior to the arrival of man on the scene (Genesis 3:17-19). To claim nature only started behaving in this hostile manner as a result of the fall, how then do we explain the paleontological record of a violent earth preceding the fall? To attribute this hostile and violent state of affairs to a benevolent omnipotent Creator who describes His creation as “good” is inconsistent with His character. Especially when He cares for the animal kingdom and commands us to do the same (Deuteronomy 25:4; Proverbs 12:10; 27:23, Jonah 4:9-11). There seems to be a disconnect between the animals God created and brought to Adam to name and what we see in the world today, as the animals in the garden were originally vegetarian (Genesis 1:29-30).

So one has to ask the question, Are these menacing aspects part of God’s original “good” creation, or has something interfered with these naturally occurring laws that have led to their now threatening state? Although when considered alone, nature is an impersonal force, the reality is scripture reveals it does not exist alone. Something has interfered with God’s original good creation and made it the threatening place it is today. Just as there are invisible, supernatural, evil forces at work influencing human behavior; scripture reveals these same evil forces to some degree exert their influence on nature itself. We have already identified a menacing force in opposition to God who is called both the “prince” and “god” of this age who exercises a significant degree of control over the affairs of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9). It should not be surprising then to see this cosmic “roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8) “red in tooth and claw” exercising a certain amount of authority over the natural order in much the same way humans have the ability to corrupt nature.

We see this capacity over nature exercised when the magicians in Pharaoh’s court were able to replicate the miracles and plagues of Moses and Aaron to a certain degree (Exodus 7:9-12, 19-22; 8:5-7, 16-19). In the Lord’s testing of Job, we see the devil’s capacity to inflict natural calamity on Job’s possessions, family and his health, but again within God-defined guidelines (Job 1:12-19; 2:3-7). Satan may be the prince and god of this world, but he is not God of the cosmos. Prior to Christ’s return, the devil will use supernatural displays of power to deceive the wicked (2

Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 6:7-8). When the God of the cosmos became incarnate, He had no hesitation in attributing the source of disease and deformity to Satan and his demons, never to the natural features of His Father's creation (Mark 9:25; Luke 11:14; 13:11, 16; Acts 10:38).

Acts 10:38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

Although the following is speculative, it would seem to make a lot more sense to attribute the sinister qualities of nature to a powerful and rebellious spirit than a benevolent God of love, peace, order and perfection (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Attributing evil in nature to Satan and his demons may also explain the violent and hostile nature of the world prior to the arrival of man and the need for God to restore it in preparation for the creation of mankind (Genesis 1:1-3).

As mentioned earlier, at some point in the prehistoric past, Satan and his angels unsuccessfully attempted to take over God's throne. In the ensuing cosmic battle, the devil was defeated and he and his demons were cast down to this earth. Exhibiting a menacing characteristic later described in the book of Revelation (Revelation 12:12-13), the devil, in a fit of rage, unleashed his significant power on God's good creation twisting and corrupting the laws of nature resulting in the perverted environment of the violent and hostile world of the dinosaurs. It was upon this corrupt and deformed environment that the Spirit of God moved to restore God's good creation (Genesis 1:1).

Things would have remained in this "good" state of the refashioned paradise had Adam and Eve chosen of the tree of life and remained in the garden under God's good provision and protection. However, as they had rejected reliance on their Creator and Father, and chose instead to be their own gods, choosing to rely on themselves to discover "the knowledge of good and evil," they now found themselves living their choice, one God was obligated to honour because of His decision to grant them freewill. By their rejection, they exposed both themselves and the earth to the same corrupting forces of evil that had perverted the previous age. Satan and his demons began to distort nature in much the same way they have perverted human nature. In a relatively short period of time we see the lifespan of humans significantly reduced, the animal kingdom again turning violent preying on the weak, and humans who were originally created to love God and fellowman, now acting in self-interest and even resorting to deadly violence in order to get their way (Genesis 6:5). Living in this hostile environment was the curse mankind brought on itself for rejecting God's overtures of love.

Genesis 3:17-19 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken for dust you are and to dust you will return."

We have lost the authority we were once given to rule over the animal kingdom and to subjugate and protect the earth (Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:15).

But rather than being in a world completely under the control of Satan and his demons as appears to be the case in the pre-humanoid world, this new environment had to reflect both aspects of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and this is why our present earth is both a combination of both good and evil aspects. I am presently writing this part of the book on-board a cruise ship sailing through the spectacular Milford Sound in New Zealand enjoying the stunning natural beauty caused by massive earth shaking powers millions of years ago. At the same time I am enjoying the beauty created by these massive earth shaking powers, Indonesians on the island of Java are frantically digging through the ruins of destroyed homes looking for loved ones buried by these same earth shaking powers. As mentioned earlier, just as there are good and bad aspects engineered into the moral universe, so it seems good and bad aspects are built into the natural

world. God has left enough of His good creation in the world of nature to both inspire believers and confound the sceptics. Either way, both groups are left astounded by the beauty of nature and to wonder as to its origin.

Jesus spoke of these two powers at work in the world in His parable of the “tares” or “weeds.” **Matthew 13:24-28** *Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 27 “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ 28 ““An enemy did this,’ he replied.*

The point of the parable is these abnormalities of nature should not be attributed to an all-powerful and benevolent Creator, but rather to “an enemy who has done this”. Jesus, when confronted with deformities, sickness and disease during His earthly ministry considered them “unnatural” rather than natural and took the unusual step of “rebuking” them, rather than just healing them. It would seem strange for Him to rebuke something impersonal as nature unless there was something more sinister affecting it. In this parable we also see confirmation of the need to allow events to play out despite the evil as the owner of the property instructed the workers to allow the wheat and the weeds to grow together until harvest time.

Matthew 13:28-29 *“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ 29 ““No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”*

There is a higher purpose at work than the elimination of evil at the present time as we discussed earlier. In order for there to be freedom of choice in this environment of good and evil there has to be viable alternatives. It also means it is necessary for God to maintain a certain arm’s length relationship with His creation so they experience both good and evil as that is what we demanded. So when people ask, “Where was God when tragedy strikes?” the answer is, “He would love to be there for us, but we have rejected Him and chosen to live life without Him!” This is not to say God does not reserve for Himself the right to intervene in both human and earthly affairs should He choose to do so, which He often does in order to further His purpose. Otherwise, Jesus’ advice to Christians to pray for our needs would be an ironic joke. Nevertheless, Christians are not insulated from the evils and sufferings of this world and there is no guarantee we will be given divine protection from them. In fact, both Jesus and Peter tell us to expect suffering, persecution and even death for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:11, 44; 16:24-25; 1 Peter 2:20-21). Experience confirms this to be the case. But regardless of what happens, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

Human Implication in Natural Evil

Before we leave this subject of natural evil we need to look at the part humans play in this evil as well. In the same way both supernatural and human agents are responsible for moral evil, human agents too play their part in the natural sufferings that befall both the human and animal kingdoms. The first world’s refusal to share their abundant blessings to ease the suffering of the second and third world is proof of human complicity with evil. Drug companies for greed and profit refuse to share life-saving drugs with a sick and suffering humanity. Mining companies build inadequate tailing dams in the third world that sometimes burst and flood villages downstream with suffocating mud that kill hundreds. Developers build flimsy homes along beaches that are prone to hurricanes. Pollution and land clearing practices put many of the earth animal species at risk. Yet in many of these cases, instead of humans taking responsibility, God is blamed for these evils. If we cared for one another, the animal kingdom and the environment the way God intended, we would avoid much of the suffering that occurs from so called “natural” evil.

And while we are on the subject we should also avoid the mistaken claim made by some televangelists that suffering that occurs at the hands of nature is the result of divine punishment for some specific national sin. Jesus Himself denies certain “natural” evils were the result of divine punishment (Luke 13:4-5; John 9:1-4). Experience also tells us there is no discernible correlation between the amount of natural suffering a person or nation experiences and their degree of sinfulness. Disease and other natural disasters are indiscriminate in that they affect all peoples and all nations. There is enough moral and natural evil built into this carefully engineered environment of good and evil without God having to take additional steps of punishment in normal circumstances.

However, there were exceptional cases where evil became so rampant where God did intervene to prevent total depravity from becoming a permanent feature (Genesis 6:5-7; 13:13; 18:20-21; 2 Peter 2:4-6). However, in these cases, supernatural forces of nature were used to annihilate the wicked, not naturally occurring ones. We need to be careful to whom we attribute the source of evil.

Chapter 11 – Why the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

Over the last two chapters we have identified three sources of evil in the cosmos: a rebellious devil bent on destroying God's good purpose; a fallen humanity with a now darkened, futile and foolish heart; and a threatening natural environment. Together, these three evils add up to what can be described for humans as a living hell. In this series we will experience four types of hell. This is the first. Even the so-called beautiful people in the first world, living in the lap of luxury in the 21st century insulated from the horrific evils being perpetuated on our fellow human beings in other parts of the world, can't escape the fact that life is hard. By the time each of us has experienced our allotted three score and ten, there are not too many of us who would say, "That was fun, let's do it all again!" But, and this is important, we need to remind ourselves, we find ourselves in this situation because we have cut ourselves off from the source of love and wisdom and chose to be our own gods and learn for ourselves the knowledge of what is good and what is evil. To put it in simple terms, "Life with God is heaven, life without God is hell!" It is now into this ominous environment man finds himself. But all is not lost; we have a Creator and Father who does not give up on His children easily.

Holiness

Now we are going to ask a question that is going to sound somewhat disturbing, and that is, "Are there important spiritual lessons we must and can only learn from walking the path of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?" Earlier we spoke about two qualities God will not compromise with in regard to developing a holy people in His image even if it means tolerating evil for a time. They were "love" and "faith." Now we need to add a third quality to that list and that is "holiness." The holiness I'm talking about is not obedience to a long list of do's and don'ts as you might expect. Earlier we spoke of an "other-consciousness" Adam and Eve possessed before sin entered the picture but then defaulted to "self-consciousness" under the control of self-will after they sinned. The holiness we are talking about even transcends other-consciousness in that it is a reflection of the very character of God whose nature is an overflowing holy love towards others. It is this type of holy relational love that is the lifeblood of the Trinity that God ultimately hopes to share with humanity. The task for God is to bring fallen humanity to the point of wanting to share in this holy love willingly. Evil, although introduced by creaturely self-will, is used by God as part of this process. It is a spiritual maturity that is developed on the principles of love and faith designed to bring about a holy loving community. This results in beings that want to live with and reflect the holy nature and character of the triune God. It's more an attitude of mind than a list of moral guidelines.

Spiritual Maturity

Earlier we talked about the moral universe God has created, where wise choices can lead to happy outcomes and bad choices lead to unhappy outcomes. Although we think we know everything when we become teenagers, the reality is in hindsight, we have to admit we were really quite immature. Although our parents warned us about the dangers lurking out there in the big bad world, chances are we disregarded their advice and proceeded according to our own desires with the subsequent results. In other words, there is a maturity that develops as a result of experience, even if that maturity comes as a result of bad experiences. When we look at what transpired in the Garden of Eden, we see this same process in action. Generally, Christianity blames Adam and Eve for the mess mankind finds itself in, and as a result of their fall, we have all fallen and are suffering. However, before we sheet too much blame on Adam and Eve for consigning mankind to a life of sin, pain, misery and death, we need to consider another important aspect of the story. We need to grant them the concession they were immature and had an innocence in regard to evil. We saw how God's prohibition only piqued their interest in the forbidden fruit – "You can eat any of the lollies in the confectionary aisle, but not the big delicious chocolate one in the middle." Also

lurking in the bushes is no less than that wily devil with his beguiling words. But critically, Adam and Eve had no concept of what “evil” was as theirs was the first sin in this context. When we tell a child not to touch the hot stove, he doesn’t know what the word “burn” means? They have to experience a burn before they know what it means to be burnt. In the same manner, Adam and Eve would not have known what it meant to experience “evil” before they actually committed evil. Now to give this some kind of perspective, you and I live in a world where we see and experience the consequences of evil every day, yet we still make wrong choices don’t we. We know better, but we stuff cigarettes into our mouths, we eat too much, we drink too much, we buy too much, we watch too much, and we desire too much. “We buy things we don’t need, with money we don’t have, to impress people we don’t like.” We aren’t stupid, most of us know we shouldn’t be doing a lot of the things we do because they are harmful to us, yet we do them anyway. We are simply weak and this has given rise to the saying, “You don’t have to, you can’t help it!” It appears we aren’t a lot different from Adam and Eve so we should be willing to cut Adam and Eve a little slack for their immaturity and inexperience. In the same vein, we have to assume Adam and Eve did not completely understand the concept of death as up till that point we have to assume they had no experience with death. Like children, it’s not until they actually burn themselves or the pet dog dies that they grasp the full significance of pain and death.

To go back to our point about developing a holy people, Adam and Eve, because of having experienced the evil consequences of their decision, now had a maturity they did not have prior to God’s advice to them not to touch the fruit. In other words, they were more aware of evil and the subsequent painful consequences as a result of their sinful action in ignoring their Creator and Father. This newfound knowledge and maturity would hopefully influence their approach to life. We see the same process at work in the parable of the prodigal son. It was only after he had experienced the pain of life without his father, that he recognised how good he had things back home and how wise and loving his father had been.

Luke 15:17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’

He now had a maturity he did not have prior to having experienced evil and the consequences of his decisions.

The question is, “Can we learn the qualities of a holy God without the experience of partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?” As we examine this question, its important to remember God did not introduce evil, but instead uses it to further His purpose. Though it rose independently of God, He incorporated it into His plan. But it is incorporated as a result of mankind’s “no” to His love. However the question remains, If it’s God’s will to create us in his image, how does He go about teaching us Godly qualities like holiness, love, grace, forgiveness, mercy, and faith? In order to learn these qualities, viable alternatives have to exist. Is it possible to learn the virtue of love without the existence of its opposite, hate? How does one extend grace, forgiveness and mercy unless we have been wronged in the first place? How does one build faith and trust unless they are tested? The apostle Peter connects the difficulties of life with the development of divine qualities.

1 Pet 1:6-7 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Life on earth with all its troubles is the crucible by which God develops his divine virtues in us so we come to resemble Him, “***of greater worth than gold.***” As mentioned one of the reoccurring themes that is repeated over and over again throughout scripture is this issue of “trust.”

Circumstances are orchestrated by God to test this premise on His servants. This theme of testing is repeated throughout scripture – Adam and Eve, Noah, Job, Abraham, the children of Israel, David, even Jesus. So is it possible to develop “faith” without a scenario to test it?

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

No one in their right mind would consider the difficulties of life a “joy” unless it is put in this context of allowing God to mould us into His image. Now notice the progression of how the process works.

V.3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

The path to spiritual maturity is littered with potholes and hurdles all carefully designed in this environment of “good” and “evil” to mould and shape us into the image of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 64:8; Romans 8:29). The apostle Paul too speaks about a spiritual maturity that comes from suffering.

Acts 14:21-22 They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.

Christians should never doubt the spiritual maturity being developed in our lives through the hardships of life. And as this verse says, it is all done in preparation for life in the kingdom of God.

Romans 5:3-4 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Paul like James earlier recognised the spiritual benefits that follow as a result of trials and suffering. It is only in an imperfect world that God-like qualities such as compassion, mercy, forgiveness, concern and consideration along with obedience can be learned and practiced. It would seem humanity has to experience evil before realising our true destiny as sons of God.

The Path of Good and Evil can bring us to our Senses

Another reason we need to experience both good and evil is; it is used to bring us to our senses. There are a number of examples used in scripture to show us how the consequences of evil are used to bring people to their senses. David’s scandalous behaviour with Bathsheba, that resulted in both the death of her husband Uriah and their child. David only came to his senses when confronted with his behavior by the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-13). Psalm 51 records his prayer of repentance after he realised the wickedness of his sin.

Psalm 51:1-4 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion. Blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

Then, of course, this is also the story of the prodigal son. It was only after he ran out of money and was reduced to eating slops with the pigs that he came to his senses.

Luke 15:17-20 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ 20 So he got up and went to his father.

There are consequences to sin, and these consequences are used to bring people to their senses. Life has been designed so that the further one gets away from God, the more serious the consequences become with the purpose of bringing us to our senses and driving us back to God.

The Path of Good and Evil can promote Reconciliation

But there is another spiritual benefit from this whole process of having experienced both good and evil and that is, it promotes “reconciliation.” Again, in the story of the prodigal son, the pain and suffering facilitated the process of reconciliation between the father and the wayward son. The father, despite his son’s disrespectful attitude in demanding his inheritance, had left the door open for reconciliation. But it was only after the experience of tasting of the tree of the knowledge

of good and evil that the son finally came to his senses, regretted his earlier actions and took steps to reconcile with his father (Luke 15:17-19). The father, who daily was hanging over the front fence scanning the road was delighted to see his returning son, rushed down the road to meet him, brushed aside his rehearsed apology and welcomed him back into the family.

Luke 15:22-24 *“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.*

This parable has too much of a familiar ring to it to not see it as being more than a coincidence which reflects the ongoing relationship between God and humanity and more accurately reflects God’s attitude to repentant sinners than is normally portrayed.

Acknowledging God’s claim on our lives

Reconciliation leads to a fourth spiritual benefit from having experienced both good and evil and that is the participants would be a lot more willing to acknowledge and accept the two comprehensive claims God has on His children of being their Creator and Father. In other words, they will grow in faith as they now recognise God has their best interests at heart when He tries to direct their steps. After all, as their Creator He did make them and as their Father, loves them.

John 14:23 *Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.*

God wants nothing more than to be welcomed into our lives, but He will only respond to an invitation that acknowledges His claim on our lives. And really this is what repentance is all about, a recognition of our rejection of God’s comprehensive claims on each of our lives and a new willingness to allow Him to come and take up residence in our lives. The critical moment in the story of the prodigal’s return is the phrase, **“When he came to himself.”** It was recognition of his rebellion against a Creator and Father who loved him.

God’s Gift of Grace

A fifth spiritual lesson to be learned from having experienced both good and evil is, it will help us recognise how merciful and graceful God has acted in redeeming humanity from our self-inflicted plight. Despite our sinfulness in rejecting God, when we do come to that point of acknowledging Him as our Creator and Father, it demonstrates how loving and graceful God is towards his wayward children.

Ephesians 2:3-5 *...Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*

The sheer magnitude of God’s grace is the key to breaking humanity’s stony heart. Despite our rebellion, God has provided the way for the two parties to be reconciled, and as we will go on to show, it comes at a great price to Him. As mentioned earlier, Christianity is the story of God’s response to our “no”!

We started this chapter talking about an additional quality to “love” and “faith” God will not compromise with in regard to developing a holy people in His image even if it means tolerating evil for a time. That third quality is “holiness.” The five important spiritual lessons we have just covered about the benefits of tasting of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, although important, should not be regarded as the full story in developing holiness in us, but rather a preparation for how God Himself is going to develop holiness in us. 1) Maturity, 2) It brings us to our senses, 3) Reconciliation, 4) Accepting God’s claim on our lives, and 5) God’s gift of grace, are designed to prepare us for the next step of developing holiness in His people. It is not something He is leaving to us, as the pursuit of one’s own holiness without reliance on God is to make the same mistake as Adam and Eve. True creatures of God recognize they are not gods and surrender their will to their Creator and Father. It’s more a preparation of mind or an attitude that focuses

on the restored relationship with our Creator and Father. He has something very special planned on how He is going to make us His holy people who truly reflect the holy nature and character of the triune God.

Chapter 12 – Evil, a necessary Path to Glory

So far as mentioned we have looked at five spiritual lessons that are the result of humanity having experienced both good and evil represented by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But there is one more very important lesson we need to examine. When we evaluate the progression of events in the garden, a prohibition not to eat of the tree, the serpent allowed to speak to the woman, and a naiveté about evil and death on the part of Adam and Eve, which together lead them into sin, can we draw any other conclusion other than, *was this the outcome God expected?* And if it was, then the follow-up question is, “Is it possible for man to rise to his destiny of become ‘in the image of God’ without first partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?”

So far there has not been a very good track record of God’s created beings saying, “yes” to Him. So the question is, “Is there a better chance of man saying ‘yes’ to God before or after experiencing evil?” This is an important question as up to this point, Satan and one-third of the angels have rejected God’s overtures of love, allowing self-interest and a lust for power to drive their decisions. Circumstances could not have been better for them to say “yes” to God. They were experiencing heaven, they were sharing in the life and love of God and yet they said “no” to Him. As mentioned earlier, this would have been an enormous affront to God. And perhaps, this is the reason why there is no hope of redemption for Satan and his demons as they made their choice after having experienced the love and majesty of God within the framework of the heavenly realm. Now in the garden, we see Adam and Eve also saying “no” to God, not in heaven, but nevertheless, in a “very good” environment. And perhaps we can speculate this is the reason why there is the need for this four-dimensional physical universe as this way, God can maintain an arm’s length relationship between Himself and humanity, so there is the possibility of redemption. The presence of the tree of life in the garden would seem to support this scenario and why they were denied access to it after they sinned. They were ejected from the garden so they would not be in the same state of judgment as Satan and the demons who had experienced firsthand the life and love of God.

But this scenario raises a very important question regarding “The Judgment.” Traditional Christianity since Augustine has maintained there is no hope of redemption for humanity post mortem. In this scenario, one has to accept the gift of salvation in this life; otherwise it is hell for all eternity. This includes those billions who have never even heard of Jesus Christ nor been offered the opportunity to respond to God’s invitation of grace (John 3:16). This position was further reinforced during the Reformation, particularly by the followers of the Reformer, John Calvin. The problem with this view is that all we have just covered about the important spiritual lessons of humanity having lived through all the pain and suffering associated with the tree of knowledge count for nothing, to say nothing on how this reflects on a loving and benevolent God who supposedly consigns billions to an eternal hell just because of the timing and place of their birth. This does not sound consistent with a God who has gone to extraordinary lengths to create this environment with the goal of creating man in His image for all this pain, suffering and death humanity has suffered down through the ages to count for nothing. Fortunately, the story does not end this way. Humanity’s experience of tasting of the tree of knowledge will not be wasted and all will be offered the free gift of grace (John 12:32). As we will see, God Himself is willing to go through a whole lot more pain, suffering and even death to make an additional claim on our lives and in doing so implicate all humanity, past, present and future in the process.

So what are we suggesting? It was Irenaeus, one of the early church fathers who first argued evil, suffering and death was an inevitable and necessary component to the development of spiritual maturity in the human race. This process of suffering as a result of the evil in the world helps in turning us to God as the deeper we get into despair the more attractive the offer of redemption becomes. The prodigal son was much more receptive to his father’s love but only after

experiencing for himself the consequences of evil. The same could be said for Israel's exodus out of Egyptian slavery. Would they have been as receptive to God's offer of deliverance had they not been in such dire straits? At the end of history when God raises the dead, humanity, having passed through this evil journey (hell), would have learned by experience what evil truly is and how merciful God is in redeeming us from it (His offer of grace). Like the prodigal son, they would be in a much more receptive position to accept God's offer of a life of loving dependence with the Father after experiencing evil. It is only through this process that humans become fit for the destiny that God intends which is union and communion with the divine.

God's Plan "A"

What I would like to suggest is that this scenario we see in the garden is God's plan "A" and Christ's redemptive work is part of plan "A" and not Plan "B" as is usually suggested because God had to come up with a contingent plan "B" as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve. After all, scripture is clear, Christ was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8), the devil is allowed to play his part in producing the evil aspects of this carefully orchestrated environment of "good" and "evil" (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2), and the weeds were allowed to grow with the wheat in the parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-29). And we have that intriguing verse in Romans 11 that suggests this to be the case.

Romans 11:32 For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

It seems the path of evil is a necessary part of God's purpose of raising fallen humanity to his destiny of becoming "in the image of God." There is one final proof humanity has to experience evil as part of God's purpose and that is the example of the process Jesus Himself had to go through in order to attain "glory." Even Jesus as the first man genuinely in God's image had to experience the full gamut of the human experience, including all the scenarios we have just discussed. Paul, in Philippians, speaks about this process Jesus was willing to subject Himself to in order to become the first human truly in God's image.

Philippians 2:5-11 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness .8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Even Jesus Christ had to experience "humility" before achieving "greatness." It was only after experiencing humility, the humility of the manger, the humility of rejection, and the humility of the cross that He was raised up to greatness.

V.9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If our Lord and Saviour had to go through this process to become the first man truly in God's image, why should we expect anything different (John 15:20-21)? It would be the height of human arrogance to think we could achieve the level of God's holiness on our own steam.

Romans 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The path to glory is paved with suffering, for both Jesus and His co-heirs. The apostle Peter echoes the same sentiment.

1 Peter 4:12-13 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

The Representative Principle

But the suffering Jesus willingly subjected Himself to had deeper implications for humanity than simply becoming the first human in God's image. This goes back to the subject of developing holiness as part of the process of creating beings in His image. As we have seen and witnessed in our own lives, humanity is totally incapable of ascending to the lofty heights of God's holiness. So what does God do? He elects to do for us what we cannot possibly do for ourselves and takes on this responsibility on our behalf. This is getting ahead of the story, but it's important to understand the principle of *representation* in that God the Father applies all that Jesus Christ achieved in His life, death, resurrection and ascension to each and every human being. By demonstrating His willingness to go through this process and by His perfect obedience, He qualified to be the perfect representative, or High Priest for sinful mankind in our relationship with God (Hebrews 4:8-9). He becomes our High Priest acting on our behalf in relation to reconciling humanity to God and God to humanity.

Hebrews 4:14-15 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

This section of scripture demonstrates how Jesus as man, went through the same process as we are going through, and although subject to the same temptations we experience, He maintained His righteousness, not failing even once. We all recognise Christ died for our sins as our sacrificial representative, but this verse demonstrates how Christ also becomes our representative in regard to holiness. It is Christ's holiness in the face of repeated temptation that is now attributed to us.

2 Corinthians 5:19, that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation... 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Christ was able to remain faithful even through the ordeal of the cross because He placed His complete and utter dependence on His heavenly Father

Hebrews 5:7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

In other words, in contrast to Adam and Eve, Jesus recognised the comprehensive claims God had on His life and submitted to His Father's will.

John 14:30-31 I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, 31 but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

It was His love for, and His obedience to His Father that gave Him the strength to resist the human temptations of the flesh and the devil. We will come back to both the subject of *representation* and *holiness* in a later session.

Another Comprehensive Claim – That of Savior

However, at this point we should pause to acknowledge Jesus' willingness to submit Himself to the same process we have to go through in order to make it possible for us to realise God's purpose for us. Jesus willingly joins us in our humanity in order to free us from the evil we have brought on ourselves because of our sinful rebellion and failure to recognise our Creator and Father. Although He bears no moral responsibility for our sinful choices, out of His love and mercy towards His children, He nevertheless chooses to accept responsibility for them. There is no risk to which God permitted humans to be subjected to that He Himself was not willing to bear, even death on the cross. God in Jesus willingly and lovingly accepted the full consequences of our rebellion.

Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

However by accepting the full consequences of our rebellion, Jesus adds another comprehensive claim on each of our lives, that of "Savior." Whether we realise it or not, all humanity has been

implicated in the life and death of Jesus Christ as He both lived and paid the death penalty for every last one of us (John 3:16-17). The one who deserved it the least of all suffered the effects of rejected love the most, so He could share glory with us (Isaiah 53:1-12).

When all this is taken into consideration, the spiritual lessons, the role of Jesus Christ, it would seem the path of evil is a necessary part of God's purpose of raising man to his destiny of becoming "in the image of God." It is as if God is allowing this period of tasting of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to inoculate us against sin and evil, so that when the time is right, we will respond positively to His invitation to realise our God-given destiny of joining Him in eternity. Just as an inoculation is necessary to build resistance to a disease, so God is using a necessary suffering and evil now to produce a better outcome for us in the future. In the end, what we can know is the evil, suffering, and death we suffer now will all make sense, there will be a justification for all the suffering that has occurred. However, that knowledge may not happen until the judgment, but waiting there will be One who is both the righteous Judge and the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14). Until then, we will need to trust the wisdom, knowledge, and love of our Creator and heavenly Father as He works out His purpose to create human beings in His image.

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

Chapter 13 – Job and Evil

Last chapter we looked at a number of issues that suggested the path of evil is a necessary part of God’s purpose of raising man to his destiny of becoming “in the image of God”. We can’t leave the subject of evil without taking a closer look at the story of Job as we get a unique insight into what is going on behind the scenes in the spiritual realm. This is usually something we are not privy to, yet as we will see, can have a serious impact on each of our lives.

The book begins with God calling a heavenly council to which Satan is also commanded to attend.

Job 1:6-12 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them.

This account gives us an important insight into the spiritual hierarchy of the cosmos. Although Satan has enormous power, he cannot thumb his nose at God; he is obligated to present Himself to God when God commands it. So the first thing we should realise is, God ultimately is in control of events.

V.7 The LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the LORD, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.” 8 Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

Now I don’t know about you, but I’m not sure I would appreciate God turning the spotlight on me in his conversations with the devil. But as the book unfolds we begin to see why God has set in motion events that are designed to address a particular spiritual problem Job has. Although God draws attention to Job being blameless and upright, there appears to be an important underlying spiritual problem that needs to be addressed. As we saw in our earlier sessions, there is always a higher purpose for what transpires, and as we shall see, in this case it will lead to the development of a healthier and closer relationship between God and Job. Through Job’s response to his dilemma we will see he has a distorted view of God and how He runs the universe.

But this scenario again raises the perplexing question, “Why would God, who is all powerful, allow the tempter to continue his work unless there is a purpose for it all?” In the same way God could have shielded Adam and Eve from the devil, He could just as easily have shielded Job from the temptations of the devil, but He doesn’t. Instead, we see it is God drawing attention to Job and the devil being used to fulfil God’s purpose. This account confirms our earlier point that both good and evil are something we have to experience in God’s higher purpose of creating us in His image. Satan has a role to play in the process but it is always under God’s control. It’s also interesting that although God perceives Job has a spiritual problem Satan seems to be unaware of it or the fact He is being used by God to fulfil His purpose in Job’s life. He is so bent, wicked and twisted he simply sees it as an opportunity to inflict evil on Job and destroy Job’s relationship with God. We will later see the same blind spot revealed in the crucifixion of Jesus. While Satan saw the crucifixion as an opportunity to destroy Jesus, His death instead resulted in the salvation of the world (1 Corinthians 2:8). In the final analysis God will work things out to fulfil His purpose even if it means turning lemons into lemonade (Romans 8:28). In each case, God uses the devil to further His purpose of bringing salvation to humanity.

Spiritual Development more important than Physical Blessings

Meanwhile, while this heavenly conference is going on, poor old Job is blissfully unaware he is on the heavenly council’s agenda and has absolutely no control over events about to transpire. But as we shall see, God is in complete control of the situation.

V.9-10 “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. 10 “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land.

Couple of things we should note here. First, God is very much involved in the lives of His people in that He does bless those who are faithful to him both spiritually and physically. Spiritually He puts a hedge around his people to protect them from the wiles of the devil and his demons depending on circumstances although as we see in this case, that hedge can be removed. Then He can choose to bless us physically, although these blessing will take a backseat to spiritual implications as ultimately He is more concerned with our spiritual development than our physical well-being. And this is why as this story goes on to show, Christians are not immune from the evil in the world as it is part of the process of creating us in the image of God. This unfortunately is a message that fails to resonate with Christians in our modern materialistic societies where the false theology of the “prosperity gospel” has been peddled on unwary believers. The book of Job is a classic example of this principle in action. Job’s spiritual development takes precedence over his physical well-being. Throughout scripture, we don’t see too many examples of God’s people developing godly qualities by God showering them with physical blessings. As we witness in our own affluent world, wealth and success usually result in people forgetting God (Matthew 13:22). In fact, Jesus gives more instruction on the dangers of the misuse of money than about almost any other subject. Nearly two thirds of His parables deal with its use (Luke 15:11-32; 16:19-31). In contrast, the Bible is littered with examples of spiritual lessons being learned as a result of suffering and evil. Christians should always remember God is primarily concerned with His stated goal of creating us in His image, and this will be His main focus in His relationship with us. We will come back to this subject later.

Collateral Damage

V.11-12 But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” 12 The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. “Okay,” God says, “Do your worst!” What we see here is what we saw earlier in the garden, and that is, there will come a time of testing where the genuineness of our faith is tested and Satan is given permission by God to be His instrument in that test. But the test is only allowed to proceed based on three important criteria.

1) The test is always under God’s control and can only go as far as God allows.

V.12 “...but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” God is in control of the situation from start to finish.

We have the assurance God is in control, even if we fail like Peter did (John 13:38).

2) The test is only allowed to proceed when there is an important spiritual lesson to be learned by the individuals involved.

As the story unfolds, the spiritual lesson for Job is given precedence over his abundance of physical possessions including the physical lives of his children and servants. The rest of chapter one tells of Job losing not only his children and servants, but also all his physical possessions. They become collateral damage as events unfold. To fair-minded people, this appears completely unjust for which we don’t have an adequate explanation at this time. However, this is not the first or last time where we will not get an adequate explanation for other events that occur in scripture where we do not get a justification for what happens. However, this is also one of the primary lessons of this book, as we will see. But imagine poor Job in this situation. He is not privy to the scenario being played out in the heavenly realm, all he knows is he has lost everything in one day. He is sitting there dumbfounded at the sudden change of events with no explanation. The chapter finishes with the bewildering statement ***v.22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.***

Job is trying to reconcile the confusing signals he is receiving with his perception of how his relationship with God is supposed to work. In theory, he wants to believe in a just God who should be blessing him for being righteous, but all the physical signals are pointing to something very

different. "Here I am being blameless and upright, yet it appears God has hung me out to dry." From Job's perspective his relationship with God was based on a quid pro quo relationship.

Job 35:2 "...*'What profit is it to me, and what do I gain by not sinning?'*

Then to add insult to injury, God and Satan have another meeting, again without Job's knowledge.

V.3-6 *Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." 4 "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. 5 But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face." 6 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life."*

Again we see a limitation placed on how far Satan can go with this test.

V.7 *So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. 8 Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.*

Job is left contemplating his standing with God, scraping his boils while sitting on a dung heap. We aren't going to take the time for a blow by blow account of the rest of the story other than to say, not only does Job learn a great deal more about His relationship with God, but so do his wife and his friends, all of whom have a distorted concept of how their relationship with God is supposed to work. Job's wife wanted him to curse God, his three friends considered God as an ATM machine who dispensed good and evil depending on one's actions. So it is important to consider the spiritual component behind the test and this leads us to the third point on why the test is allowed to proceed.

3) No test is allowed to proceed without first of all going through the hands of a loving God. God did not deliberately draw Satan's attention to Job without a reason. It has to be looked at from the perspective of a loving Father who wants His children to mature into His "image." God as a loving Father knew exactly what Job needed in his spiritual development as one of His children and He looks at each of us in the same way. So there is always a higher spiritual purpose in the tests and temptations of life.

What exactly was Job's Spiritual Problem?

What we see through Job's reaction to his suffering is that he has a warped and immature relationship about God's nature and how He runs the universe (Job 32:1-2). As the story unfolds, Job first of all argues with his friends then turns his sights on God and it's not a pretty picture. Elihu sums up Job's long argument maintaining his righteous and integrity with his friends this way.

Job 34:5-6 *"Job says, 'I am innocent, but God denies me justice. 6 Although I am right, I am considered a liar, although I am guiltless, his arrow inflicts an incurable wound.'*

Job's words reveal the type of relationship he had with God. It was one based on fairness and justice, with an emphasis on right and wrong and an obligation on the part of God to bless him as a result of his obedience. Although God welcomes our obedience, He wants that obedience to flow from a personal relationship with Him, not from one's own puffed up righteousness or to be selfishly showered with blessings for our good behaviour. Jesus later confronted a similar attitude with the Jewish religious leaders who had a similar problem (Matthew 23:1-36). They related to God through the law and refused to relate personally to God when He stood face to face with them. When God does finally respond to Job, it's to remind him of his place in the scheme of things, and for his wrongful accusation of Him running an arbitrary and unjust universe (Job 40:2-8). He also sternly corrects Job's three friends for their false accusations against Job based on their faulty reward and punishment theology for some undisclosed sin (Job 42:7-9). They mistakenly thought they could trace evil back to God or human sin.

In His response to Job, God's argument centres on the two comprehensive claims He has on His creation. He is our Creator and He is our Father, not to be treated as an equal as Job seems to think. God's arguments revolve around His role as Creator and the Father in whom Job should

learn to put his trust and love. In His response, God as Creator, sometimes patiently and sometimes angrily goes to great lengths to remind Job who created and controls the universe (Job 38:1-41:34). The underlying message in God's argument is this; If I am the ONE (Creator) who has carefully designed and created the physical universe, which includes rolling out the heavens, of hanging the earth in space, and creating the animals like the fearsome creature Leviathan, then you should learn to trust and love the same ONE (Father) who is dealing with you and rolling out his spiritual creation of sons and daughters.

Through it all, God never directly answers Job's question of WHY this is happening to him. The only answer Job gets from God is WHO? Who he is dealing with, a loving Father who wants to share His existence with him. He wants Job to relate to Him based on love and trust, not on some business relationship where one favour is granted in return for another. It is only when confronted with this argument that Job finally changes his tone and reflects on his arrogance in accusing God of being unjust.

Job 42:1-3 Then Job replied to the LORD: 2 "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 3 You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

It's clear from this verse that God has a clearly defined plan and that plan is to make both Job and us in His image.

V.4 "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.'

In the face of this questioning, Job recognises how foolish he has been in his relationship with his Creator and Father. He had heard about God and formed his own distorted perceptions of what God was like. But now after this severe test, and in a face-to-face confrontation with God Himself, he came to realise where he stood in the scheme of things.

V.5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

So finally at the end of the story we see God's purpose in allowing Satan to test Job. It boils down to a simple lesson in faith and love, *Job didn't trust the One on whom his spiritual development rested*. He marvelled at God's creative ability with the physical creation, but lacked faith in God's creative ability with His spiritual creation. However as a result of allowing Satan access to Job under conditions entirely controlled by God, Job grew in spiritual maturity and the story ends with Job having a closer, healthier and more loving relationship with God than he had prior to his ordeal.

In the book of Job, we have the revealing example of how God uses Satan and his temptations to further his purpose of creating "man in His image." But the message to Job also applies to us. We don't always see the big picture from where we sit just as Job had no idea of what was going on at the heavenly council yet it had a dramatic impact on his life. This is the caution God delivers to Job in His scathing critique of Job's misguided worldview that God runs an arbitrary and unjust universe (Job 40:2-8). God reminds him of his place in the scheme of things. By confronting Job with the vast complexity of the world, God shows that simplistic models are an inadequate basis for understanding what He is doing in the world.

But it all ended for the better, both spiritually and physically. At the end of the story, God restored Job's physical blessings by blessing him with twice what he had before (Job 1:2-3; 42:10). But there was one exception; God did not double the number of his children. This would suggest there was a future time coming when those that had suffered collateral damage in the exchange would be raised to life again to see both their earthly and heavenly Father, thereby doubling the number of Job's children. But more importantly, on the spiritual level, after experiencing evil, we see a reconciliation happening between the two parties as Job has grown in spiritual maturity and has a better appreciation of WHO he is dealing with.

Now before we get too concerned about God allowing Satan to inflict a severe trial such as the one Job faced on you and me, let me reassure you. First, under normal circumstances, most of us have enough problems dealing with the normal cut and thrust of life without being subjected to this type of trial. Second, this type of severe test is usually associated with the great men of God, those God is dealing with directly throughout history, Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, Jesus, Peter, Paul, etc.

2 Corinthians 12:7 Or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

Most of us don't fall into this category of patriarch or apostle. Third, as we read at the beginning, God does put a spiritual hedge around his people and this hedge is only removed when it is in God's purpose to do so. In other words, like Job we have to learn to trust our heavenly Father with our spiritual development and He knows exactly what we need.

A footnote on the question of Evil

The question of evil is a difficult one for theologians to answer, and scripture doesn't give us a full explanation. However, looking at "evil" through the prism of "making man in His image" gives us a context to help us understand its purpose. And sometimes, as in the case of Job, God doesn't always give us the "WHY," He only gives us the "WHO" and asks us to trust Him with His spiritual creation. For instance, we aren't given an adequate explanation as to why Job's family became collateral damage in the ordeal. But one day, we will be given a suitable justification as to why this happened to them. Until then, like God's advice to Job, we need to be content with WHO, not WHY! What we can know is that in the end it will all make sense. This is a healthy perspective to have as mentioned above; we humans have a limited perspective from where we sit. We have a heavenly Father who knows us intimately and knows what is best for us spiritually in order to mould and shape us into His image. And like Job we need to learn to trust Him with this process.

Chapter 14 – A Living Hell

After our diversion into the subject of evil we now pick up the story again. Adam and Eve have been driven out of the garden and have embarked on a journey through life without God's direction. By choosing to be their own gods, mankind has been left to learn for himself what was depicted by the tree from which they had eaten, what was "good" and what was "evil" through hard experience. God, because of His decision to grant humanity free-will, honoured their choice and basically said, "Okay, if you want to live your life without the involvement of your Creator and Father then I will reluctantly remove myself from your lives and allow you to discover for yourselves through experimentation what is good and what is evil. But I warn you, you won't like the consequences." This however, did not mean God was not involved behind the scenes. They might have been wayward children, but they were still His wayward children and although they had rejected Him, not once in all that was about to unfold did God stop loving his children. And as God's actions demonstrated in "clothing" Adam and Eve after their sin, He had already planned the redemption of mankind through the shedding of blood.

A Living Hell

This might seem an unusual place to talk about this subject as it is usually associated with "The Judgment," but we now return to the subject of "hell." Scripture identifies four types of hell, but at this stage we are only going to talk about two of them. Most are familiar with the term "hell" used to identify the grave or the place of the dead - "Sheol"(Hebrew) or "Hades"(Greek). It's the hole in the ground into which dead bodies are placed.

The second hell is the one we alluded to earlier. This is the foreboding place mankind found himself when he was ejected from the garden after rejecting God's offer of living in a faithful relationship with Him. Remember we talked about the parable of the prodigal son, how the difficulties and trials of the lifestyle he chose were used to reconcile him with his father. The story of the prodigal is really the story of mankind. All of us to one degree or another have rejected and turned away from our heavenly Father in the same way as the prodigal did with his father. But as discussed earlier, our heavenly Father has engineered an environment whereby there are consequences to the choices we make. God then uses the negative consequences to bring his wayward children back to their senses with the goal of reconciling the two parties. It is through this prism that we should now view the human experience.

When we sit back and contemplate the normal course of human existence one has to conclude this life is a type of "hell." We have to contend with moral evil, the evil we bring on ourselves through our own flawed choices. Then there is natural evil, events like the aging process, sickness, disease, famines, disasters such as earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, mudslides etc. When news crews ask victims what it was like after the latest natural disaster, they use phrases like, "It was like a war zone!" or "It was a living hell!" It would be foolhardy to think the majority of mankind who has ever lived enjoyed the quality of life we take for granted in our modern western societies. The reality of daily life for the vast majority of mankind has been one of "quiet desperation" – "Where does my next meal come from? How do I provide for my family?" It was only two centuries ago that 90 per cent of the global population lived in extreme poverty. Fortunately that statistic has dropped to less than ten per cent today even though the world population has increased from less than one billion to about 7.5 billion.

In addition to poverty, history is littered with mind-numbing statistics of man's inhumanity to his fellow man. 620,000 Americans died in the four-year American Civil War. Six million Jews died in WW2 along with the other 60 million who perished. 700,000 Tutsi's died in 100 days mostly at the hands of machete wielding Hutu's in the Rwandan Civil War. Then there are the millions who have

died over the centuries as a result of natural disasters. In the middle Ages, the Black Death killed an estimated 40-50 million people in Europe and the population of Western Europe did not again reach its pre-1348 level until the beginning of the 16th century, 150 years later. Suffering was inescapable as up until just over a 150 years ago pain was endured without aspirin, novocaine or anaesthetic. This is what human existence descends to when God is left out of the picture. While there are many positive and good aspects to enjoy about life, after all, it was the tree of the knowledge of both good and evil, the overall conclusion even for those not directly affected by the wretched events mentioned above, has to be one of revulsion and dismay. It was designed this way to demonstrate to mankind what life is like when God is pushed out of our lives. In a sense, life without God could be described as a “living hell.” No one is excluded from this experience. Everyone, including Christians, goes through this experience because we all need to get a taste of what life is like without God.

And the question has to be asked, “Why would God allow us to go through this process unless he had a very good reason for allowing it?” We will see how all this ties together when we deal with the subject of the judgment at the end time. All we will say for the moment is, there is a reason why humanity is being given a taste of “hell,” that is, what life is like without the involvement of our God. However, this is not how the story ends. We talked earlier about the prodigal son. In much the same way as the prodigal, to his chagrin, learned what it was like to live life without the assurance of having his loving father around, he did return home and experienced the love and concern of his father. The story ends with him getting a taste of heaven – life with his father.

The World descends into Anarchy

With that background, we now return to the story of mankind living without God. Adam and Eve were driven from the garden and left to their own devices. It wasn't very long before man's now fallen nature began to manifest itself in its most violent form. Cain was jealous of his brother Abel's sacrifice and so took Abel's life (Genesis 4:1-8). And the sorry tale of man's inhumanity to his fellowman begins. History shows that civilizations go through stages of development. It begins with families, families grow into tribes and tribes eventually grow into nations. We can witness this progression even in today's world. Afghanistan is a present-day example of a nation grappling to move from a tribal stage to a nation stage. But this progression is usually associated with extreme violence as one tribe tries to dominate the others. Without the institutions of the state to maintain law and order, man reverts to the law of the jungle. It becomes the Wild West as individuals, families and tribes take matters into their own hands. That's why our western governments have devoted so much time and resources into building a functioning police force and army in Afghanistan, not only to protect from outside threats, but also to control local tribal infighting. But they're finding it is very difficult to overcome tribal loyalties. Despite their good intentions, it was quite naïve of our western leaders to think they can breeze into a tribal situation and in a few short years institute democratic reforms and unite a nation. Even our own Westminster or democratic experience shows this process can take hundreds of years to develop. In much of today's world we still live with the violent leftovers of European Colonial powers drawing political boundaries on maps without taking into consideration tribal matters on the ground.

Now the reason we mention all this is to give you some idea of the chaos the world had descended into prior to Noah's Flood. Usually when discussing the Flood, the question usually focuses on God's actions rather than man's. The question is asked, “Why would God do such a thing?” Rarely however is the question asked, to what level of depravity had man descended in order for God to take such drastic action? Well let's read how things had deteriorated without any type of restraint on humanity's actions

Genesis 6:5-8 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. 6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

Notice this was not an easy decision for God to make.

V.7 So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Remember, his was an age of anarchy, with no recognised government, laws, army or police force to regulate human behaviour. We are in the early stages of society's development where families and tribes vied for control. It was the Wild West, Hatfields vs. McCoys, only everyone is doing it. For emphasis, the same sad conclusion is repeated in verses 11-13.

Genesis 6:11-13 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. 12 God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 13 So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.

Before we judge God too harshly, we need to remember how we as civilised people have reacted to terrorist groups in our own time. There wouldn't be too many people who would say the world isn't better off without the likes of Osama Bin Laden, Al Qaida, the Taliban or ISIS. We expect our governments to take action against these crazies who go around chopping off their victim's heads, blowing up innocent people or flying planes into high-rise buildings. It was only a few short decades ago we saw one of our most civilised societies massacre six million Jews along with the other 60 million who died in the conflict. No one in their right minds reacted in moral outrage as the Allies fought to destroy this source of wickedness. And one could make a good argument about getting rid of the Nazi hierarchy rather than allowing 60 million people to perish. Yet when it comes to God taking the appropriate action to prevent similar evils, we, sitting in our safe and secure leafy suburbs question His judgment. But imagine for a moment if the atrocities we recently observed with ISIS was the norm in pre-flood society. Mankind had become so wicked and depraved they were acting like wild beasts. It would have been a living hell especially for the weak and vulnerable.

God just cannot stand by and let wickedness continue until it reaches its ultimate conclusion, destruction! Destruction is the devil's goal (Revelation 9:11). We have Jesus' statement from the New Testament that confirms He will intervene to stop humanity from destroying itself at the end time.

Mark 13:20 "If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

God's purpose will stand, even if it means taking drastic action such as the flood and starting over with Noah's family. In the biblical record we have other examples when cities or nations became so depraved that God had to take drastic action to bring the wickedness to an end. This was also the case of the inhabitants who lived in the land of Canaan, the land God had promised to Abraham's descendants. It is another of those instances where God is criticised for aiding the Israelites in wiping out these inhabitants. But we get an insight into why this occurred in God's promise to Abraham.

Genesis 15:16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

God could see where the depravity and wickedness of the Amorites was heading and He would have to take drastic action to rid the land of this evil, which included sacrificing their children to idols (Leviticus 20:1-3; Deuteronomy 9:5-6). It's a similar situation with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The male inhabitants of these two cities had become so sexually depraved that heterosexuals were no longer safe and were targets of violent gang rape (Genesis 19:1-10; Jude 1:7). Only three were considered righteous enough in this whole region to escape the destruction,

Lot and his two daughters (Genesis 18:20-33). Paul uses similar language to describe the resistance of the Jews to the acceptance of Jesus Christ and the Gospel message.

1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, 16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

God will only tolerate wickedness to a certain extent, before stepping in to prevent it from going any further or when it is contrary to His divine purposes. But those who perished in Noah's flood, the Amorites, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and even the Jews who rejected Jesus will take with them the evil record of their time on earth and as we will see when we come to the subject of the judgment this experience will not be wasted (Matthew 11:23-24). So it is with great reluctance and regret, that God initiates the destruction of the wicked, but He only does so after giving the evil inhabitants a significant period of time to change their ways (Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5). This is a pattern that will repeat itself before God launches subsequent attacks on wickedness in the future. He sends Moses and Aaron to warn Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21-23); prophets to both Israel and Judah (2 Kings 17:13); Jonah to Nineveh (Jonah 1:1); John the Baptist to the Jews (Matthew 3:6-8); and the two witnesses before the destruction of Babylon prior to Christ's return (Revelation 11:1-6).

But this episode was just the first of a long series of man's futile attempt to rule himself. Depravity was the result when anarchy ruled prior to the flood. Down through the millennia, humanity has experimented with many different forms of government only to see each one of them end up in the same place – in "Babel" or confusion (Genesis 11:9). Hence the biblical term "Babylon." Babylon is the biblical term used to describe any form of authority that opposes God (Revelation 18:1-3). The first mention of an organised government in opposition to God was formed by Nimrod who built the Tower of Babel on the Plains of Shinar (Genesis 11). God confused their language to prevent another descent into wickedness.

Genesis 11:5-7 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 6 The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.

Since then humanity has developed a whole series of "isms" to describe these different forms of human inspired governments – Despotism, Fascism, Imperialism, Socialism, Communism, Capitalism. To the "isms" we can add, Dictatorship, Democracy, Monarchy, and Theocracy. Even democracy, which Winston Churchill famously described as the worst form of government, except for all the others, will also end in chaos. We are presently witnessing the unravelling of our democratic institutions as corruption, nepotism, and greed reign in the corridors of power. History unfortunately is not a story of gradual human improvement; rather it is the story of the past, present and future power of evil that manifests itself in opposition to God's good purpose for humanity.

But again, this process has to be viewed from the perspective of what life is like without God. When it is all said and done, no one will ever be able to stand up and contend with God and say, "Well if only you had allowed us a little more time we could have come up with a better system of government and managed to rule ourselves." No, the record is very clear. Mankind is incapable of ruling himself, of being his own god, and we have a host of witnesses down through the ages that can testify to that fact. Life without God is a "living Hell."

Chapter 15 – The Wrath of God

Mankind has rejected God's invitation to live in relationship with Him and instead chosen to live independently of God. This created a painful rift or separation in the relationship between God and humanity. The decision resulted in a lot of unnecessary pain and suffering as humanity descended into such a state of depravity and wickedness that God had to take the drastic step of practically annihilating mankind with the Flood.

As this would seem to be an extreme decision for God to take, it wouldn't be right to leave this sorry situation without saying something about the wrath of God. It is similar stories like the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah and other accounts in the Old Testament that give people the impression God is just waiting for us to step out of line so he can zap us. From a human perspective it would seem His wrath was unjustified and God is acting from a vindictive desire to get even, to pay back and even destroy those opposed to Him. This and other misleading concepts have developed over the centuries that can give a misrepresentation of the true nature of God. There is the subject of hell where many people, including Christians, continue to view God as this harsh judge who hates sinners and can't wait to punish them for their wrongdoing. When some natural disaster or calamity occurs some misguided televangelists claim God is punishing that particular city or nation because of its wickedness. Then there is the "good cop, bad cop" routine where God the Father is so angry with sinners, He had to send Jesus to clean up humanity so He could accept us. Jesus is there to placate the Father's wrath so He can present us to the Father, but only after we smarten up and repent of our sinful ways. In all these scenarios, God comes off looking like an arbitrary tyrant who is hell-bent on punishing the wicked.

God's actions are always governed by Love

We have already addressed some of the issues surrounding these events like the flood, as to why God acted in a particular way, but we need to return to the question of God's character to understand this subject of God's wrath or anger. Right from the start, we should acknowledge one thing about God's character, and that is, He is a holy God who hates sin, wickedness and evil, and these things make Him angry.

Psalms 5:5 The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong.

But is it a bad characteristic to hate sin? Would we prefer a God who is not holy, not just, not righteous, one who doesn't hate sin, wickedness and evil? This is not a human judge we are dealing with whose judgment can be clouded by human tendencies such as favouritism, prejudice, bigotry, or partiality. This is the judge of righteousness and truth whose judgement is always determined by another of God's characteristics and that is "love." As we saw earlier, the one characteristic that best describes God is "love." The apostle John expressed it in the simple sentence, "**God is love**" (1 John 4:8). So the dominant principle that governs everything God does flows from this one overriding characteristic. If God is creating, it's for the purpose of love. If He is redeeming, it's for the purpose of love. If He is correcting, it's for the purpose of love. In the same sense, we can only conclude that any display of God's wrath is also an expression of God's love as He responds with justice to an injustice. It would be a mistake to separate the wrath of God from the love of God. So in those cases where we witness an expression of God's anger towards humanity, it has to be in reaction to some extreme wickedness, some injustice or hurt that opposes what God ultimately stands for, loving relationships! Instead of wanting to pay back, get even or destroy, God's expression of anger is to restore order, to liberate the oppressed, and to heal relationships.

For example let's look at God's angry reaction to Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden. What we see in God's anger with Adam and Eve is a natural anger that flows from a loving parent when they see their children doing something that will harm themselves or others. Their foolish decision had set

humanity on a course that could only result in pain, suffering and death, events diametrically opposed to “loving relationships.” Which of us as parents have not reacted with anger after we have done our best to protect and educate our children only to watch them do something stupid that caused them some physical, emotional or spiritual harm. You would have to wonder about the genuineness of the love of parents who didn’t react with anger – it’s a natural and healthy response of loving parents. God is no different. If He did not oppose sin and evil He too would be an irresponsible parent.

His anger in the garden was also directed at the devil. His anger again stems from “love” as the devil was attempting to destroy God’s good purpose for His children. In effect, God’s reaction is a divine “no”; “No, my purpose will stand, I’m not going to let you destroy what I have planned for my children! And whatever it takes, even if it costs the life of my beloved Son we will bear that cost.” It is in reaction to a threat to what He has planned for his children that the anger of God is aroused. We saw God’s drastic intervention earlier in the examples of Noah’s flood and with Sodom and Gomorrah. We saw His decision to intervene was in response to the violence, perversion and wickedness that permeated their societies. Again, behaviour that was totally contrary to God’s characteristic of love. There were victims to these evils and God will only tolerate evil so long before intervening (Matthew 24:22). God in love acts with both divine justice and divine mercy. We are not just talking about dishing justice out to the wicked, but justice also for the weak and vulnerable who have been exploited by the wicked.

Isaiah 11:4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

Justice has two sides; it punishes the wicked and brings relief to the oppressed. If God’s justice is biased, it is towards the poor, the defenceless and the oppressed (Psalms 146:7-9).

This is why justice in the hands of a loving God is not something to be approached with dread, but rather a blessing to be received with thanksgiving. In extreme cases, as in the story of the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah, God in love, determined the world was better off without the influence of these depraved and wicked children. Events had to be arrested in much the same way our modern civilised governments respond to the likes of ISIS and other terrorist organisations. The inhabitants of Syria and Iraq are much better off without the wicked influence and cruelty of ISIS. So rather than viewing God as a heartless, vengeful and mean God ready to zap us the minute we step out of line, we need to regard Him as a loving parent who loves His children, and even when dispensing justice, He does so out of love. The fact God does get angry with us demonstrates He does love us and will not let us get away with our self-destructive and inhumane ways.

This anger, however, doesn’t mean God stops loving us any more than we stop loving our children. And even though it was the physical end for the wicked in the time of Noah, and Sodom and Gomorrah, it doesn’t mean this is the end of the story for them, because Jesus drops in this cryptic statement in Matthew 10:15.

Matthew 10:15 Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Why would Christ drop in this statement unless he has something planned for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah on judgment day? We will come back to this statement later when we look at the subject of the Judgment. It was this same Jesus who rebukes his disciples for wanting to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village that didn’t put out the welcome mat for Jesus (Luke 9:51-56). This doesn’t exactly sound like a God who gets some sick pleasure in seeing the wicked being dropped into burning hellfire. It was this same Jesus who admonishes us to “Love our enemies.”

Luke 6:35-36 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

It would be the height of hypocrisy for Jesus to tell us to love our enemies, and then for Him to turn around and destroy his enemies, the wicked, without an opportunity for repentance. If we are honest, it is only because of his willingness to do this that we stand here today as forgiven sinners, because at one stage we too were enemies of God (Colossians 1:21). So it is highly likely the same grace that has been extended to us will one day be extended to all the enemies of God including the victims of the flood and the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah if we understand Matthew 10 correctly.

Jesus voluntarily submits Himself to God's punishment on the wicked

Just in case we need additional proof that God loves His children and always acts out of love for them. Why would this God who supposedly acts like an arbitrary tyrant decide to offer Himself on the hideous cross to pay the death penalty required for the sins perpetuated by the cruel and perverted inhabitants of the world of Noah's flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the rest of the billions who have ever lived? This is the same God we have hurt and offended with our emphatic "no" to His loving invitation to dwell in love with Him. Yet what does He do? He demonstrates He still loves us by taking our sin along with its guilt and consequences on Himself.

Romans 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Jesus absorbs the wrath of God's anger towards sinners by submitting Himself voluntarily to God's punishment on the wicked. It is this fact that separates Christianity from all other religions. The gods of other religions require their followers to pay for their own offenses. In contrast, the Christian God looks over the judgment bench, pronounces us guilty and deserving of the death sentence, then gets up, walks around to the other side of the bench and pays the death penalty in our stead. A holy God requires the death penalty to be paid to atone for our sins, and then makes a sacrifice on our behalf. The love of God and the wrath of God fuse upon the cross. He does this because "God is love."

Jesus came to reveal the true nature of the Father

This simple statement applies to all three persons of the Trinity. The fact part of Jesus' mission was to reveal the true nature of the Father to us implies humanity has a distorted view of God and this included how God executes justice (John 14:9). We saw earlier how the patriarch Job's ordeal was designed to correct Job and his three friends' inaccurate view of God. This is a common problem usually stemming from the mistake of "making God in our image" rather than the other way around. One of these distortions is to think Jesus smiles on us while the Father stands in the background frowning at us, the old "good cop, bad cop" routine. To believe this effectively does great violence to the unity concept of the Trinity as well as two other important characteristics of God, justice and grace. In this scenario, the Father is the God of justice while Jesus is the God of grace. Yet this same Jesus who came to reveal the Father also said, "***I and the Father are one***" (John 10:30). We cannot separate the actions of Jesus from the actions of the Father and the Holy Spirit. So if we want to get an accurate understanding of the nature of the Father we need to study the life of Jesus Christ.

However, this unfortunate teaching of the "good cop, bad cop" routine has led to a warped concept of God. On the one side we have the fire and brimstone crowd who view God through the prism of justice to the detriment of grace. On the other hand, libertarians minimize the justice of God and over-emphasize the grace of God. Both extremes lead to a warped concept of God. If we regard him only as a God of justice then our relationship with Him is based on that concept alone. If we regard him only as a God of grace then our relationship with Him is based on that concept alone. While both of these virtues are important characteristics of God's nature, both are governed by the overriding characteristic of God's nature, love. Notice how these three characteristics of God, love, justice and grace are linked in John 3:16-17 and are an expression of love

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world (justice), but to save the world through him (grace).

Both justice and grace are a manifestation of and are governed by the love of God. Whether God is acting in His capacity as Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Creator, Sovereign, Judge, Savior, He is always acting from the perspective of love. When we understand this we can better comprehend the true nature of God.

So to think there is some division in the Trinity is patently false, there is no “good cop, bad cop” routine going on. God the Father is opposed to evil; Jesus is opposed to evil, the Holy Spirit is opposed to evil and they love us enough not to let us get away with our sin. God has a fierce, burning passion of love that is directed at those things that threaten to destroy His purpose. And the most loving example of that burning passion was when Jesus offered Himself as the sacrifice to absorb the wrath of God towards the sins of humanity in what became known as the “Passion of Christ.”

So we need to be very careful we aren’t too quick to judge God’s motives in his dealing with his children – He always acts from a motive of divine love even if it appears from a human perspective His wrath is unjustified. Instead we need to take a leaf from the book of Job and recognise we don’t see all the facts from where we sit and we need to learn to trust the one who has the responsibility of turning rebellious sinners into His holy loving children. There is always a loving reason why God acts the way He does.

With the last few chapters we have dealt with mostly negative news; the devil, the tragedy in the garden, and the rebellion of mankind against God. But we need not despair. Because running parallel to the bad news associated with mankind’s rejection of God is the good news of what God is doing to restore the severed relationship. Next time we come to that important passage of scripture, Genesis 12 that spells out God’s plan for mankind’s redemption.

Chapter 16 – Covenant Relationships

Up to this point in our story, things have gone downhill for humanity after our rejection of a relationship with God. We see the dark side of man's nature exposed for all its ugliness; we had the tragic events in the garden, Cain murdering his brother Abel, the descent into anarchy of the pre-flood society and their destruction, the rebellion at the Tower of Babel on the Plains of Shinar and the confusion of the languages. God's contact with mankind through this period has been with a few select individuals.

God calls Abram

However, now at this point, we see God taking an important step to restore the broken relationship in response to His creation's "no." He chooses a nomad called Abram and promised him that he would be the father of a great people if he did what God asked him to do.

Genesis 12:1 *The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.*

First thing we should notice about the story of Abram is, it is God who takes the initiative. This is a God who doesn't wait around moping, waiting for humanity to show some sort of contrition before he responds. Throughout his dealing with humanity's redemption, it is God who always takes the initiative.

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

What we see is a God who loves his children so much he takes the initiative even though He is the one wronged and is best characterised by the New Testament phrase, "**the good shepherd goes searching for the lost sheep**" (Luke 15:1-7). God makes two important promises to Abram.

Genesis 12:2-3 *"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

The first is, he would become the father of a great nation. The great nation refers to what would later become the Hebrew nation, otherwise known as the Israelite or the Jewish nation. Abram is referred to as being a Hebrew in Genesis 14:13. More importantly though is the second promise made to Abram, that through him, "**all peoples on earth will be blessed.**" This promise, made some 1500 years before this promise became a reality, is much more inclusive and is a spiritual promise the benefits of which would be to all the families of the earth. God's promise was referring to that distant descendant of Abram, Jesus Christ whose sacrifice for the sins of the world would be a blessing to all mankind (John 3:16). To be able to engineer events hundreds of years before they actually come to fruition is testimony to God's design behind the passage of history and His commitment to fulfil His intended purpose. God sealed these two promises by ratifying a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15) and it was reaffirmed in Genesis 17.

Covenant Agreements

Covenants play a central role in the biblical story of salvation. It is through the use of covenants that God re-establishes contact with humanity with the intent of reconciling the two alienated parties and establishing His kingdom within estranged humanity. In much the same way a marriage agreement or covenant is used to bind together a bride and groom, it is the instrument used to bind two parties together in a union, in this case, God and Abraham. The issue at the centre of both the marriage covenant and the various covenants God initiates with humanity is faithfulness (Malachi 2:14). As we saw earlier, it was a lack of faith or trust in their Creator and Father which led humanity into sin, so these covenant agreements were designed to lead people back to trusting their God. The other important theme that permeates all of God's covenants with mankind is the issue of God's grace (Deuteronomy 9:5-6). It reaches its glorious culmination with the shedding of Christ's blood that initiated the New Covenant of grace. Reconciliation between

the two parties simply could not happen if it were not for the grace of God as humanity could not from his side, free himself from the penalty of sin, spiritual death.

In addition, each party to the covenant promises to fulfil specific conditions or obligations they had agreed to in advance. We will look at seven of these conditions that make up a covenant.

1) The parties involved.

2) The type of covenant, conditional or unconditional; did man have to do anything to initiate the covenant?

3) Blessings or promise associated with the covenant; temporal (pertaining to this life) or eternal (life to come).

4) Entry into the covenant.

5) Sign of the covenant.

6) Status of covenant; in effect or terminated.

7) Dietary conditions; open or restricted.

The first recorded covenant is the one God made with Noah after the flood.

Genesis 9:8-17 Then God told Noah and his sons, 9 “I hereby confirm my covenant with you and your descendants, 10 and with all the animals that were on the boat with you—the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals—every living creature on earth. 11 Yes, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again will floodwaters kill all living creatures; never again will a flood destroy the earth.” 12 Then God said, “I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. 13 I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. 14 When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, 15 and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. 16 When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth.” 17 Then God said to Noah, “Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth.”

This section of scripture gives us the answers to most of these seven conditions.

Covenant between God and Noah. (See chart below).

Covenants Between God and Man

	Noah Gen 9:8-17	Abraham Gen 12:1-3 Gen 17:1-22	Moses Ex 19:3-8, Deut 4:1-14, Deut 5:1-32	Jesus Jer 31:31-34, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Cor 11:23- 26, 2 Cor 3:1-17, Heb 1- 10
Parties to Covenant	God/Noah, descendants, every living creature (Gen 9:8-10)			
Type of Covenant Conditional/ Unconditional	Unconditional Man didn't have to do anything			
Type of Blessing (Promise) Temporal/Eternal	Temporal – no more floods (Gen 9:11)			
Entry into Covenant	No Condition			
Signs of Covenant	Rainbow (Gen 9:12-16)			
Status of Covenant Still in effect or terminated	In Effect (Gen 9:11, 15-16)			
Dietary Conditions	All food – no restrictions (Gen 9:3)			
Additional Comments				

Let me ask a very important question. When we look at this covenant, what was the main point of the agreement? Think of it this way. Put yourself in the shoes of someone who had just witnessed the annihilation of mankind. What would be your number one concern? That it would never happen again, right? The most important thing about the covenant was the promise God made that it would never happen again. We will see that God's promise is the most important aspect of each of the covenants.

Covenant between God and Abraham. (See chart below).

Covenants Between God and Man

	Noah Gen 9:8-17	Abraham Gen 12:1-3 Gen 17:1-22	Moses Ex 19:3-8, Deut 4:1-14, Deut 5:1-32	Jesus Jer 31:31-34, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Cor 11:23- 26, 2 Cor 3:1-17, Heb 1- 10
Parties to Covenant	God/Noah, descendants, every living creature (Gen 9:8-10)	God/Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:7)		
Type of Covenant Conditional/ Unconditional	Unconditional – Man didn't have to do anything	Conditional – on Faith (Gen 15:6, Rom 4, Gal 3:6-9)		
Type of Blessing (Promise) Temporal/Eternal	Temporal – no more floods (Gen 9:11)	Temporal and Eternal – “Great Nation” and “All nations blessed through you” – referring to Jesus (Gen 12:1-3)		
Entry into Covenant	No Condition	Faith (Gen 15:6)		
Signs of Covenant	Rainbow (Gen 9:12-16)	Circumcision (Gen 17:11)		
Status of Covenant Still in effect or terminated	In Effect (Gen 9:11, 15-16)	In Effect (Gen 17:7)		
Dietary Conditions	All food – no restrictions (Gen 9:3)	No change		
Additional Comments		Foreshadowed the New Covenant (Gal 3:29)		

Let's ask that very important question again. What was the main point of the agreement? If you were Abraham, what was important to him? Again it was the promise made by God, the third line in our diagram, “Great Nation” and “All nations blessed through you.” In another important precedent, what did Abraham have to do to enter into the covenant? He just had to believe God's promise, in other words, faith, or trust God at His word. This goes back to our lack of trust displayed in the garden when we rejected our Creator and Father. Abraham became the father of the faithful because of his willingness to trust God at His word (Romans 4:16). God's Covenant with Abraham was reaffirmed with Abraham's descendants, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 17:19; Exodus 2:24; Leviticus 26:42). Things quietly bubble along for another 400 years or so in which time through some cunning manoeuvring by Jacob's children, the descendants of Abraham end up in Egypt as slaves.

Archetypes

Now we are introduced to another important biblical principle, the principle of “archetypes” or “prototypes.” We will see events occurring in the history of Israel that are prototypes of more

important events to occur later in the story of redemption. The bible doesn't exactly use that term. It uses terms like, "shadow" and "reality" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Colossians 2:17, Hebrews 10:1).

Colossians 2:17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

For example, the events surrounding the exodus of the Israelites being delivered out of Egypt are concepts and prototypes which will be used to help us understand the role of the Messiah who was to come hundreds of years later. For instance, symbols associated with the story of the Passover are terms that are used much later to describe the promised Messiah. The spilt blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts signalled the death angel to "Passover" that dwelling place inhabited by Israelites. The Lamb of God had to be sacrificed to allow God the option of "passing over" the sins of the world (John 1:29) and introduced God's concept of "grace" (Romans 5:15). The unleavened bread and the wine consumed by the Israelites with the cooked Passover lamb signified the body and the blood of the slain Messiah given for the redemption of the world.

Another prototype is the theme of sacrifice that began back in the garden (Genesis 3:21). It is graphically portrayed here in the Passover events, the sacrificial system introduced as part of the Mosaic Covenant and the final culmination in the sacrifice of the Son of God for the sins of the world. These events cast a long shadow into the future that eventually would result in the "shadow caster," Jesus Christ releasing humanity from the bondage of sin. The Old Covenant looks forward in anticipation, while the New Covenant looks back in fulfilment. Or to look at it from God's perspective of eternal time, the shadow was cast backwards to these events from the glorious light of grace from the Man on the cross, slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). When we get to the New Covenant we will see the shadow completely disappears in the intense light of God's grace toward humanity (John 1:14; 12:46-47).

This aspect of "archetypes" is one of the amazing aspects of the Bible. To see these themes and concepts repeated throughout the scriptural record over a period of a thousand years by different authors is testimony to God's purpose and design underpinning scripture. So as we look at the circumstances leading up to the covenant delivered to Moses at Mt. Sinai what we begin to see is a framework being carefully constructed to prepare us for the redeeming work of the Saviour of Israel and the entire world. Some have even described the Mosaic Covenant as the womb for the birth of the Messiah.

Chapter 17 – The Exodus

Now we come to another important step in God’s plan of redemption for mankind. Last chapter we looked at the covenants God established with Noah and Abraham. Up to this point in the story God has been dealing with select individuals, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now He chooses to expand His plan to include a nation. His choice of a nation is interesting, as it was not one of great power and influence, but rather an oppressed people living as slaves under the domination of one of the major powers of the time, Egypt.

Exodus 3:7 The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

God, as He promised to Abraham earlier, was going to make this poor oppressed nation into a mighty nation that reached its zenith during the later rule of King David and Solomon. But this verse also gives us another insight into God’s character. What we see here is a God who hears the suffering of those who are oppressed (Psalms 9:9). He doesn’t always intervene to stop this oppression as He did in this case. Rather He is a God who joins people in their suffering. It is faith in a God who suffers with them that has given hope to many oppressed people down through the ages. So we can take heart from the fact God does hear our cries and although He may not directly intervene to change a situation, He will join with us to help us cope with our distress. But there was also a dark side to Israel’s nature, as Jesus would go on to say, both Nineveh, Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented in dust and ashes long ago if the same message had been performed in their cities (Matthew 12:41). God chose Israel despite their stiff-necked, recalcitrant and rebellious nature in order to demonstrate what He had planned for all humanity with His future covenant of love and grace.

God’s choice to lead the rescue of His chosen nation was also an interesting decision. He chose an 80-year-old criminal on the run hiding in the desert. He had a promising career in Pharaoh’s palace before he decided to kill an Egyptian who was beating up on a Hebrew slave. God’s “Hall of Fame” is littered with dubious characters of similar background to Moses. Again this is testimony to God’s mercy towards sinners and His ability to work with those who are willing to put their faith and trust in His hands. After some reluctance on Moses’ part and God’s concession to allow Moses’ brother Aaron to accompany him, God sets about delivering His chosen people from the oppression of the Egyptians.

Exodus 3:8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites

God unleashed a series of ten plagues on the Egyptians before Pharaoh allowed Moses to lead God’s people out of Egypt. The use of supernatural plagues was indicative of the superstitious nature of peoples at that time. The fact that Egyptian magicians were able to imitate Aaron’s miracles shows the forces of darkness were very much a part of pagan worship (Exodus 7:8-13). The Israelites were also infected with this obsession with the supernatural as was evident later as they demanded Aaron build them a golden calf (Exodus 32:1-4). It was because of this superstitious culture that God employed supernatural means to free his people. He wanted to demonstrate to both Israelites and Egyptians who really controls the spiritual realm. Finally after the death angel plague, Pharaoh relents and releases the Israelites. Moses then led them through the Red Sea and they arrive at Mt. Sinai.

The Mosaic Covenant

God had planned a special event for the Israelite nation at this location. He would establish a covenant with them to guide them into becoming His special people. I mentioned in the preface of this book we would spend some time looking in more detail at the Old and New Covenants. This emphasis is a result of my own church background. I grew up in a church, which as a result of a

failure to understand the vast spiritual differences between the Mosaic and the New Covenant, led to a distorted view of God and a legalistic approach to Christianity. We observed the seventh-day Sabbath as well as other aspects of the Mosaic Covenant such as clean and unclean foods. Fortunately, due to the grace of God, and a change of leadership, our church suffered through an extended painful period as we were dragged kicking and screaming from our legalistic and self-righteous ways to enjoying the liberating freedom of the grace of God. Much of what follows about this section on the Covenants is in response to that painful journey with the hope others who may also be steeped in legalism will make the transition to grace.

As an oppressed people in Egypt, the Israelites had no government structure, no codified laws, and no recognised form of worship. They were basically a rabble of an estimated 2-3 million people crossing a hostile environment. Some structure needed to be introduced in order to avoid the potential chaos. We witnessed what happened in the recent Iraq war after the coalition invaded and stripped the country of its infrastructure without having a suitable replacement. This covenant was unique in that it allowed for the opportunity to install a structure where both the administrative and spiritual aspects of government were pulling in the same direction. It was a theocracy under the divine guidance of God with Moses as the mediator between God and the nation. There was no separation of church and state that we find in our western democracies. In this particular case, Moses headed up the administrative side (prophet) and Aaron the spiritual (priest), but in many respects the two branches worked together in a complementary fashion. A third foundation was added later with the establishment of a kingly line under King David in Jerusalem. The amount of detail that God provided that went into the establishment of the covenant also highlighted the lack of skills necessary for the normal functioning of a nation. They were not called the “children of Israel” for nothing. The use of the word “children” emphasised the level of maturity of the people in both administrative and spiritual matters.

But the covenant established through Moses with the children of Israel was much more than a structure of government. The main reason for this is captured in Exodus 6 at the beginning of the Exodus.

Exodus 6:6-8 “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7 I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. 8 And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’”

God has not deviated from His purpose of creating a holy people with whom He can come and dwell. Earlier we were talking about the superstitious nature of people at that time and it was common for people to believe in many gods. God was establishing with Israel the fact that He was going to be their special God and they were going to be his chosen people. Of course the Egyptians and surrounding nations had their own pagan gods that were peculiar to them but God through the plagues he unleashed on the Egyptians and what was to transpire in the Israelite’s trek to the Promised Land was to show there was no god as powerful as the God of Israel.

Despite the fact Israel was now God’s special nation, and He had revealed Himself to them as their God, this was the first step in the reconciliation process. As such the covenant was designed to maintain an arm’s length relationship between a holy God and His people. It is not until we get to the New Covenant that Jesus introduces concepts of God being a Father in the familial sense or uses the affectionate term, “Abba.” The term Father is only used of God 15 times in the entire Old Testament while it is used 165 times in just the four Gospels in the New Testament. When Father is used in the Old Testament, its use is more in the corporate sense like the Father of the nation. So in a sense God is still at a distance from his people. He is more like “God above them” than “God with us” as in the case of Jesus (Emmanuel) in the New Testament and “God in us” as

Christians born of the Holy Spirit. This arm's length relationship was reaffirmed when God warned Moses to make sure the children of Israel were not to approach the mountain where God was to speak to them (Exodus 19:10-13), and the guidelines concerning the priesthood and the tabernacle. God was only to be approached by Moses or the priesthood – they became the mediators between God and man. Another one of those archetypes that was later to be replicated in the New Covenant era.

But there was a reason for this arm's length relationship.

Exodus 19:23 Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, 'Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.'"

There was this huge gulf between a holy, righteous God and a sinful people and ne'er the twain would meet until the people were proclaimed holy. And then as if to remind the people of this great gulf, God delivers the Ten Commandments along with the other 603 commands that make up the Torah, as a code of behaviour to govern the Israelites in becoming His holy people. This is in line with God's promise to, **"take you as my own people, and I will be your God"** to which He adds, **"Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."** (Leviticus 19:2).

In effect, this is just another way of reiterating His purpose to "make man in our image." And in order to encourage them to obey his commandments He promises to bless them for obedience and curse them for disobedience (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28). Sometimes the words covenants and law are confused but the blessings and curses is another one of those areas that differentiate between covenants and laws. Laws only work as a negative motivation as a deterrent to crime while God's covenant with Israel had the added positive aspect of rewarding obedient behaviour.

Now this was all fine in theory, but what was the problem with this covenant? What we see here is a repetition of the scenario that played out in the Garden of Eden. As mentioned earlier, faithfulness and allegiance is very important to God. Now, with the introduction of the Mosaic Covenant, the allegiance of a whole nation is being put to the test. But was mankind any better at obedience now than it was in the Garden of Eden? And was the law, which was part of the covenant capable of making people holy? We have to go to the New Testament to find the answer.

Romans 5:20 The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase.

No, it was introduced to magnify the vast gulf between a holy God and a sinful people.

Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

The law was introduced to highlight sin and magnify our sinfulness. It is only when we acknowledge how sinful we really are, and our helplessness in becoming holy through our own means that we will look to the Saviour of sinners.

Galatians 3:23-25 (JB Phillips) Before the coming of faith we were all imprisoned under the power of the Law, with our only hope of deliverance the faith that was to be shown to us. Or, to change the metaphor, the Law was like a strict governess in charge of us until we went to the school of Christ and learned to be justified by faith in him. Once we had that faith we were completely free from the governess's authority.

Just as today's secular laws bring a certain amount of order to a society, so the Mosaic covenant did the same for Israel when they obeyed them. But just as our secular laws haven't brought about a perfect society, so the Mosaic Law failed in bringing perfection, but as we just read, this was not its intention. It was simply a stopgap measure until the real way of achieving holiness was introduced that was to come later. The answer to humanity's problems is not going to come about as a result of more laws, as laws are incapable of changing the heart and this is where the real problem lies. It will not be until the New Covenant is introduced that the heart problem is addressed. Next time we will look at the Mosaic Covenant in relation to the other covenants God instituted with man.

Chapter 18 – Covenant Failure

Moses and the children of Israel arrive at Mt. Sinai where God takes another important step in his plan of redemption, to restore the relationship with mankind. He establishes a covenant with the children of Israel to guide them into becoming His special people. The main purpose of the covenant was outlined in Exodus 6.

Exodus 6:6-8 “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7 I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.

So outlined once again is God’s determination to prepare a holy people within whom He can come and dwell. God started the process of reconciliation with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but now expands the relationship to include a nation.

So let’s take a closer look at the conditions of the Mosaic covenant in the same way we looked at the earlier covenants.

Covenant between God and Israel. (See chart below).

Covenants Between God and Man

	Noah Gen 9:8-17	Abraham Gen 12:1-3 Gen 17:1-22	Moses Ex 19:3-8, Deut 4:1-14, Deut 5:1-32	Jesus Jer 31:31-34, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Cor 11:23- 26, 2 Cor 3:1-17, Heb 1-10
Parties to Covenant	God/Noah, descendants, every living creature (Gen 9:8-10)	God/Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:7)	God/Moses and the Nation of Israel (Ex 19:3-6)	
Type of Covenant Conditional/ Unconditional	Unconditional – Man didn't have to do anything	Conditional - on Faith (Gen 15:6, Rom 4, Gal 3:6-9)	Conditional - on Obedience (Ex 19:5-8, Deut 4:13, 5:32)	
Type of Blessing (Promise) Temporal/Eternal	Temporal – no more floods (Gen 9:11)	Temporal and Eternal – “Great Nation” and “All nations blessed through you” – referring to Jesus (Gen 12:1-3)	Temporal – “Blessed in the city, blessed in the country” etc. (Lev 26, Deut 28)	
Entry into Covenant	No Condition	Faith (Gen 15:6)	Circumcision (Ex 12:43-51, Lev 12:1-3)	
Signs of Covenant	Rainbow (Gen 9:12-16)	Circumcision (Gen 17:11)	Sabbath (Ex 31:12-17, Ez 20:12, 20)	
Status of Covenant Still in effect or terminated	In Effect	In Effect (Gen 17:7)	Terminated – even though it was an everlasting covenant, it was terminated because Israel did not keep their side of the covenant (Jer 31:31-33, Ez 20:1-49, Matt 27:51, John 19:30, Heb 7:11, 18-19, 8:6-13)	
Dietary Changes	All food – no restrictions (Gen 9:3)	No change	“Clean” Foods only (Lev 11)	
Additional Comments		Foreshadowed the New Covenant (Gal 3:29)	Ineffective against sin (Heb 7:18) External regulations - standards written on stone (2 Cor 3, Heb 9:9-10) Motivation based on “blessing and curses” (Lev 26, Deut 28) Human effort (Gal 2:16, 21) Shadow (Col 2:16) Relationship through priesthood and law (Heb 9:1-10) Available to Israel only (Eph 2:11-22)	

However, we can't leave this covenant without looking a little more closely at a couple of aspects that have led to some unfortunate misunderstandings about the Old and New Covenants. These misunderstandings revolve around two aspects, first, the term “everlasting” used in reference to the Mosaic Covenant, and second, the role of the Ten Commandments in the age of the New Covenant.

Everlasting Covenant?

Let's take a closer look at the term "everlasting." Sabbatarians claim that the reason they observe the seventh day Sabbath and not Sunday is because the Mosaic Covenant is still in effect because it was to be an "everlasting covenant."

Exodus 31:16 The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.

But was it an everlasting covenant? As part of the Mosaic Covenant agreement, both parties promised to abide by certain conditions.

Exodus 19:3-8 Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

From God's side He promised He would make them his treasured possession and bless them. But the agreement was conditional on the people's obedience from their side.

V.7-8 So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. 8 The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.

The Israelites for their part promised to abide by the terms of the agreement. In other words, the covenant was conditional on both parties upholding their side of the agreement. We all know what happened don't we. Israel didn't do any better than Adam and Eve. Let's use the example of a marriage covenant. A couple promises to stay together "until death do us part." As such it is supposed to be an everlasting covenant. But what happens to that covenant promise if one person decides not to honour it? What was ordained to be everlasting is reduced to a broken promise. It is no different with God's covenant with Israel. If one side failed to keep their obligations to the covenant, it, like any legal document, was terminated. God, over centuries, pleaded with the Israelites to obey him, but eventually He discarded that covenant and replaced it with one where He would do for them what they could not do for themselves.

Hebrews 8:6-9 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 8 Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—9 "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.

Notice though, even though God terminated the covenant, He continued to remain faithful to His side of the agreement. You could say God still regarded the covenant as everlasting from His side in the sense He was going to achieve His goal of creating a holy people for Himself even if He had to do it for them through the institution of the New Covenant. He set up a new agreement that would apply not only to Israel but also to the whole world.

Once we understand the Mosaic covenant was terminated because of the Israelites disobedience, the "everlasting" aspect becomes redundant. So the whole agreement, including the priesthood, sacrifices, temple regulations, holy days, the dietary restrictions and the Ten Commandments including the command concerning the Sabbath day was terminated. Christians are not required to observe the conditions of the discarded Mosaic Covenant. However, I hasten to add, Christians are required to observe the conditions of the New Covenant.

The Sign of the Mosaic Covenant

So with that understanding, let's now go back to the issue of the signs of the covenants. The sign of the Mosaic Covenant was the Sabbath.

Exodus 31:16-17 The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. 17 It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.”

Earlier we saw how God gave Adam and Eve a test commandment, “Don’t eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This scenario was much more than just a moral issue about fruit; it was a test of their allegiance. We saw the failure of Adam and Eve, representing humanity failing in this test (Romans 5:12,18). Now we see God testing the allegiance of the nation of Israel to Him. Would they trust Him as their God? Again, this is much more than a moral issue about a day; it was a test of their allegiance. This, by the way, is not the only test given as part of the Mosaic Covenant. Others include food regulations, circumcision, holy places, even mixing different types of threads. All of these things were given to remind a stiff-necked and rebellious people on a daily basis they were God’s special people, not to mention the fact they had the constant reminder of the pillar of fire and cloud hovering over them. The Sabbath command was a test of obedience for the nation. And we know from subsequent history beginning with those who went out to gather manna on the Sabbath day that this was one of the major issues of disobedience on the part of the Israelites (Exodus 16:27-30). In much the same way we saw the failure of individuals (represented by Adam and Eve) to obey God, now we see the failure of nations (represented by Israel) to obey God. In both cases, the respective parties had an ongoing relationship with God yet failed in their obligations of being faithful to their God. So once again we see mankind’s unwillingness to surrender their will to God.

But there is another important aspect to the Sabbath being given to the Israelites as a sign. The signs associated with the various covenants, were just that, signs that pointed to something greater or more significant. When we see a sign on the roadside pointing to our destination, we don’t stand there admiring the sign, we head off to that destination. In Noah’s Covenant, the rainbow sign pointed to the more significant promise God made never to flood the earth again. With the Abrahamic Covenant, the circumcision sign pointed to the future fulfilment when God would circumcise the heart through faith (Romans 3:29-30). This is one of the archetypes that had its later fulfilment in the New Covenant. We need to look at the sign of the Mosaic Covenant in the same light, as it was a sign that pointed backwards as well as forwards. The Sabbath day sign although a test of allegiance for the children of Israel pointed to something much more significant. It was never God’s intention for the sign to become the object of worship; rather it was to direct people’s worship to what the sign pointed to. Unfortunately, down through the centuries, whether a church worshiped on a Saturday or a Sunday, the sign at times took on a more significant focus than what it pointed to (Matthew 23:1-4, 16-22). Rules and regulations were imposed on what was allowed and not allowed on the day so that it became both a burden for worshippers and a standard of “righteousness.”

Rather than focusing on the day, our attention should be focused on what the day was pointing to. So let’s look at what the sign pointed to.

Exodus 20:8-11 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.11 For in six days THE LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

The first thing we notice is the focus of the day was to remind them to remember God their Creator (v.11). One day each week was set aside as a day of worship to their Creator and the God who had created the functional world in which they lived (Genesis 1). Second, He was the One

who had redeemed them from Egyptian slavery where they worked seven days a week without rest (Exodus 20:1, 9-10). So this signpost pointed the people backwards to God's handiwork of creation and His redeeming work of delivering people from the oppression of slavery. The sign was not the object of worship; it was the God to whom it pointed, their Creator and Redeemer. Even in many Christian circles today, the emphasis placed on the fourth commandment revolves around what is permissible on the day and misses the more significant command to "remember the Lord who made the heavens and the earth", and the One who delivers them from the oppression of slavery. The fourth commandment is a command to worship God, not a day.

But the Sabbath sign had a future significance as well and it revolved around four key words also found in this section of scripture. They are, "holy", "remember", "work" and "rested."

Chapter 19 – Sabbath Sign

We have been focusing on the sign aspect of the Mosaic Covenant, which was the Sabbath day. It was never God's intention for the sign to become the object of worship. Rather it was to direct peoples' worship to what the sign pointed to. The sign pointed both backwards as well as forwards. Last chapter our focus was on what it pointed backwards to, the God who was their Creator and Redeemer.

Remember, Work, and Rested

But the Sabbath sign had a future significance as well and it revolved around three key words also found in this section of scripture, "remember", "work" and "rested."

Exodus 20:8-11 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.11 For in six days THE LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Let's look at these three words to understand why they are important. In Bible usage, the word "rest" is contrasted with "work." This is how the Bible starts out, God working – creating the physical order.

Genesis 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.2 And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

For six days God worked, then He rested and hallowed the seventh day. What did this rest signify? Did God need a rest; was He worn out from all His work? No! God could sit back and look at His handiwork, the beautiful aspects of his creative genius, but most importantly He enjoyed perfect communion with his most important handiwork, the man He had created in his image. There were no rituals, no ceremonies, no religion – just a simple loving relationship between God and the humans he had created.

This is important to understand because a correct understanding of what "rest" means to God determines to a large extent what follows. ***"Then on the eighth day, God went back to work."*** No, it doesn't say that. How long did this rest last? We don't know, but what we do know is something interrupted that blissful period of "rest" where God and man enjoyed an intimate loving relationship. What interrupted this rest? As we know, the man God had created exercised his free-will and disobeyed God. What was God's response to the disruption of this special relationship? He had to start working again to restore the broken relationship He had with His creation.

So bearing in mind what "rest" and "work" means to God, let's look at what we find in scripture. In John 5, Jesus is being accused of healing a man on the Sabbath, something the Jews regarded as work and therefore "breaking the Sabbath." Notice the answer Jesus gives to his detractors.

John 5:17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

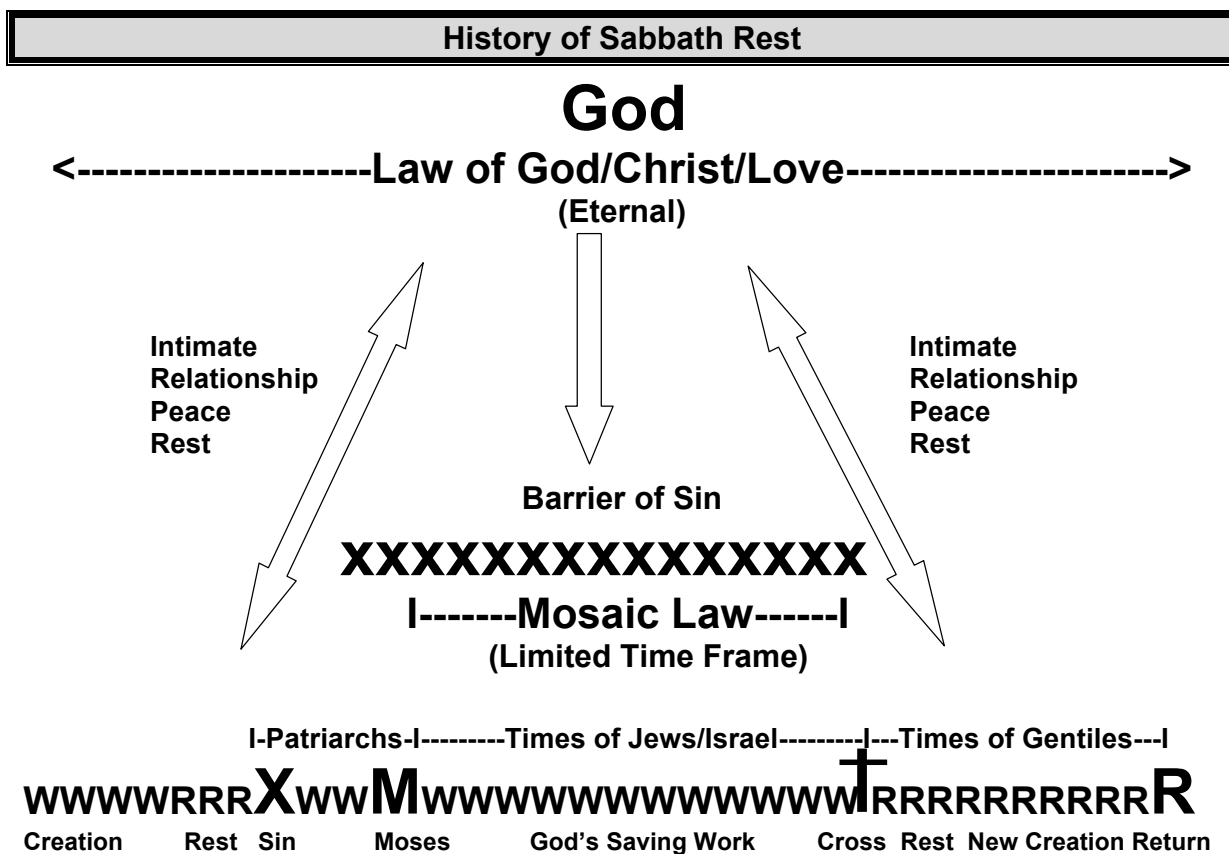
Notice both the Father and Jesus have been laboring since the events of the garden to restore the relationship between God and man. There is no "good cop, bad cop" routine going on. As soon as man sinned, God the Father and the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world went back to work to restore the relationship. Now notice when this work finished in John 17. This is the occasion of the Last Supper

John 17:1-4 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 "as You have given Him authority

over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.3 “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.4 “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.

There was a two-fold aspect of the Sabbath command, it looked back to the rest before sin entered the scene, but it also looked forward to the spiritual rest Jesus would accomplish through His saving work of salvation.

History of Sabbath Rest. (See figure below)



The word, “rest” refers to the state of peace and intimate communion that exists in the relationship between God and humanity. And the word “work” refers to Christ’s saving work in restoring that relationship. Notice what Jesus’ work accomplished, **“that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him”**

Jesus’ saving work has restored the relationship and made it possible for sinful mankind to once again enjoy spiritual rest with His God.

Lord of Spiritual Rest

So the signpost of the Sabbath in the Mosaic Covenant was much more than a day of “physical rest,” it pointed to the one who would make “spiritual rest” possible, Jesus Christ. The Jews whose focus of attention was on the signpost completely missed what the sign was pointing to, Jesus Christ. That’s why Jesus told the Jews, **I am the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8)** or in other words, “I am the Lord of spiritual rest.” The author of the book of Hebrews makes the same argument. The first 10 chapters of the Book of Hebrews are a comparison between the Old and New Covenants

Hebrews 3:16-19 *For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? 17Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned,*

whose corpses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. The “rest” in this verse is referring to entry into the Promised Land and how the unbelief (or a lack of faith in believing God would overpower the giants in the land) prevented the rebellious Israelites from entering the Promised Land. But then the author of Hebrews goes on to warn the Jews they too could miss out on entering the spiritual rest offered to them for the same lack of faith.

Hebrews 4:1-11 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

“Now a much better rest is being offered to us, so don’t make the same mistake our forefathers made by rejecting the one who is offering us spiritual rest.”

V.2 For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.3 For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: “So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest,’” although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”;5 and again in this place: “They shall not enter My rest.” 6 Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, 7 again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.” 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, (Joshua had the Sabbath day, so it can’t be talking about the day) then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. 11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

After man sinned, God went back to work in order to restore the relationship that sin had broken. True spiritual rest was re-established by the saving work of Jesus on our behalf. Notice what the author of Hebrews says about what Jesus did after He had completed his saving work.

Hebrews 10:11-14 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,

The work of the Mosaic priesthood was never finished, that is why they remain “standing.” In contrast, after Jesus’ once for all sacrifice, He was able to “sit down” and “rest.”

V.13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

And what were Jesus’ last words on the cross?

John 19:30 "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

To summarize. The Sabbath command pointed backwards to the time when God and mankind enjoyed spiritual rest before sin entered. But it also pointed forwards to the time in the future when that relationship would be restored by the saving work of Jesus Christ, the Lord of true spiritual rest.

We have looked at the words, “work” and “rested,” but what about the word “remember”? Under the Mosaic Covenant the Israelites were told to “remember” the Sabbath day. But now as part of the New Covenant, what are we told to “remember”?

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

It is no mere coincidence that this word “remembrance” is used in this context. It is a reminder for Christians to remember the one the sign pointed to, Jesus Christ who gives us “spiritual rest.” And what does Jesus Christ himself say about the “rest” he offers us.

Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.30 “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

God never intended us to focus on the signs of the various covenants, but rather on what they represented. He wants us to focus on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and how He has given us “spiritual rest” by what He suffered on our behalf. And if we do, there is a spiritual blessing recorded in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:15 But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, 16 “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,”17 then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

If you think steak knives are a good bargain, check this one out. God says ***“If you remember me, (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) I will not remember your sins” (Hebrews 10:17).*** Now that is a pretty good bargain.

What was the purpose of the Sabbath in the Mosaic Covenant? Exodus 31 tells us it was a sign. So we have to look at the Sabbath day as a sign in that it pointed both backwards and forwards ***Exodus 31:17 It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’ ”***

So it pointed backwards in the sense that on the Sabbath the Israelites were commanded to imitate the way Adam and Eve lived on that seventh day. Adam and Eve enjoyed intimate spiritual rest with God in Eden – there was no sin, no disharmony, and therefore no need to work. The Sabbath was to remind the Israelites of “the spiritual rest” mankind enjoyed with God in Eden before “sin” entered the equation.

But it also looks forward.

Exodus 31:13 ...for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.

Who ultimately sanctifies us? Jesus Christ. So the Sabbath day also pointed forward to the one who would ultimately sanctify us or give us true spiritual rest through His saving work.

Chapter 20 – Fulfilling the Law

Last chapter we looked at what the Sabbath day pictured for the Israelites under the Mosaic Covenant. This chapter looks at a couple more aspects of the Mosaic Covenant that have implications for what follows. These revolve around the question of the laws given to the Israelites as part of the Mosaic Covenant and their relevance for Christians today. The following verse is one used by Sabbatarians to prove we are to obey the Sabbath commandment today.

Matthew 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

They use it in the sense that Jesus was confirming His support for the continuation of the Mosaic Law especially the Ten Commandments including the command to observe the seventh day Sabbath. We have already discussed how the Mosaic Covenant that included the Ten Commandments was cast aside because of the failure of the people (Hebrews 8:6-9).

God's Higher Law of Love

Any talk of dismissing the Ten Commandments immediately raises the question as to what happens to righteousness if one does away with their observance? Of course this is a legitimate question and one we need to address. In response to this question the first thing we need to do is reassure everyone God has not suddenly gone soft on developing holiness or righteousness in His people. But we need to understand that just because the Mosaic Covenant was cast aside, this in no way cancels God's higher *Law of Love* as this is based on God's very character and nature and this remains the same for all eternity. It's just as impossible to do away with God's higher law of love, as it is to do away with God. So we need to understand that some aspects of the Mosaic Law continued because they are the ones that have existed for all eternity because they define who God is. These are those principles that are consistent with God's nature of love and reveal His will for mankind. God is in the process of creating us in His image, so there has to be a process whereby He teaches us to think, act and love as He does. So the laws and commandments God reveals to His people at various times need to be evaluated in this context.

But there is another consideration that has to be taken into account and that is the maturity of the recipients (Hebrews 5:12-6:1). When we look at the Ten Commandments within the context mentioned above, we need to concede they were a very rudimentary level of God's law of love. We know this because when Jesus came along he raised the bar even higher with his radical teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-6), and His new command to "love as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

Jesus raises the bar of the sixth commandment to a whole new level, sin at the thought, attitude and heart level. The law, whether it is spelled out in its most basic form in the Ten Commandments or expounded and lived out by the teachings of Jesus are given for three reasons. 1) To reveal God's nature and will for mankind.

1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome

God gives us these commands so we can learn to imitate His nature and character.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

These works should not be confused as a means to salvation, as that is only possible through faith in Jesus (Romans 3:28).

2) To show the vast difference between a holy God and sinful mankind so that mankind throws himself on the grace of God.

Romans 5:20 The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase (Romans 3:20, Galatians 3:23-25).

We will talk more about this later, but in reality, the Ten Commandments reveal more about humanity's fallen evil nature than they do about God's holy nature. God knew the Israelites would not worship Him as they should and therefore introduced four laws to govern their worship of Him and six laws to combat the tendency to exploit their fellow human beings in various evil ways. Jesus in raising the bar to the heart level was speaking to a generation who thought they were doing pretty well in the righteousness department and Jesus wanted to jolt them out of their complacency to recognise their need for a Saviour (Luke 18:9-14).

3) To restrain evil.

Although the external law cannot change the heart, the law along with the threat of punishment for criminal behaviour, can to a certain extent constrain lawlessness.

Romans 13:3-4 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. 4 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

So when someone says the Mosaic Covenant has been cast aside and replaced by the New Covenant, it doesn't mean God's standards are any lower. In fact, as we read, the expectations of the New Covenant are even higher now. But as we shall see God has provided the means by which His people can attain a higher level of righteousness. God is a Holy God and He hasn't changed; however the means to impart holiness to His people has.

Jeremiah 31:33 "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

The fact this was written while the Jews were still under the Mosaic Covenant demonstrates the limitations of the external law and the spiritual immaturity of the people. God is committed to creating a holy people and will provide the means for it to happen. But this is getting ahead of the story. However in reference to the Old Covenant, we need to understand what continued and what was discontinued. Those aspects of the law regarding God's holy nature and character continue for all time as they reflect who God is.

However, those laws specifically pertaining to Israel, such as the laws governing the priesthood, the sacrifices, holy days, the Ten Commandments, holy places, and clean and unclean foods were abolished when the Mosaic Covenant was *replaced* with the New Covenant instituted at Jesus' death. Now notice we used the word "replaced" as each one of these aspects of the Mosaic Covenant was replaced with a more effective means of achieving God's goal of creating a holy people for Himself. And this is one of the main reasons for the replacement of the Old Covenant, as it failed to produce a godly righteousness coming from an obedient heart. The best the Old could produce was a dutiful external obedience best typified by the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-36). Jesus' intent in fulfilling the law was not to add more regulations to the law. The Pharisees were already doing a good job of that with their "Oral Torah" by constructing a protecting fence around the Torah. It was already quite obvious man is incapable of fulfilling even the basic requirements of the law spelled out in the Ten Commandments let alone the heart intent teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5-6.

Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Covenant

Jesus Himself makes the real intent of His statement "to fulfil" perfectly clear to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Luke 24:25-27 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his

glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

And for emphasis, Jesus basically repeats Himself later in the same chapter.

Luke 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

The focus was never intended to be on the law; it was merely the tutor that pointed to Jesus Christ, the one who fulfilled what the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms pointed to.

Galatians 3:23-25 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

The law did what it was designed to do, **to increase the trespasses** with the intent of bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ. Last time we saw how the Sabbath command pointed forward to Jesus Christ and He *fulfilled* it by providing us with “spiritual rest.” So we need to view everything about the Mosaic Covenant as pointing to Jesus Christ in the same way the “rest” of the Sabbath day pointed to the author of true “spiritual rest.”

Colossians 2:16-17 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

As mentioned earlier, the Mosaic Covenant was the womb for the birth of the Messiah. It’s a simple exercise to demonstrate this process.

- ◆ What did the various sacrifices of the Old Covenant foreshadow? Christ’s sacrifice.
- ◆ What did the Passover Lamb foreshadow? Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!).
- ◆ What did the tabernacle and temple foreshadow? Christ’s Body (John 2:19 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up).
- ◆ What did the Levitical priesthood foreshadow? Christ, the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (**Hebrews 5:6 “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”**).

Without this background, many of the concepts the New Testament uses to explain the Gospel would not be understood and this is why the Mosaic Covenant is described as the “Womb for the birth of the Messiah.” Similar analogies with Jesus can be drawn with the Mosaic Holy or High Days (Leviticus 23).

- ◆ Passover – Lamb of God (John 1:29).
- ◆ Unleavened Bread – Bread of Life (John 6:35).
- ◆ Pentecost – Jesus comes and lives in us through the Spirit (John 14:15-18, 23).
- ◆ Trumpets - In the Mosaic Covenant, the blowing of trumpets was associated with judgment. For example, the walls of Jericho fell (Joshua 6:1-20); the Day of the Lord, a time of judgment, begins with the blowing of the trumpet (Revelation 8, 9). The Feast of Trumpets was closely associated with the Day of Atonement. The Israelites were to use the ten days, beginning with the Day of Trumpets leading up to the Day of Atonement to examine or judge themselves in preparation for this solemn assembly. Atonement pictured the forgiveness of sins for the Israelites. It’s interesting to see on the one hand, Israel was judged and condemned, but then released from that judgment on the Day of Atonement. We see this same progression in Leviticus 25, where the beginning of the Year of Jubilee also began with the blowing of the trumpet on the Day of Atonement and we know the Year of Jubilee pictured the release of all debts and obligations (Leviticus 25:8-12). Jesus does the same thing. He comes as the righteous judge (John 5:22) but then sets us free from judgment by his atoning sacrifice.
- ◆ Atonement – Jesus our Atonement for sin (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17).
- ◆ Tabernacles – Jesus came and tabernacled with us? Emmanuel, God with us (Hebrews 9:11-12).

Jesus' intent back in Matthew 5:17 was to show He was the embodiment or fulfilment of all that the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms pointed to. The focus was never to be on the law, but on Jesus Christ, the one who fulfilled all that the Law, the Prophets and Psalms pointed to. God, in the person of Jesus Christ came and gave substance to the shadows cast by the types. The temporary shadow arrangements were cancelled because their symbolic meaning had been replaced by the glory of the reality (John 1:14).

Hebrews 10:9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." **He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

When we understand that various aspects of the Old Covenant are replaced with more glorious aspects of the New Covenant centred on Jesus Christ there is no need for fear, but rather relief.

2 Corinthians 3:7-10 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, **8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!**

It ought to be liberating for us to understand we have moved from the ministry that brought *condemnation* to the ministry that brings *righteousness*! The first ten chapters of the book of Hebrews is devoted to explaining why the New Covenant is much more glorious than the Old Covenant. It has better promises (Hebrews 8:6), better sacrifices (Hebrews 9:23), better High Priest (Hebrews 7:26-8:6), better country, a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:16).

As we will see, the New accomplishes what the Old could not do, because Jesus does for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Jesus' Perfect Obedience

But there was another sense in which Jesus fulfilled the Law. And that was, He kept the law perfectly, and not just the Mosaic Law, but also the higher law of love we spoke about earlier.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin

We have touched on this earlier but will come back to this subject in more detail when we get to the New Testament. So when Jesus said he came to fulfil the law, what he meant was, 1) He fulfilled the role of the one prophesied about in the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms, and 2) He came and fulfilled the law by his perfect obedience to it.

When questions about the Ten Commandments arise we need to keep the following points in mind.

1) When we read the Old Testament, we need to view everything through the prism of Jesus Christ, as He is the fulfilment of what the Old Covenant pointed to.

He was the one who came to fulfil all that the Law, Prophets and Psalms pointed to - the sacrifices, the priesthood, the temple – all pointed to Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:17). He also fulfilled the law in that he obeyed it perfectly. The focus was never intended to be on the law, but on Jesus Christ.

2) Even though some aspects of the Ten Commandments were set aside, they did not cancel the higher law of love which is a reflection of God's holy character and nature.

These exist throughout eternity.

3) The Mosaic Covenant although glorious had serious limitations in developing holiness in God's people, so it was replaced with a more glorious Covenant that addressed this shortcoming.

This process will be addressed in a future chapter.

4) As we saw with the Sabbath rules, we need to be very careful by focusing so much on the details we miss the higher spiritual intent.

This is the advice Jesus gave the Pharisees when he criticised them for their hypocrisy for tithing of their herbs and missing the weightier matters of the law (Matthew 23:23). It wasn't just with herbs where the Pharisees missed the point. They had endless regulations on what was lawful to do on the Sabbath while standing in front of them was the One offering them "spiritual rest."

Chapter 21 – Other Mosaic Questions

Before we leave the Mosaic Covenant and move on to the New Covenant, we need to clear up a few loose ends regarding the Old Covenant.

Changing Dietary Laws

One of the peculiar aspects of the various covenants we looked at earlier is the change to the dietary laws depending on the particular covenant. Under the covenants with Noah and Abraham, all foods are allowed while under the Mosaic covenant the Israelites are restricted to so called “clean foods.” And the question has to be asked, “Why would God find it necessary to change this law”? Prior to the Mosaic Covenant, we read as part of the Covenant with Noah that there was no restriction on food.

Genesis 9:3 Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

Yet we read two separate sets of animals were taken onto the ark, both clean and unclean animals.

Genesis 7:1-2 The Lord then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. 2 Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate.

There was no way Noah had the resources to round up all these creatures and herd them onto the ark, so God caused the animals to come (Genesis 7:7-9). We need to remember Moses who was very much aware of clean and unclean animals wrote Genesis in hindsight. Whether or not Noah knew of any distinction prior to the animals showing up to the ark is unknown, but if he didn't he must have been quite curious as to why.

This is another of those instances where we see the hand of God working behind the scenes of history to bring about His intended purpose. But again this is another of these instances where we can get side tracked and get caught up in the specifics and miss the higher spiritual intent behind the event. We already know about God's dietary instructions to the Israelites at Sinai, to eat only clean animals (Leviticus 11). However if we jump ahead nearly 1000 years to the New Testament, what story do we find associated with clean/unclean animals there? Peter's dream about the sheet full of unclean creatures (Acts 11:1-18). And what did those unclean creatures represent? The Gentiles. So if the unclean animals represented Gentiles, who do you think clean animals represent? The Israelites. Is it so surprising then that God instructed the Israelites at Sinai to eat only “clean” foods?

Now if we go back to the story of the ark, what did the ark represent for Noah and his family? Salvation – it saved them from destruction. What we see here with the story of the animals on the ark centuries before it became a reality is another shadow representing God's ultimate plan of offering salvation to both Jews and Gentiles.

Another analogy in this regard concerns the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). At Babel, God used tongues to divide people. However on the Day of Pentecost in the New Testament, tongues are used as a gift to bring all peoples of the earth together for salvation (Acts 2:1-12). This was the beginning of the times of the Gentiles. No longer would there be this distinction between Jew and Gentile as far as salvation was concerned.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Peter in his famous sermon in Acts 2:17 quotes the prophet Joel, ***‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh.*** And of course it was only a short time later after this sermon that Peter had his dream about the unclean animals in the sheet. It

shouldn't surprise us then that as the times of the Gentiles begin, the dietary restrictions, which applied only to the Jews, are removed.

Romans 14:14, I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.

Romans 14:20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

The changing aspects of the dietary law revolved around who God was offering salvation to at the time, the Israelites in Moses' time and the Gentiles in Peter's time. Clean foods represented Israel and unclean foods represented Gentiles. However the primary message is not about food, but rather how God is offering salvation to both Jew and Gentile alike especially as viewed from the perspective of the two sets of animals going onto Noah's ark.

Misconceptions around Sacrifices

Because of the way pagan religions view sacrifices, it's easy for Christians to view the sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant in the same light. Pagan superstitious sacrifices are offered as a way to manipulate or influence the gods to gain some positive benefit from them – rain, crops, good health, etc. So sacrifices of goods, animals, and sometimes humans are offered to manipulate or appease the gods.

But the sacrifices commanded by the God of Israel had a totally different aim. They were made not to appease or manipulate God but to remind the people of the source of the grace, mercy and forgiveness which was extended towards them (Exodus 34:5-7). It was to remind them of their gracious and merciful God who led them out of Egypt and forgave all their sins. The various sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant are carefully linked to the word, "atonement" (Leviticus 5-6). Over and over again the word "atonement" is linked with the various sacrifices signifying God's willingness to be reconciled with his people despite their sins. And He alone is the one who makes "atonement" possible.

The annual Day of Atonement is a good example of this process (Leviticus 16). Each year the high priest had to go through a carefully prescribed ritual in order to enter the holies of holies in the tabernacle where God resided. Animals were sacrificed for both himself and the people and the blood carefully laid on the mercy seat signifying God was the one who provided the means of forgiveness and reconciliation. The blood of the sacrificed goat placed on the mercy seat signified the people's sins were blotted out by a sacrifice presented *on their behalf* (They did not have to personally pay the penalty for their sins, the goat did). The other goat on who's head the sins of the people were laid was then led out into the wilderness signifying God's willingness to forget the people's sins.

Psalms 103:7-12 He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: 8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Of course the deep significance of this whole process was revealed in all its glory with the "once for all" sacrifice of Jesus Christ where not the blood of a goat but the blood of the Lamb of God was shed *on behalf* of the sins of the world. Again, the price was paid for us; we did not have to personally pay the penalty for our sins. And the same promise of God no longer remembering our sins is made as part of the New Covenant.

Hebrews 10:16-17 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." 17 Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.

So once again we are reminded of the need to view everything through the prism of Jesus Christ.

However there is an important lesson in this principle today and that is not to think we can manipulate God by “our sacrifices” and “our good works” to do our bidding. This principle is as true today in the church age as it was back in Moses’ day. Our forgiveness is solely a result of God’s graciousness and the willingness of Jesus Christ to sacrifice Himself on our behalf. It would be a huge affront to our Saviour to take anything away from the horrific sacrifice He suffered on our behalf on the cross. He wants us to have faith in “His” saving work and not on “our” saving work. The emphasis should always be on Jesus Christ’s work.

So the various rituals we perform today, worship, baptism, Lord’s Supper, giving, etc. are not done to gain some favour from God, but to remind us of how merciful are God’s gracious acts towards us. Unfortunately it is a failure to remember this principle that has led to much of the confusion surrounding the “Health and Wealth” debate. God is not a cosmic ATM machine to be manipulated by pressing the right buttons. It’s true, God does bless his children, but don’t make the mistake of thinking God is obliged to act because of our long and fervent prayers or our generous donations to the church. Our “righteousness” or our “good works” has little to do with God’s decision as we learned with the story of Job (Job 1:1,8). If God does decide to bless us with a “yes” answer to our prayers, it is only after evaluating what is best for us spiritually.

God’s graciousness and generosity flows from the fact He is a loving Father who wants to develop spiritual maturity and holiness in His children. So the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant and the Lamb of God’s sacrifice of the New Covenant are reminders for us to worship the One who is gracious, faithful, and merciful and has redeemed us from our sins. He is not to be regarded and worshipped as a god who can be influenced by manipulative human beings. The object of true worship is to focus on God and His graciousness (Exodus 20:2-3; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

Chapter 22 – Prophet, Priest and King

In this chapter we will address the two distinct priestly roles of Moses and Aaron. In an earlier session, we saw how the Mosaic Covenant allowed for the unique opportunity to develop a structure where both the administrative and spiritual aspects of government were pulling in the same direction. There was no separation of church and state as there are in our western democracies. Moses headed up the administrative side and Aaron headed up the priesthood, sacrificial and tabernacle functions. You may remember Moses was the one the people came to in order to make judgments on disputes that came up (Exodus 18:13-14).

But there was another important function Moses played in the spiritual life of the nation – He too had a priestly function. When God wanted to communicate to the children of Israel, He would do so through Moses, not Aaron.

Exodus 33:10-11 Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. 11 The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.

Here we see Moses, also a priest from the tribe of Levi given the role of “spokesperson” or the “word” of God. Moses enjoyed a special role as God’s spokesperson that not even Aaron, the high priest enjoyed. Also when it came to matters of revealing God’s will for the Israelites as in the giving of the Covenant and the law, it was done through Moses, not Aaron. Aaron had the responsibility of administering the priestly responsibilities revealed by God through Moses such as the functions of the priesthood, the tabernacle, and the sacrifices. So we see a separation of priestly responsibilities between Moses and Aaron. Moses acted as the Word/Logos/Spokesperson/Prophet and Mediator in relaying God’s will to the people. Aaron’s responsibilities were restricted to the liturgy and rituals associated with the priesthood and the Tabernacle. Aaron’s responsibilities were subordinate to Moses’ role - he was to carry out the instructions God gave to Moses.

Tensions between the two Priestly Roles

But right from the very start of the Covenant relationship, we see tension developing between these two important priestly roles. While Moses is up on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, something quite different is happening back at the foot of the mountain. Aaron is playing to the wishes of the crowds and has built a golden calf (Exodus 32). He would have made a good politician as he was simply responding to the latest opinion poll. God threatened to destroy the Israelites because of their sin, but Moses, operating from his position as priestly mediator intervened to “change” God’s mind.

The golden calf incident was the first of many attempts by the priesthood to manipulate worship according to their desires rather than God’s (“We prefer to worship like the Egyptians,” Exodus 32:4). The second attempt to usurp Moses’ position came when Miriam and Aaron began to criticise Moses over his marriage to a Cushite woman.

Numbers 12:1-2 Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite.

This claim was nothing but a smokescreen as the next verse reveals their true motive.

V.2 “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” And the Lord heard this.

Aaron’s and Miriam’s jealousy resulted in Miriam being struck down with leprosy. Again Moses as mediator intervened and asked God to heal Miriam. Again we see the liturgical priesthood trying to impose their will on God’s revealed preference – Moses was the one God spoke through, not Aaron. Miriam and Aaron were guilty of that same old trait of human nature – they wanted to decide for themselves how they should worship God. We see this age-old problem of freewill

agents wanting to be their own gods raised again. Even with God so close to them, the Israelites wanted to worship according to their own guidelines.

This was a scenario that was to play out throughout the history of Israel. At various times we see the people being led astray by their spiritual leaders, as they would set up their own sacred places of worship, groves, idols, and adopt the pagan practices of the nations around them. In response God would send his spokespersons in the form of prophets with His “word” to warn the people to repent and return to him.

Ezekiel 34:1-2 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?’

Unfortunately, the messages the prophets brought to the nation were not well received. Most of them did not have a happy ending. Finally because of their disobedience, God allowed the nation to be taken into exile at the hand of the Babylonians.

When the Jews had returned to Jerusalem after the captivity, the group identified as the “Scribes” assumed the role of the “word.” This was a group who descended from the Priest Ezra who led the Babylonian exiles back to Jerusalem (Ezra 8). One of his titles was “Ezra the Scribe” (Ezra 7:11-12). Nehemiah, Ezra’s contemporary, rebuilt the city walls but after this was completed, he asked Ezra to read the Law of Moses to the assembled Jews (Nehemiah 8:1-3). In response to the reading, there was a great outpouring of remorse on the part of the Jews and the commitment was made by the people to follow the instructions of the law. This was understandable as it was a lack of obedience that had resulted in the Jews being taken off into captivity in the first place. However, the change of heart didn’t last very long and it was only a few years later that Nehemiah had to rebuke the people for their lack of commitment to the law (Nehemiah 13). But during this period between the Testaments, the Scribes took it upon themselves to expand the law governing every aspect of Jewish life under the pretext of preventing a future exile.

Now we see the Word and the Law distorted in a totally different way. Up to this point, the Israelites were just plain rebellious and disobedient ignoring God’s word, killing the prophets, etc. But now in their zealousness to protect the nation from disobedience the priests used the law to give themselves the authority over every minute aspect of an Israelite’s life. In other words they usurped the role of the word and imposed their interpretation of the law on the people. The law that was to be a blessing to the Israelites (which it was under God’s direction) became a burden under the direction of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-4). And that is why even today orthodox Jews still conform to these rules that govern every aspect of their lives. Once again we see the priests exerting their independence from the Word of God.

The True Word Arrives

It was into this environment that the true Word of God arrived and the stage was set for confrontation between Himself and those in the religious establishment who had usurped His rightful role (Matthew 23:1-3). We will come back to this later, but with the arrival of the true Word of God we will see these two priestly roles represented by Moses and Aaron combined in the one man Jesus Christ.

The establishment of the role of King

Before we leave the Old Testament, there is a third important role established by God that needs to be discussed as it was also a precursor of things to come and that is the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. Although God preferred that Israel would treat Him as their king, He gave in to their demands to have a human king like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:4-9). Initially established through King Saul, the title passed to David when Saul proved himself untrustworthy

2 Samuel 7:15-17 But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

Saul's downfall lay in that like Aaron, he assumed roles he was not entitled to assume. First he presumptuously assumed the role of a *priest* when he offered sacrifices when Samuel delayed his coming (1 Samuel 13:8-14). And secondly he disobeyed the *Word* of God given by the prophet Samuel when he spared the king of the Amalekites, Agag and kept the best of the livestock when God had specifically commanded him to destroy them all (1 Samuel 15). So we see Saul in his role of king assuming roles God had specifically reserved for prophet and priest. The kingly line then passed to David, a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:13-14; 15:27-29). David himself had his weaknesses. However, unlike Saul, David was willing to admit and repent of his mistakes (Psalms 51). It was from the Davidic line that the promised Messiah was to come.

Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

We see these three aspects of prophet, priest and king carefully woven into the fabric of the history of ancient Israel.

God remains faithful to His people

Despite the failings of each of these groups as well as the nation in general, God remained faithful to his called out people. God had bound Himself to Israel as it was through Israel that redemption would come to the whole world as promised to Abraham. But He also knows that his children in their sin and frailty are unable to fulfil their side of the Covenant. But in a grand design known only to God and planned from the foundation of the world, God is going to provide the means from within Israel to fulfil the Covenant requirements.

However, the means to achieve this end can only come as a result of the continuing saga of wickedness and disobedience on the part of God's chosen nation. For their part in the event, they would not realise that through their fearful wickedness they would bring about reconciliation with God not only for their nation but also for the whole world. Like Adam and Eve, Israel was elected to act in a representative capacity for all nations so that all would be included in God's grand design of making us in His image. This was a heavy burden for Israel to carry and they suffered as a consequence, but only because of their persistent refusal to respond to God's love and grace. In an amazing display of rebellion, the more God gave Himself to His people, the more they rejected Him. But this has been humanity's response from the very beginning; Adam and Eve hiding from God; Israel's rejection of their Deliverer; and the priesthood hiding behind the "works of the law" which gave them a pseudo righteousness. Humanity's decision to exercise his self-will is a curse that leads to sin and sin leads to guilt. Guilt in turn leads to shame and the inclination to hide from God.

What we fail to realise is the further one strays or hides himself from God the further he removes himself from being in the image of God. We are social animals and God created us to be in relationship most notably with Him. It is this primary relationship that makes it possible for us to be in His image. But once this primary relationship with Him breaks down, every other relationship suffers irreversible damage. Conflict between male and female began when Adam and Eve got into the blame game. Conflict within families began when jealous Cain slays his brother Abel. Instead of love and cooperation governing relationships, we see individualism and independence exerting itself. Our human nature is fatally flawed and despite man's attempts to restore it, the disease persists. Beginning with Babel, man has devised many "isms," ideologies, philosophies, counselling

techniques all in an attempt to draw mankind together, yet the disease persists. And the sad news is from man's perspective there is no cure for this hideous disease called "sin."

Fortunately, what is impossible for man is not impossible for God. The God who created us loves us despite ourselves. Despite Israel's continued rejection of God and their failure to measure up to the Covenant they agreed to, God remains faithful to his people. Notice what he says to his rebellious children.

Jeremiah 31:3-4 Long ago the Lord said to Israel: "I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself. 4 I will rebuild you, my virgin Israel. You will again be happy and dance merrily with your tambourines.

Isaiah 43:1-5 But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.

Hosea 2:20 I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as the Lord.

So despite his anger at His people for their sinful rebellion against Him, God shows he is committed to his children. Humanity is about to witness the extraordinary lengths to which God will go in order to restore His relationship with His creation.

Chapter 23 – Incarnation, Atonement, Reconciliation

But no one could have predicted just how far God was willing to go in order to rescue his wayward children. Last chapter we finished up lamenting the sad news that from man's perspective there is no cure for this hideous disease called "sin." Fortunately, what is impossible for man is not impossible for God. The heavenly host must have watched in awe as the divinely inspired plan devised before the foundation of the world is put into effect in order to heal and restore mankind's broken relationship with his Creator (Revelation 13:8).

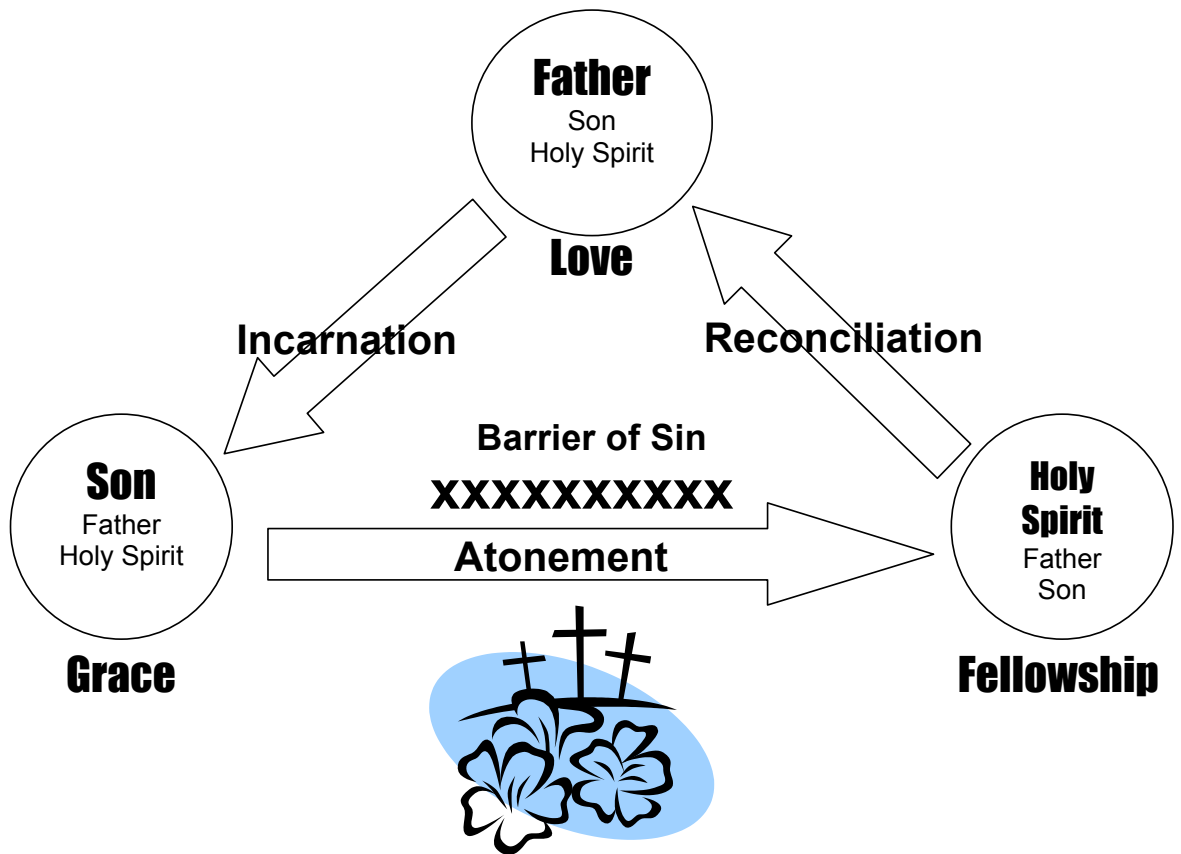
If the first creation was about creating "man in God's image," the plan to restore mankind's relationship to God relies incredibly on "God condescending to take on the image of man." What mankind could not do for himself, God has devised an astounding plan to insert Himself into humanity so He could act on man's behalf. What we are about to witness is the Trinity's counterattack on the forces of evil that want to disrupt God's plan to make man in His image. This is the Trinity's angry "No, I'm not going to allow this to happen even if it means we have to go down and rescue them from the evil they have brought on themselves"!

God faces two challenges in restoring the relationship broken by man's rebellion. First, how can a Holy God draw near to a sinful mankind? And second, how can God draw sinful mankind to Himself? The answer to this question shows the lengths to which God will go in order to save His rebellious children. The only possible way to solve the problem is for God to join humanity in its sinfulness and from within that sinfulness do for humanity what it cannot do for itself. This is the sacrifice God was willing to make so *He could draw near to us* and in the process *draw us near to Him*.

Before we go into detail to explain the whole process of God's master plan to rescue His children, we are going to start with an overview which will help us get a better handle on the plan as it unfolds. To do this we are going to use an illustration.

Three Steps of Redemption – Incarnation, Atonement, Reconciliation. (See figure below).

The Three Steps of Redemption – Incarnation, Atonement, Reconciliation



2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

God’s plan of redemption revolves around three main steps if it is to overcome the barrier of sin represented by the X’s in the illustration. These are, 1) the Incarnation, 2) the Atonement, and 3) Reconciliation, represented by the arrows in the illustration. You will also notice each person of the Trinity, represented by the three circles is intimately involved in the process. They bring their own unique aspects to the process. This is no coincidence as Paul spells out each of these roles in his benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14.

2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Although these divine qualities are innately part of the nature of all three persons of the Godhead, as we will see, each plays a unique role in this process of redemption. The love of God flows from the Father to His creation, Jesus embodies the grace of God through the Incarnation and the Atonement, and the Holy Spirit draws us into the fellowship of love that is the Trinity.

The Love of the Father

Has it ever occurred to you why God the Father chose to call Himself by the title “Father”? We know He is Father to the Son, Jesus. But He chose this title to describe Himself because He doesn’t just want to be Father to Jesus Christ, He also wants to be Father to His created children.

Ephesians 1:5 (NLT) His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.

This is the reason you and I and every other human being exist – to be adopted into the Father’s family. The Father is so committed to this plan that He is willing to give humanity His most precious gift, the life of His Son (John 3:16).

The Grace of Jesus Christ

Of course Jesus Christ plays the central role in the drama as He is the One who lovingly lays aside his heavenly privileges, takes off his crown, sets aside his sceptre, rolls up his sleeves and trades the splendour of heaven for the poverty of a stable. This is that great event in salvation history the Christian world calls the “Incarnation.” The Incarnation is the doctrine that the eternal second person of the Trinity became a human being and “assumed flesh” in Jesus of Nazareth (**John 1:14 The Word became flesh**). The Son added humanity to His divinity. This event called the *Incarnation is the way God chose to draw near to mankind*. Paul in his letter to the Philippians explains this condescension in what is believed to be a hymn of the early church.

Philippians 2:5-8 *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

Not only did Jesus join humanity, He then went on to offer Himself as a substitute for the sins of humanity by suffering the humiliation of the cross.

V.8 *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!*

This is the divine act of the “Atonement.” Jesus voluntarily lived out the Atonement as the Lamb of God sacrificed on our behalf. Again we see this extraordinary love, this time displayed by the Son of God in the terrible sacrifice He was willing to suffer *in order for us to be drawn back to God*. What mankind could not do for himself, God incredibly assumes humanity to act on man’s behalf. It was purely and simply an act of pure “grace” on God’s part. It is through these two divine steps that God is able to *draw near to us* (Incarnation) and through the ordeal of the cross *draw us near to Him* (Atonement).

The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

The consequence of these two great acts opens the door for the possibility of “reconciliation” between God and humanity. It is at this point that the Holy Spirit assumes His role by making humanity aware of Christ’s saving work on their behalf and drawing them back to a relationship with their Creator and Father. In John 16 Jesus promised his disciples He would send *another* comforter, the Holy Spirit.

John 16:7 (NKJV) *7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. 8 And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:*

He is going to be working on people’s minds convicting them of their sin and their need for a Savior. The Holy Spirit points people to their Savior, Jesus Christ.

John 16:14 *He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.*

The Holy Spirit draws people to Jesus Christ and into His atoning work.

Now when you put all this together what you end up with is “Reconciliation.” Through the “**Incarnation**” (the Son becoming man), God is able to draw near to us. Through the “**Atonement**” (the saving work of the Son and the Holy Spirit) mankind can draw near to God. These two great saving acts, the “**Incarnation**” and the “**Atonement**” summarize God’s great love for us. When you put the two together “**Reconciliation**” is the result – God is reconciled to man and man to God. With that overview, we now turn our attention to the detail.

Chapter 24 – God Joins Humanity

Last chapter we took an overview of the Trinity’s counterattack on the forces of evil that want to disrupt God’s plan to make man in His image. God’s plan of redemption revolves around three main steps if it is to overcome the broken relationship between God and mankind. These are, 1) the Incarnation, 2) the Atonement, and 3) Reconciliation. The love of God flows from the Father to His Creation, Jesus embodies the grace of God through the Incarnation and the Atonement, and the Holy Spirit draws us into the fellowship of love that is the Trinity.

We have already seen how the shadows of this plan have been hinted at throughout the Old Testament, but now with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem we begin to see the reality-taking place. Important in the context of the earthly birth of Jesus is the heavenly message the angels brought with them from God as it gives us an interesting insight into the mind of God and His faithful commitment to His wayward and rebellious children. This was the divine message delivered to the shepherds on the outskirts of Bethlehem. The shepherds were settling down for the night, wrapped in their blankets drifting off to sleep when suddenly all heaven breaks loose.

Luke 2:8-14 (NKJV) 8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

We have talked about the Word of God coming to Israel through human prophets, but here at this critical point in salvation history, in order to give the message additional authority, the Word of God is delivered by a holy angel.

V.10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid.”

The first words God has for mankind after the birth of Jesus is, “You no longer need to be afraid.” Granted they had just received an almighty scare, but there is a deeper message in that statement because up until this point in human history, mankind needed to be afraid. This is in contrast to the first beginning, when the words echoing in Adam and Eve’s ears as they were being marched out of Eden by God’s angels were, “Be afraid!” Because of our sin, because of our self-will and because of our stubbornness to live independently of God, humanity has been living under the curse of the law which leads to God’s righteous judgment which in turn leads to spiritual death. Because as we will see, our acceptance is no longer contingent on our works or our self-salvation but on God’s salvation.

Up to this point in salvation history God’s people lived under the law and the upshot of that little exercise was to show that when we try to make ourselves right with God (self-salvation) it ends up in total and utter failure. So God says, and this was His plan from the beginning, you cannot make yourselves presentable to participate in the life and love of God on your own merits so I am going to do it for you. Now with the coming of Jesus this whole bad news scenario has been turned on its head.

V.10 ...for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

What was bad news for humanity is now through God’s efforts about to be turned into “good news.” Notice too that the promise is now expanded to include “all people.” What started with individuals like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob then expanded to include the nation of Israel is now thrown open to “all people.” And who is it that makes it “good news”?

V.11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

Notice that last sentence as it reveals God’s attitude towards His wayward children despite centuries of rejection. Something dramatic happened on the world scene when God became man, and it was not bad news, *it was good news*. It’s unfortunate that what God calls “good news” is

unfortunately peddled by many Christians today as “bad news.” However, in a dramatic display of power, we witness the heavenly host interpreting the coming of Jesus in a totally different way. Humanity is about to witness the extraordinary lengths to which God will go in order to restore the relationship with his creation.

An unimpressive entrance

Despite man’s repeated rejection of his overtures, God’s commitment to His children is unshakeable. So when God decides to rescue humanity from his sinfulness he doesn’t come as a conquering king but rather as a baby in a manger. What an inappropriate way for God to reveal himself to mankind. No press releases, no media attention, no miracles, no powerful demonstrations of shock and awe, but rather a helpless babe in a manger. But this is Jesus’ *modus operandi* throughout His earthly ministry. He trades His glory in heaven for a manger, a donkey and a cross in an effort to prove God’s love for His children. The point of all this is, despite man’s distorted mindset about an angry wrathful God, God is not mad at anyone! He loves every one of his children and wants to redeem every last one of them, if possible. Now that doesn’t mean He is not angry at our sin in the same way a parent gets angry at his children when they disobey him or see them doing something that is going to hurt them. Because God is love, even his anger is governed by that love. But that doesn’t mean he stops loving his children. And isn’t that what the most famous verse in all the bible tells us (John 3:16). God the Father is so committed to his children, He is willing to give His most precious possession, His Son to make it possible for the relationship between God and man to be restored. In reality, because of the Trinitarian doctrine, God is really giving Himself to the world. How Jesus arrives on earth demonstrates the true character of God and his intentions – to save mankind not through force but through love.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God is not a vengeful and wrathful God eager to throw unrepentant sinners into the fires of hell as sometimes portrayed by some Christians. Instead He wants to save the world. For some reason unknown to us, but which is rooted in his nature, God gives himself to us, attaches himself to us, and acts to rescue us. Though we deserve wrath, saving grace comes instead.

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Such is his love for us Christ willingly empties himself in order to save us. If the first creation was about making man in God’s image, the second creation is about making God in man’s image. The early church father Irenaeus tells us, “Christ became what we are, so that Christ might bring us to be even what he is.” The early church summed it up this way in what is called the *mirifica commutatio* or the “glorious exchange” - The Son of God became the son of man so we the children of humanity might become children of God.

Humanity’s damaged and distorted mindset of God

The perception that God is against mankind is a falsehood and the fabrication of man’s fallen nature. Because of our fallen nature, mankind’s natural response to God is one of fear, resentment and ultimately hatred. As we saw with Israel, the closer God draws to mankind and the contrast between a holy God and sinful mankind increases the more intense this resentment and resistance grows. Such is humanity’s damaged and distorted mindset; he interprets God’s overtures of grace as threatening and judgmental. It’s a product of the same mindset that ridicules Christianity today (John 15:18). To some degree Christianity itself has contributed to the problem by being overly judgmental. If Jesus had shown up as a conquering king it would only have reinforced this false notion.

Instead, in one of the most unimpressive entrances of all times, the all-powerful, all-wise God of the universe shows up as a baby in a barn in an obscure little village in a third-rate nation under

Roman occupation. Instead of showing up as a conquering king with unlimited power, He shows up as a helpless baby with boundless love. He shows up as one of us. It is no longer a matter of power, where one partner in the relationship is more powerful than the other. Jesus uses a new type of power the world has not seen nor experienced – the conquering power of love. In fact throughout his whole life Jesus rejected the impulse to use His superior power. In the account of the temptation, Jesus refused to respond to Satan’s taunts to use power to prove He was the Son of God. **“If you are the Son of God turn these stones to bread” (Matthew 4:3-4)**. He refused to respond to the taunts of those who ridiculed at the crucifixion when they asked the same question, **“If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matthew 27:40)**. It is not his almighty power that makes our God different. It is his unconditional love and his willingness *to become weak* even giving up his life in order to save those who have rejected Him.

But it is because of this willingness to become weak, in other words, to become a human being; He is in turn elevating the worth of human beings. By Jesus joining himself to humanity as God, He opens the door for humans to have direct access to the same Spirit that flows in the life of the Godhead itself. Jesus as **“the way and the truth and the life”** gives humanity access to the divine life (John 14:6). We will come back to this reality at a future time. But for now this event, called the *Incarnation* of God adding humanity to His divinity demonstrates how committed He is to restoring mankind’s broken relationship with Him. He desperately wants shared love to pass over the vast gulf between God and his creation. He wants to be in communion with his people. And Jesus is the one who makes it possible.

We finish with a beautiful Eucharistic prayer from the Scottish Episcopal Church that contemplates the miracle of the Incarnation.

*Father of all, we give thanks and praise
That when we were still far off
You met us in your Son and brought us home
Dying and living, he declared your love,
Gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory
May we who share Christ’s Body live his risen life;
We who drink his cup bring life to others;
We whom the spirit lights, give light to the world.
Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,
So we and all our children shall be free,
And the whole earth live to praise your name;
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Chapter 25 – Born of the Virgin Mary

Last chapter we witnessed God’s divinely inspired plan put into effect in order to heal and restore mankind’s broken relationship with his Creator (Revelation 13:8). The Son of God lovingly gives up his heavenly privileges, takes off his crown, sets aside his sceptre, rolls up his sleeves and trades the splendour of heaven for the poverty of a stable. The message that accompanies His birth is “Mankind no longer needs to be afraid as a Savior is born in Bethlehem” (Luke 2:10).

The virgin birth

The history of mankind usually revolves around the mighty male and his conquests – Nebuchadnezzar, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler, etc. But in the most important event in human history the mighty male is excluded. The husband as the representative head of the family plays no part in the process. Instead God chooses to work through a humble faithful female. Despite the shame and humiliation associated with a pregnancy outside of wedlock, this was Mary’s response.

Luke 1:38 I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

The response of this humble maiden to this act of pure grace on God’s part (In choosing to become one of us) is one of willing submission. Mary’s response of faith is an example for all humanity on how we are to respond to God’s gift of grace in the remarkable act of the Incarnation and the Atonement. Unlike her sister Eve in the original creation, Mary at the conception of the new creation willingly accepts and submits to God’s claim on her life. Instead of exerting her independence and wanting “to be like God,” she willingly cooperates with God’s plan of redemption.

Mary’s conception

The other question that arises with this passage concerns the question of “How did Mary become pregnant”?

Luke 1:34-35 How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

If we’re looking for a biological answer, we won’t find one, any more than we will find a scientific answer to how God created the universe from nothing. This is one of those events that involve the crossover between the physical dimension of time and space and the spiritual realm God inhabits. Jesus became flesh purely by the Word of God in the same way He spoke at the original creation and all things came into existence “out of nothing.” These events along with questions like the mystery of the Trinity are part of our walk of faith, the answers to which will be revealed when we too inhabit the spiritual realm, we will “***see Him as He is***” (1 John 3:2).

But there is another reason the mighty male is excluded, as he plays no part in the conception of Jesus. The creation of Jesus in the womb is an act of the Holy Spirit. This is significant as this was the beginning of the new creation, and just as the Holy Spirit was active in the original creation, now we see Him playing a significant role in this new beginning (Genesis 1:2). While the origin of the birth of the original Adam was born of the “dust of the earth” in other words from “below,” now we see the last Adam born from “above” (1 Corinthians 15:45-46). The last Adam came into existence from “above” through a divine act of the Holy Spirit, but His humanity was formed on earth in Mary’s womb. But as He was born of a human woman Jesus could legitimately claim both titles, Son of God and Son of man. The doctrine of the Incarnation is that Christ really comes to us in human flesh and assumes it in its fallen condition in order to redeem it and sanctify it. Out of Mary, a sinful woman, the Holy Son of God is born.

Firstborn of the New Creation

But we should not miss the point that Jesus Christ is the firstborn of the new creation, the first human born from “above,” in perfect union with the Father. This is the discussion Jesus had with Nicodemus in John 3 about being born again, or born from “above.”

John 3:5-7 “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’

“***Water and the Spirit***” is a reference to the sacrament of baptism where on repentance; one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit that births us from heaven. But then Jesus makes the remarkable claim that in the same way as He was born from above, we too can experience the same heavenly birth, ***‘You must be born again.’***

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

Notice again the exclusion of the mighty male that can only birth us physically. The human male plays no part in this process as he represents the sinful independence of man who asserted his self-will in rebellion against His Creator. In the process of Jesus’ birth, man in the flesh, represented by Joseph is set aside and has no say in the matter. Now in his place to represent sinful humanity stands a man who is willing to faithfully surrender His will to His Father’s will. Jesus’ birth is one initiated from above, as this is the beginning of the new creation.

Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

This verse is the New Testament equivalent to Genesis 1:26 and demonstrates God’s commitment to his purpose of creating a holy people within whom He can come and dwell. Just as Jesus was born from above by the Holy Spirit, so we too can be born from above by the Holy Spirit and participate in His birth as ***“brothers and sisters.”***

Born from Above

But the first step in the process of being conformed to the image of his Son requires we be born from “above” by the Holy Spirit so we too can inhabit the new creation. Without grace, without being birthed from above by the Holy Spirit, we can never attain the goal of being ***“conformed to the image of his Son”*** who was sinless and perfect. The reason He was sinless was not because He had a different nature to everyone else. It was because He chose to live without sin.

Romans 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh.

Jesus lived a perfect life because unlike Adam and Eve and all other humans, He put His complete faith and trust in His heavenly Father and lived the faithful life of a true son of God, in the image of God. This is what it means to be a true human in the image of God. It was also this requirement of living a sinless life in the flesh that made Him the perfect sacrifice for human sins and the Savior of His mother and the rest of humanity, including the mighty male. He also had to be sinless if He was to save sinners (Luke 15:2). Rather than scaring sinners away with His perfection and moral outrage, He appealed to them out of love because He knew they needed a Savior who could offer them forgiveness, acceptance and help. Jesus Christ has opened up the way for the old humanity to transition to the new humanity, from the old creation to the new creation.

But all this will come to naught if the other miraculous event does not take place at the end of His earthly life and that is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. There is a both a miraculous event at the beginning of Jesus’ earthly life and at the end. Bracketed between these two events we have the remarkable story of God joining Himself to our fallen and sinful humanity and producing out of it a new humanity that is holy and perfect like Himself.

Chapter 26 – Who Is Jesus Christ?

We begin this chapter by compiling a list of the titles the Bible uses to describe Jesus Christ. The most obvious one is “Savior,” but to this we can add, God, Son, Mighty King, Redeemer, Good Shepherd, Way, Truth, Life, Light of the World, Mediator, Atonement, High Priest, Prophet, Word, Healer, Revelator, Judge, Reconciler, Justifier, Counsellor, Creator. Most of us have a title that goes along with our job description, but usually it’s only one title. Yet when we look at the list of titles used to describe Jesus Christ, that’s quite a list. And behind each one of those titles comes a responsibility.

Over the last couple of chapters we have focused on how committed God is to his children. Despite our resistance to his overtures of love, in an incredible act of self-humiliation, God willingly joins us in our humanity. The reason why He willingly joins us in our humanity has a lot to do with these titles we just looked at. These titles describe the mission the Father has set for the Son to achieve during His sojourn on earth. And I think it’s interesting that as I looked at the list of titles, one thing about those titles really struck me. There is only one of these titles that carry a negative connotation, that of Judge. All the others carry a positive connotation. That reveals a lot about God’s attitude towards us yet it also reveals what a distorted view humanity usually has of God.

Last chapter we saw the arrival of Jesus on this earth not as a conquering king, but rather as a helpless babe. Now we need to look a little more closely at the person, Jesus Christ. We will start with the apostle John’s introduction of the “Word”, a title of Jesus Christ.

John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word.

From our time in the Old Testament, we learned the “Word,” or “Spokesperson” was the title given to Moses and the prophets of God to bring God’s personal word to the people. But here John introduces the One whom these prophets represented and now this Word in human form is speaking for Himself. We can begin to understand why God gets angry with Aaron the high priest and Miriam when they try to assume this role for themselves.

V.1 ...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

This raises a difficult question as “How can you be with someone and be Him at the same time”? As we saw earlier, this is the ongoing dilemma we humans face in trying to understand the mystery that is the Trinity.

V 2. He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made

Not only has He always existed, but he also bears the title of “Creator.” And just as the Old Testament begins with a Creator moving to create man, now we see the Creator moving to create a new beginning for mankind. Interestingly, this word, “Word” used in verse one is the English translation for the Greek word “logos.” The Greek philosopher, Plato contrasts the word “logos”, representing the realm of reason, with the word, “alogon”, representing the illogical and irrational world. By using this particular word, the apostle John harks back to the original creation where God is restoring order in the midst of disorder. This “Creator” who has just joined mankind is about to bring about a final and lasting rational order to the cosmos.

V 4. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

The life that exists in every human being, in every plant and animal on the planet came from the Life-Giver. But here too is an indication of that remarkable gift which distinguishes man from the animal kingdom, “light,” a possible reference to human consciousness. It is human consciousness in conjunction with the already mentioned “word” or communication qualities that gives humans the capacity to experience relationships. But as we know this life of light was perverted by the

darkness of sin and man fell from his original estate. However this is not the end of the story as the next verse attests.

V.5. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Not only is He the life giver, but he is also the source of light and He will not allow the darkness, the “alagon” that has descended on mankind to prevail indefinitely.

Jesus as God

Here we see identified three resources that the Word or Logos brings with Him when he shows up as God in the flesh; the ability to create, the ability to give life, and the ability to bring light. By introducing these qualities of the Word, John is making the point that only God has these capabilities. Man cannot “create,” he cannot give “life,” and he most certainly isn’t a “light” bringer. The point John is making in these short verses is that everything that makes God who He is, everything that makes God, God, the Word possesses. And the Gospel message is about how the Word uses these three resources to bring about the restoration of humanity.

Amazingly this God who in the past was off in heaven now chooses to join us in our sinful state.

V.14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

The word used here, “dwelling,” is the word “tabernacle.” In the past God “tabernacled” with Israel at a distance, in the tent of the meeting. Now God through the Word comes and “tabernacles” amongst us.

V.14 We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Peter, James and John witnessed Jesus in His glory at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-6). There is only one Son in the sense of being God; humans become sons only by adoption. And notice the motivation of the Godhead in sending Jesus to us. He is not “full of judgment and damnation,” but rather “full of grace and truth.” What Jesus does is entirely an act of grace on behalf of mankind.

God is Approachable

But by revealing Jesus as the Son, John introduces another interesting concept of who God is. As mentioned earlier, there is very little use of the title Father in the Old Testament as it is only used 15 times. In contrast, it is used more than 100 times in the Gospel of John alone. The use of this terminology by John to describe the relationship between Jesus and the Father demonstrated the Trinity was relational – for all eternity, there has been the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit interacting in community. The God Jesus came to reveal was much different from the distant and removed God of the Old Testament. There the high priest only approached God once a year on the Day of Atonement and then it was only with great trepidation. He ventured into the Holy of Holies with a bell and rope attached to his leg so if something happened to him and the bell stopped ringing, he could be pulled out with the rope. But now we see God taking the initiative and making a face-to-face approach to humanity. In one of our earlier chapters we mentioned how God the Father is the wellspring or the source of living waters that constantly flows from Him. This water is an analogy for God’s love and as the book of Revelation tells us, these living waters flow out to heal the nations (Revelation 22:2). Now in the incarnation of the Son we see this flow of love being extended to embrace mankind so we too can participate in this loving relationship that exists within the Godhead itself. This is precisely what Paul was speaking about in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:6-7 (NRSV) Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

Now in the true nature of who God is, we see Jesus emptying himself of his status at the Father’s right hand in order for the love of God to flow through Him to mankind. As Jesus’ ministry develops we will see him reveal more about the special relationship the Son has with the Father. From God’s point of view, the self-humiliation of the Son is the Trinity’s loving response to man’s downfall. Martin Luther puts it this way; “God reveals who God is in complete vulnerability by

placing himself in the hands of humanity, in surrendering to suffering and death.” Here is the sacrifice God was willing to make so He could draw near to us and in the process draw us near to Him. And just to reiterate once again, the Son is in complete harmony with the Father’s intentions. ***John 5:30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me***

All three persons of the Trinity are committed to their creation and will not allow anything to disrupt their plans. The Father has initiated the process, now we see the Son, our Creator, taking on the life of the created and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit implementing God’s plan of redemption.

Jesus’ Mission

The task set before Jesus was formidable and one only God would be capable of fulfilling in order to restore the broken relationship between God and humanity. Out of pure love and at great cost, God was willing to become something He had never been in eternity, a human being, in order to reconcile and redeem a lost humanity. Each of the titles listed at the beginning carried with it a heavy responsibility and it all had to be accomplished in a hostile landscape under the influence of evil forces. Much of the commentary on Jesus’ mission focuses on His sacrifice on our behalf, but as we will see from the following list this is only one aspect (although the major one) of His mission.

- ◆ To reveal the true nature of the Father, a Father who loves His creation and longs to live with them.
- ◆ He has to confront and defeat the devil and the evil forces arrayed against God and humanity.
- ◆ He has to assume our fallen human nature in order to wrestle it to the ground, defeat it and restore it to God’s original intention.
- ◆ He has to live a perfect life in order to be humanity’s representative for His righteousness to be attributed to us.
- ◆ He has to demonstrate the arrival of the new age, the Kingdom of God by healing the sick, calming the elements, casting out demons, raising the dead and forgiving sin.
- ◆ He has to choose disciples for the embryonic formation of the church.
- ◆ He has to establish through His teachings the ruling principles of the Kingdom of God and show salvation is obtained through grace, not through obedience to the law as that is an impossibility for human beings.
- ◆ He has to be born “under the law” in order to redeem those “under the law.”
- ◆ He has to introduce the New Covenant that has real forgiving power as it is based on His sacrificed body and blood, not the body and blood of animals.
- ◆ He, as the “predestined” one or the “elected” one has to willingly substitute himself in the place of guilty mankind to accept the wrath of God’s just penalty against sin on the cross, so we could be adopted into the family of God.
- ◆ And finally Jesus has to willingly cut Himself off from the true source of life and go to that god-forsaken place called hell and die the second death so we wouldn’t have to.

It is only after He has faithfully fulfilled all these aspects that the Father will resurrect Him and accept His total sacrifice on humanity’s behalf. It is to these aspects that we now direct our attention.

Chapter 27 – Jesus, Fully God and Fully Man

This chapter we are going to have a bit of a theology lesson. Theology, which is the study of God, is normally reserved for scholars and academics who use big difficult to pronounce words and terms to explain biblical concepts. However, as theology plays an important role in magnifying our understanding of God's nature and character, we need to spend some time looking at these concepts to deepen our relationship with our God.

Trinity and Christology

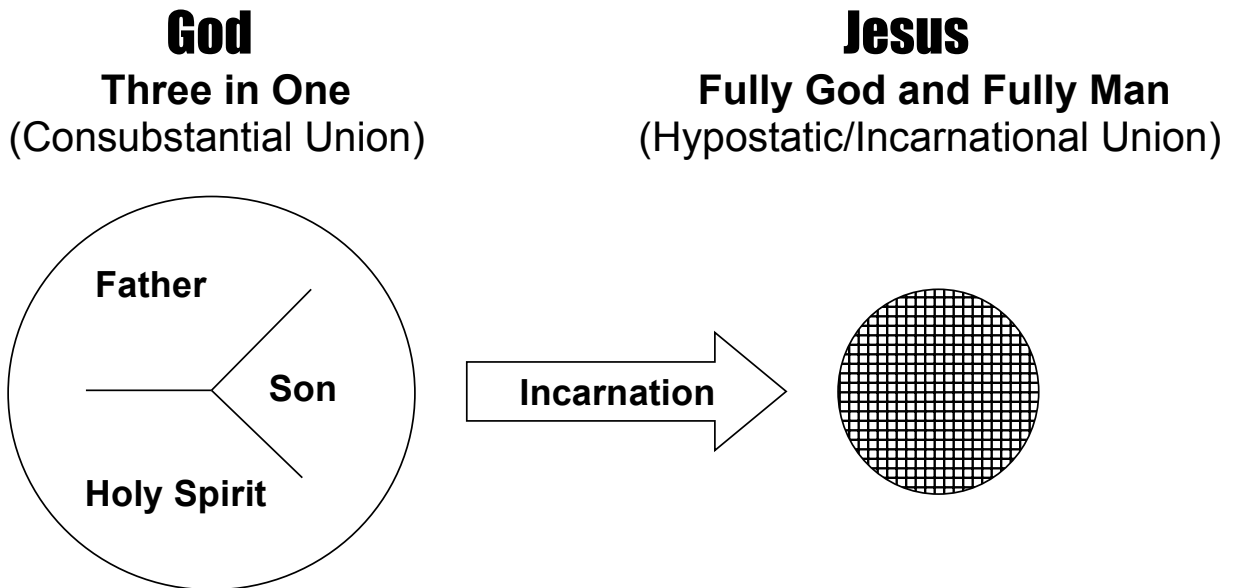
The early New Testament church wrestled with two major issues for the first 400 years – The concept of the “Trinity,” and the concept of “Christology.” We looked at the concept of the Trinity earlier, so our focus this time is on “Christology.”

Last chapter we proved from John 1 that Jesus was indeed God. We also saw that in the true spirit of the Trinity, He did not come with his own agenda, but came with the complete support and agreement of the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity was united in its mission to restore its broken relationship with mankind. But the other remarkable statement John makes is, “***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.***” (John 1:14). In an act of pure grace, the Word chooses to give up his glory at the Father's right hand and become a human. So just to confuse things not only is Jesus God, but He is also God in the flesh – a real live human. So in addition to trying to reconcile God being one and at the same time three, the early church had to wrestle with the question of trying to understand the nature of Jesus Christ – How could He be at the same time both human and divine? This led to the development of what is termed “Christology” – the study of the nature of Jesus Christ. The importance of this discussion should not be underestimated, as at stake is Jesus' claim of being our Savior. If He was not both God and man our very salvation is at stake.

To begin with, we need to go back to the conundrum facing the early church of trying to understand the nature of Jesus Christ – how could He be at the same time both human and divine? For centuries the debate raged around how these two natures could exist in one person. Some stressed the divine side while others stressed the human side. Finally after substantial debate and even bloodshed, The Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. ruled that the Lord Jesus Christ is “*truly God and truly man.*”

The Consubstantial and Hypostatic Unions. (See figure below).

Consubstantial and Hypostatic Unions



In the same way we cannot understand the mystery of the Consubstantial Union of the Trinity, we cannot understand the mystery of the Hypostatic or Incarnational Union of Jesus

The Council of Chalcedon (451AD) ruled that the Lord Jesus Christ is *“truly God and truly man, consubstantial with the Father in all things, as to His divinity, yet in His humanity like unto us in all things, sin excepted.”* He is thus known *“in two natures, without confusion, without conversion, without severance and without division, the distinction of natures being in no wise abolished by their union, but the peculiarities of each nature being maintained, and both concurring in one person and subsistence.”*

What we should note is the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Incarnation belong together. The doctrine of the Trinity declares that Jesus is truly divine, while the doctrine of the Incarnation declares that Jesus is also truly human. Why did the early church spend over 400 years debating this issue before arriving at this conclusion? Well it had important theological implications that centre on the ability of Jesus’ claim to be able to forgive our sins – a pretty important implication. First, justice demands a response; a price has to be paid for our sins. Just as a murderer is sentenced to die or life in prison, a penalty had to be paid for the sins of all humanity. The only person in the position to be able to die for the sins of all humanity is the Creator of all humanity, Jesus Christ (John 1:3). Our Holy God takes sin very seriously. He just doesn’t give us a free pass; a price has to be paid. Our death is demanded by a just and holy God for our many sins. As the guilty party, we can only die for our own sins; none of us can die for anyone else’s sins. Yet the remarkable truth of the Gospel is, Jesus as our Creator steps around the judgment table from his position of Judge and takes the place of condemned humanity.

Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So it was important to establish Jesus was indeed God in order for Him to be our Savior.

With the price paid, God is now in a position to “forgive” us as the price has been paid. This is the second point. As God is the one offended by our sins, Jesus had to be *fully God* in order to be able to forgive us our sins. Ultimately sin is an offense against God’s Holy nature of love and all God stands for. So when we hate our brother, it not only offends our brother, it also offends God because it reflects back on the Creator and Father who has a comprehensive claim on that brother. That is why David in his prayer after his murderous plot against the courageous Uriah, says.

“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;” (Psalms 51:4). David was fully aware of his sin against Uriah, but ultimately he realized the universal implications of his sin on God Himself as David had killed one of God’s children. So David approaches God’s throne asking for forgiveness.

Psalms 51:7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Jesus demonstrated His ability to forgive sins as He went around performing miracles. You may remember the story of the paralytic who was lowered down through the roof of the building.

Mark 2:5-7 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” 6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

The teacher’s of the law’s statement was correct, only God has the right to forgive sins. This is also one of the major proofs that Jesus was indeed God as only God has the right to forgive sins.

You may have heard of the Arian controversy in the fourth century. The Arian controversy describes the early controversy between the early church fathers Arius and Athanasius relating to the nature of Jesus Christ. Arius believed Jesus, as Son of God was a created being which put him in conflict with the Trinitarian position that was defended by Athanasius. The issue was settled at the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) that introduced the word *homoousious* or “consubstantial,” meaning of the “same substance” as the Father. This was in contrast to Arius who used the word, *homoiousias* meaning of “similar substance.” This word *homoousious* or substance was added to the word *hypostasis*, which came to mean “person” to form the orthodox Trinitarian formula, “one substance, three persons”, or in the Greek, “one *ousia*, three *hypostases*.” The early church fathers wanted there to be no misunderstanding that the person Jesus Christ was indeed God. The debate continued and was finally settled at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) where it was ruled that Jesus is one divine-human person in two natures. The two natures, human and divine are united in the person of Jesus Christ without mixture, confusion, separation, or division. The remarkable truth of this statement is the second person of the Trinity is now also human. He who has always had a divine nature now also has a human nature. Jesus Christ is the permanent union between God and man that makes Him the perfect representative or mediator between God and humanity (Hebrews 5:7-10).

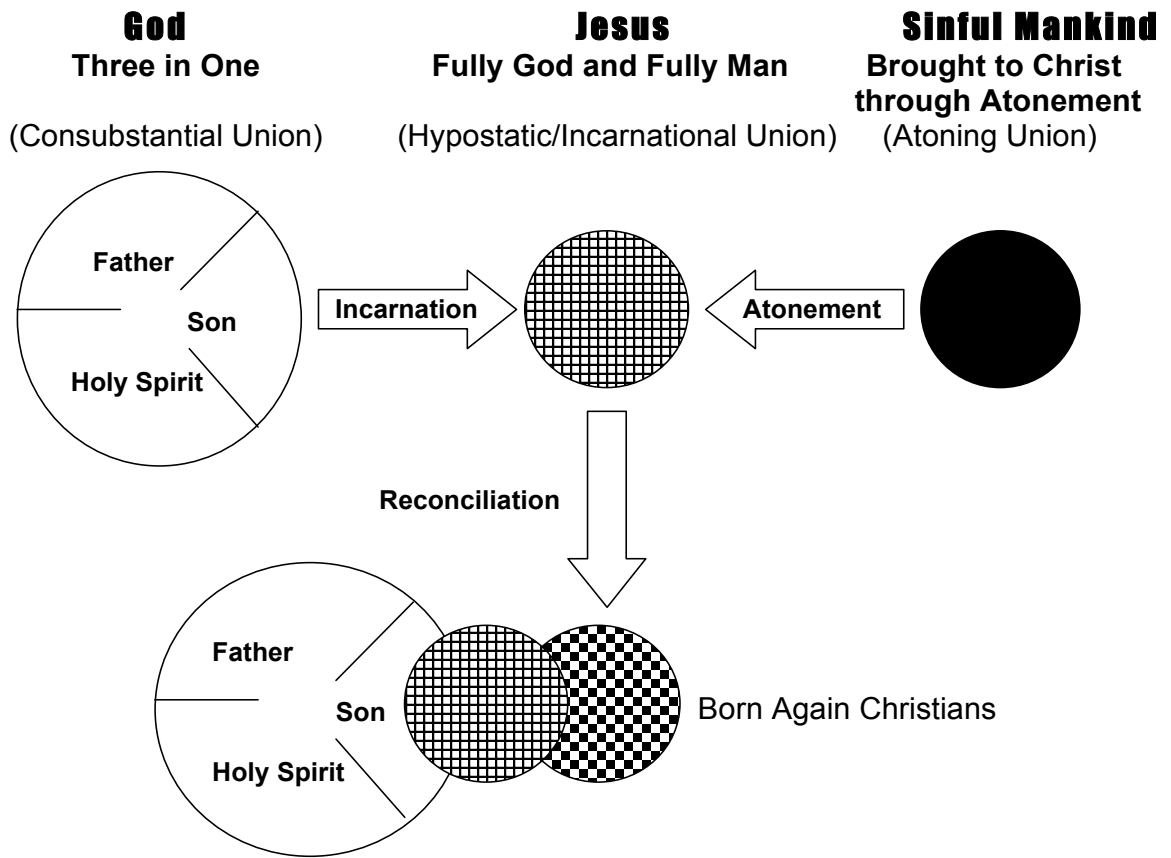
Jesus our Mediator

One of the many titles Jesus has is that of “Mediator.” A mediator is one who stands between two parties in order to affect “reconciliation.” You may remember this was one of the roles Moses assumed in the ongoing rocky relationship between God and Israel.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.

Jesus as Mediator. (See figure below).

Jesus as Mediator



Christ our Mediator as Fully God and Fully Man:

1. Enters into our fallen humanity and sanctifies us from within His own Being
2. Imparts to us the "life" and "love" of God
3. By uniting humanity with His divinity overcame sin and death
4. Unites every believer together into His Church

As a result we enjoy an intimate relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit through the mediating work of Jesus Christ

- ♦ **2 Peter 1:3-4 (NKJV) 3 as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.**

There are three important unions that revolve around and make it possible for Jesus Christ to fulfil his role as our "Mediator." The first union, top left, is the "Consubstantial Union" which is the term used to describe the Trinitarian Union. As mentioned earlier the term, *homoousios* or "consubstantial" meaning of the "same substance" was the word used to describe the oneness of the Trinity in that the three persons were of the same "substance" at the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.). Hence the word, "consubstantial."

If we follow the arrow of the "Incarnation" we arrive at another union, the union between God and humanity through Jesus Christ called the "Hypostatic or Incarnational Union." The Incarnation is the way God chose to *draw near to mankind*. God is not this far-off, uninvolved God who would

up the universe and let things run its course. Rather He is intimately involved with His creation even to the point of rolling up His sleeves and immersing Himself in our tangled mess.

Then further to the right we have the “Atoning Union” where Jesus unites Himself to sinful humanity in order to act as their atoning representative and substitute for their sin. Jesus knew the ordeal He was about to face; yet He voluntarily accepted the task. He was the One who inspired Isaiah 52-53. He chose to invade humanity when the cross was the method of execution. He walked the streets of Jerusalem and saw on a distant hill the crucified silhouetted against the sky.

John 10:17-18 (NLT) “The Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may have it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I lay down my life voluntarily. For I have the right to lay it down when I want to and also the power to take it again. For my Father has given me this command.”

Jesus voluntarily lived out the Atonement as the Lamb of God sacrificed on our behalf. Again we see this extraordinary love, this time displayed by the Son of God in the terrible sacrifice He was willing to suffer *in order for us to be drawn back to God*. The Incarnation is the way God chose to draw near to mankind, while the Atonement opened the door for a sinful humanity to draw near to God.

This in turn leads to “reconciliation” between God and redeemed humanity as Jesus has paid the penalty for their sin and opened the door for reconciliation to occur. (See bottom center). The key person in the whole process though is Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:6-8 (NLT) Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. 7 He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. (Incarnation) 8 And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal’s death on a cross. (Atonement).

It is His central role in bringing about reconciliation between God and humanity that qualifies Him as our Savior, our Mediator, our Representative, and our Substitute.

Representative of Humanity

We explained earlier why it was important for Jesus to be divine in order to substitute Himself as our Creator in the place of sinful humanity in order to forgive us. But it was equally important for Jesus to be human in order for Him to be a true “representative” of humanity. A true human being lived the life of the obedient son and faced the ordeal of the cross on our behalf. It is through this process of Jesus fulfilling in Himself the Incarnation and the Atonement that has brought about Reconciliation.

As Mediator, as God and man in one person, He acted from the side of God as God, and from the side of man as man. Earlier we spoke about the failure of the Israelites to live up to their requirements of the Mosaic Covenant, to ***“be holy as I am holy” (Leviticus 19:2)***. Through the whole process God has been faithful to His side of the covenant. What we see happening with the Incarnation and the Atonement is Jesus as the holy faithful Son now acting from the side of man not only for unfaithful Israel, but also for all humanity with the introduction of the New Covenant instituted with His body and blood. Jesus was born under the law in order to act on behalf of unfaithful Israel, but then expanded the gift of salvation to all people, the Gentiles, under the New Covenant (Galatians 4:4-5; 3:6).

We have looked at three important reasons why Jesus needed to be both divine and human in order to be our Savior. First, God’s justice demands a response, a price had to be paid for our many sins. As our Creator and God, Jesus was the only one capable of paying the price for the sins of all humanity. Second, as God is the one offended by our sins, Jesus had to be fully God in order

to be able to forgive our sins. Third, Jesus had to be a human being in order for Him to be a true representative of humanity. We will come back to this “representative” principle shortly.

It's a remarkable thing to contemplate God's expression of love towards humanity in the gift of Jesus Christ, but to also understand the wonderful design behind this expression of love only adds to the wonderment. As we have seen today, theology plays an important role in magnifying both the immensity of God's love and the incredible brilliance in how that love is expressed to us. We will look more at this in the next chapter.

Chapter 28 – The Representative Principle

We need to spend some time looking at why Jesus needed to be fully human and that brings us to the “Representative Principle.” This principle is critical to understanding Jesus’ role in saving us. The apostle Paul in Romans 5 explains this principle.

Romans 5:17-19 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

Here we see the comparison being made between the first Adam and the second Adam and the subsequent consequences of their actions (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

V.18 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

Notice how the consequences of each Adam’s actions affect all people for either good or bad. It’s interesting to note how some commentators try to skate around this verse to make it sound like Adam’s actions affect “all people” while Jesus’ does not. This is usually done in an attempt to avoid being labelled a Universalist, in other words to avoid giving the impression all will eventually be saved. We will address that question at a future time. Suffice here to say, it isn’t necessarily true that just because one’s sins have been forgiven, they will automatically be saved. The other problem of trying to slide around this issue is to make the claim that Adam’s sinful actions have a far greater effect on mankind than Jesus Christ’s saving actions. Yet this scripture clearly says, ***how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!*** To insist Christ’s actions don’t affect all people is tantamount to saying God is unable to correct the damage done by Adam. The whole gospel message is precisely the opposite. It’s the good news that through Jesus Christ, God is more than able to undo the damage done by Adam.

V.19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

This representation principle is foreshadowed in the role of the high priest on the Day of Atonement when he went into the Holy of Holies as the representative of the whole nation of Israel. However in this case we see the true High Priest’s fulfilment of what the Day of Atonement foreshadowed for the nation of Israel, will now affect true forgiveness of sins for the whole world. And instead of presenting the blood of an animal to God, this High Priest, this Lamb of God, offers His own blood as an act of sacrifice.

Much of the Christian message rightly focuses on this saving aspect of Jesus’ mission to save the world. However it would be a mistake to limit the representative principle to just Jesus’ death on the cross. To limit Christ’s role to just that one event, awe-inspiring as it was, is to miss so much more of what Christ achieved for us in his role of Mediator. We need now to go back to look more closely at Jesus’ life to see how He acts as our representative in other important aspects of delivering us from our sinfulness.

Jesus not only “died” for us, He also “lived” for us.

The Gospels don’t give us a lot of information on Jesus’ early life. We have the record of him visiting Jerusalem during the Passover season with his parents and dumbfounding the elders there with his knowledge even though he was only 12 years of age. We know he had brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55) and one can only imagine how difficult it was for them to live with a sibling who was perfect. But it’s not until Jesus is 30 years of age, the age one was eligible to enter the priesthood (Numbers 4:30) that we see the beginning of Jesus’ official ministry. It begins with Jesus asking John the Baptist to baptise Him. Usually baptism is associated with repentance, so why is it then that Jesus, a perfect, sinless individual, needed to be baptised? Yet He insisted despite John’s protests. It goes back to this principle of representation. As we will go on to show,

Jesus did not only “die” for us, he also “lived” for us. Jesus by becoming a man, assumed the role of the second Adam, and set out to undo the work of the first Adam (Romans 5:17-19).

The sorry history of mankind up to this point demonstrated beyond doubt that both with, and without the law, humanity was totally incapable of meeting the strict requirement of becoming God’s holy people under their own steam. “Self-salvation”, despite the best attempts of self-righteous groups such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Puritans and others throughout history, the goal of attaining the holiness of God has been a complete and unmitigated failure. As mentioned in an earlier session, it is the height of arrogance to think we, as the created can attain the holiness of our Creator and Father by our own efforts. This is the same trap the serpent sold to Adam and Eve by claiming they **“would be like God, knowing good and evil.”** If holiness is the goal and that is God’s purpose, it was not going to come from man’s efforts. In the same way God has provided the means for our sins to be forgiven through the efforts of Jesus Christ, He is now going to provide the means for us to become “holy” through the efforts of Jesus Christ.

The key to understanding this process is given by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In the same way Jesus substituted Himself on the cross for our sakes so the sins of the world could be placed on His shoulders, Jesus also assumes the role of living the perfect righteous life for our sakes so His righteousness can be attributed to us. As the created cannot attain holiness through their own efforts, the Creator is going to do it for us. This is why Jesus insists John baptise Him as He is stepping into the role of being our representative by identifying himself with sinners so he could vicariously live the perfect life you and I are incapable of living. We know from Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus, despite facing the combined evil forces of the cosmos, successfully prevailed in His task of both living a perfect life and suffering the ordeal of the cross on our behalf.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

As a result of this sacrifice, our sins are forgiven and Christ’s righteousness is attributed to us through faith.

Hebrews 10:14 For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Unfortunately, this aspect of Jesus’ ministry is rarely talked about yet it has far reaching implications for Christians standing before God. Much is made of Jesus’ vicarious death on the cross on our behalf, so that we know our sins have been forgiven. But precious little emphasis is laid on His living a perfect life vicariously on our behalf so that Christ’s righteousness can be attributed to us. Yet this fact too is a truly liberating aspect of the Gospel message.

Living under unnecessary guilt

Because of a misunderstanding of this aspect of the Gospel message, too many Christians live under an unnecessary cloud of guilt. Don’t misunderstand. Guilt plays an important role in a Christian’s life. We should be disappointed with ourselves when we sin and let our Savior down even though Jesus knows our human frailty and has taken care of the sin problem with His atonement. We should accept His forgiveness and rest in His peace. Unfortunately “guilt” that is designed to drive us back to our Saviour for forgiveness and help in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16), has instead been used as a club to manipulate Christians into striving harder to overcome their many sins. The result pushes us back to self-salvation or performance religion. We’re told to build more faith, more character, pray more, study more, fast more, believing overcoming sin is our problem. There aren’t too many Christians who have not suffered at the hands of those advocating performance religion. Performance religion doesn’t end well. Those with more obvious sins usually give up on religion. They already feel bad enough about themselves, the last thing they need is misguided Christians piling more guilt on them. At the other extreme we have

those, like the Pharisees, who because of a focus on external performance, fall into the trap of self-righteousness, or self-salvation.

Sin is God's Problem, not ours

If sin was *our* problem, Jesus didn't need to come. Sin is God's problem! Jesus is the one whose task it is to undo the work of the first Adam, not us. Acknowledging the sin in our lives is a critical part of the repentance process. Isn't that why we came to Christ in the first place because we didn't like what we saw and were frustrated with our inability to deal with sin and the sinful nature that causes it? Christians need to stop beating themselves up with unnecessary guilt. Instead when we fail, we acknowledge our sin before God, request His forgiveness, which He graciously grants, and hand the sin problem over to the one who can do something about it. However, as we go through this process of repentance we need to remember our standing with God has not changed, we are still His holy children. When we fail to live up to the uncompromising demands of God's law we are still accepted by our loving Father as His adopted children because *we are not accepted on the flawed life we live but rather on the perfect life Jesus lived when He walked the dusty roads of Palestine*. This is the good news of Jesus representing us through the life that he lived. Children of God are not judged by their works, they are judged by Christ's works. I don't know about you, but that takes an enormous pressure off me as a Christian. It tells me I don't need to be perfect to be accepted by God, because the righteousness of Jesus Christ has been attributed to me. But it's much more than just a forensic transaction. It also has enormous implications for our daily walk.

Perfect Worship

Let me ask this question. Did you offer up perfect prayers this morning? I did! Why? Because those feeble pathetic petitions that I call my prayers are intercepted and wrapped in Jesus' perfect prayers before they even reach the Father. Jesus as Mediator and Priest effectively becomes our worship leader. You may not have a singing voice that makes it on to some celebrity TV show, but it doesn't matter. Jesus Christ intercepts your tone-deaf praises long before they are included with the heavenly chorus singing praises to the Father. What the representative principle means is, from God's perspective, whatever applies to Jesus Christ effectively applies to you and me when we accept Jesus as our Savior. This applies to every aspect of our lives. We may not be the perfect Christian, husband, wife, parent, teenager, etc. however, Jesus is. It's on his ability and His righteousness that we are accepted. It is futile and harmful for Christians to continue to unnecessarily beat themselves up trying to be perfect. But know this and here's a news flash, this side of the resurrection, we're not going to be perfect at anything! While we are trapped in this body of flesh, we will continue to sin. That's what we are told in 1 John 1:8.

1 John 1:8-9 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Unfortunately sin is going to be with us while we drag around this body of flesh. That's just the way things are. The good news is we are no longer judged or guilty, but rather forgiven sinners clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:4-6 (NKJV) 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Notice the representative principle in this verse, we are made alive *together* with Christ, and we sit *together* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Salvation from start to finish is an act of pure grace flowing from the heart of God. This is why salvation is an act of faith as it is based on Jesus' saving work not ours – it is Christ-salvation, not self-salvation. We are not accepted by the Father on the life we live, but rather on the perfect life

Jesus lived. As far as God is concerned, those in Christ are regarded as holy and righteous as Jesus Christ. Praise God!

Chapter 29 – Redeeming Sinful Nature

Last chapter we looked at the Representative principle where Jesus steps into the shoes of sinful humanity so He can act as their representative. Jesus substituted Himself on the cross for our sakes so the sins of the world could be placed on His shoulders. Jesus also assumes the role of living the perfect righteous life for our sakes so His righteousness can be attributed to us.

But there is another aspect of human depravity that needs to be addressed as part of Jesus' mission to free us from sin and that is the sinful human nature that causes our sin. As a result of Adam and Eve's fateful decision to reject God, the gift of freewill with which they were created defaulted and came under the domination of self-will with the resulting dehumanising consequences. It would be a hollow victory to save humanity without taking care of the sinful nature that causes sin and its subsequent death. To use a medical illustration, the patient was resuscitated, but nothing was done to address the disease that caused his death, which means he would only die again. The cause of death had to be addressed. This too was part of Jesus' mission as our representative, He came not only to live and die for us as we saw last time, but also to heal the disease that causes death.

The unassumed is the unhealed

There is a famous quote from the 4th-century Bishop, Gregory of Nazianzen, "the unassumed is the unhealed" (or "unredeemed"). Remember, the goal of salvation is to make us in God's image. It would be of little use to save us without addressing the cause of our inhumanity and making it possible for us to receive a nature consistent with God's nature. This phrase "the unassumed is the unhealed" stresses what is at stake when it comes to Christ's humanity. If Jesus did not assume our flesh and nature completely then that part which He did not assume remains unredeemed. It was crucial then that the human nature Jesus was born with was the same fallen nature that comes along with every corruptible mortal body.

Romans 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh.

It had to be this way in order for him to take that sinful nature and restore it to God's original intention for humanity. Jesus' whole life was one of wrestling with, overcoming and defeating that sinful nature in order that he might heal, sanctify and redeem it. Of course the climax of this whole process came at the cross, where Paul says, "***God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21)***. It was at the ordeal of the cross when the wicked forces of the cosmos including the devil, his demons, the secular and religious leaders, the baying crowd, along with the fallen nature of humanity combined in an attempt to defeat God's plan of redemption. On top of this, the burden of the sins of the world were heaped on His shoulders to the point where He felt like God had abandoned Him and He uttered that God forsaken cry, although of course God hadn't abandoned Him (Psalms 22:1-24).

One can only imagine the internal struggle that played out within Jesus as He battled these evil forces without retaliating or compromising His holiness. But, from start to finish, Jesus' whole life was one of undoing the damage done by the first Adam. As the second Adam, Jesus took on sinful human nature and through his sinless life sanctified our fallen humanity. He was able to achieve this victory through the intimate relationship He maintained with the Father and the divine power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 4:13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. 14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

We spoke earlier about the Spirit of God descending on the man Jesus at his baptism. And it was Jesus' willingness to rely completely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit rather than trust His independent human nature that guided His steps. In other words, Jesus lived in the power of the Spirit rather than the power of the flesh. Jesus was not omnipotent as a human. When the situation required it, the Holy Spirit provided Jesus with the love, knowledge, wisdom and power He needed that was appropriate to the situation.

This was the key difference between the two Adams. The first Adam when confronted with a choice to let God be God, or to "become his own god", decided to trust in his own ability as to how he should conduct his life. In contrast, the second Adam, Jesus, committed to live His life in unbroken trust and obedience to the Father, in other words to let God be God.

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

Despite the immense pressure to succumb to the evil forces arrayed against Him, He was never going to surrender his will to the kingdom of darkness. His intimate relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit prevented this from happening. However, this was not an easy task as scripture records this overcoming did not come without "***loud cries and tears***".

Hebrews 5:7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

His "***reverent submission***" to the Father's will, and His intimate relationship through "***prayers and petitions***" with the Father, were the keys to Jesus overcoming sinful human nature all the way to the hideous cross. Unlike his rebellious forefather, He willingly submitted to the Father's will in directing His life, in the same way an obedient created son should respond to His Creator and Father. This second Adam is living the response of the obedient son the first Adam should have lived, and He did it not only for the first Adam but also for all those who have followed in his rebellious footsteps. On behalf of all humanity as our representative, Jesus is fulfilling the role of the obedient son, recognizing the comprehensive claims the Father has on each one of us.

If we now go back to 2 Corinthians 5:21, we see the full implication of Paul's statement.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The first part of the verse speaks about Jesus acting as our representative by accepting the penalty of sin on our behalf on the cross. The second part is referring to what Jesus has accomplished so He can impute His righteousness to us. He was able to do this by first living the perfect sinless life we are incapable of living, and second by assuming our fallen human nature in order to redeem it by wrestling it to the ground, defeating it and restoring it to God's original intention. This transaction has been called, "the great exchange." It's the bargain of the cosmos in that we give Jesus our sins and He in turn gives us His righteousness.

Jesus' Joyful Sacrifice

This was the path Jesus committed Himself to when He insisted John the Baptist baptise Him. He joyfully headed down a path even though at the end of it stood the hideous cross.

Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It was not just the power of the Spirit, nor following the will of the Father or his intimate communication with the Father that motivated Jesus. It was for the joy of setting his creation free from the power of sin and darkness. It was joy motivated by pure love for His creation that allowed Him to counter the evil forces arrayed against Him. He saw past the temptations, the betrayals, the opposition, the scourging and the cross to a humanity living in intimate relationship with the Trinity. Jesus was never going to betray that outcome. That's why he went, not only with

a godly confidence, but also with joy to confront the forces of sin and evil. Along the way, He lived a perfect life of trust and obedience, and wrestled to the ground and defeated our sinful human nature. As a result of Jesus' effort on our behalf as our representative, the good news is we no longer need to feel judged or guilty, but rather forgiven sinners clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:27). In the Father's eyes we are now considered as righteous as Jesus Christ.

At Jesus' baptism, the heavens opened and a voice was heard from heaven.

Matthew 3:17 "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Not only does this statement show the close bond between the Father and the only begotten Son, but also it has some interesting implications when the representative principle is taken into account.

Hebrews 2:11 Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

Now that we are "***made holy***" and are considered "***brothers and sisters***" with Jesus through His righteous works, the words the Father spoke to the Son on His baptism also apply to His adopted children. Can we believe that? As adopted children of God, what the Father said about Jesus is also said about us!

Matthew 3:17 "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Chapter 30 – Confronting the Devil

Jesus' official ministry begins with Jesus asking John the Baptist to baptise him. We saw Jesus did not just "die" for us, he also "lived" for us. At his baptism, Jesus stepped into the role of being our representative by identifying himself with sinners so he could vicariously live the perfect life you and I are incapable of living and overcome our fallen human nature in order to redeem it by wrestling it to the ground, defeating it and restoring it to God's original intention.

With His baptism, Jesus begins his official ministry. As He begins His ministry, it's important to note that for the first time there is a human acknowledging God as Lord by putting his complete trust in God and living a life truly in God's image. This is in contrast to the life of independence humanity has chosen in rejecting God's invitation to trust Him with their lives. But his baptism is also the beginning of a new age, the age of the New Creation. At Jesus' baptism we see God pronouncing his "well pleased" on his Son in much the same way He announced His "very good" at the original creation. We also see the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the new creation as it descends like a dove upon Jesus. As mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit is prominent in all new beginnings, e.g., original creation, Jesus' birth and baptism, and the birth of the church at Pentecost. The striking aspect of this display of the Holy Spirit is significant in that it has been poured out on a human being. Humanity is now drawn into and included in the circle of life and love of the Trinity. As we saw in an earlier session, Jesus as our Mediator as both God and man, establishes a direct connection between God and humanity that allows us to participate in the life of the Trinity. We are drawn into "Holy Communion" with the Trinity.

But there is another striking similarity with the original creation and that is the temptation from Satan that signifies a new start or a new creation. As we saw earlier in the cases of Adam, Job, Abraham, Israel, David, there comes a time in the lives of God's people when their allegiance is put to the test. What we see now is the "second" Adam being subjected to the same conditions as the "first" Adam. But the test the second Adam is subjected to is much more menacing than the original Adam. In this encounter, Jesus faces the full onslaught of the principalities and powers of the evil side of the spiritual realm. Right from the start, beginning with his birth when Herod sought to kill all the newborns, and now at the start of His official ministry, the devil tries to derail God's plan of redemption. This is a burden that will plague Jesus throughout his ministry and reach its climax at the cross. And the goal of Satan and his evil powers is to somehow break that hypostatic union between the divine and the flesh by luring Jesus into sin. In other words, to surrender to the self-will of the flesh rather than trust the leading of the Spirit. Surrendering to the selfish desires of the flesh would disqualify Jesus from becoming our Savior.

But there is a major difference in the temptation Jesus willingly subjected himself to and the one Adam and Eve were subjected to. While Adam and Eve were enjoying the pleasures of Eden with a full stomach in a beautiful surrounding with an unfallen nature, when temptation nuzzled up to them in the form of a serpent, Jesus had an entirely different experience. It was not in the cool Garden of Eden, it was the heat of the desert. He faced temptation battling the desires of the flesh with an empty stomach after fasting for 40 days. And He went voluntarily to the fray with a fallen human nature that is hostile to God and a human will that resents any external interference especially from God. He is then confronted with a not so subtle serpent as in the case of Eve, but with the most malevolent creature in all creation, the roaring lion of Satan himself.

Yet we don't see any hesitation in Jesus going forth on our behalf to confront Satan and his evil forces, such is His confidence in His heavenly Father and His desire to take personal responsibility for releasing humanity from the full depth of human depravity.

Mark 1:9-12 *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." 12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.*

In the midst of human frailty, Jesus willingly confronts the devil's temptations. The strategy used by Satan are attempts to get Jesus in his weakened human condition to resort to using the God-ordained powers available to him, to live as the all-powerful Son of God rather than the frail Son of man. That is why Satan begins each temptation with the phrase, "If you are the Son of God."

It would have been easy for Jesus to use His divine powers to turn rocks into bread. Bread however, is of little use to the man who has betrayed his soul even if he is currently starving (Genesis 25:29-34). The answer, Jesus gives Satan, to human problems is not more physical bread, but instead to feast on spiritual bread, the Word of God (Matthew 4:4). In the second temptation, Jesus could have called on God's angels to save Him if He cast Himself off the cliff. Yet God should not be regarded as some sort of divine safety net ready to intervene to rescue us from our irresponsible and reckless decisions. Nor should He be regarded as some sort of cosmic ATM machine or magician to be commanded to shower us with "health and wealth" not even by His own Son.

Matthew 4:7 *Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" But Jesus' mission as our representative was to live a life of overcoming as the Son of Man with all the baggage that implied without resorting to using the overwhelming divine power available to Him as the Son of God. If Jesus was to truly represent us He could have no advantage over us otherwise his representative role would be compromised. Of course Jesus, throughout His ministry does use His divine power to help and heal others, but He never uses it to aid Himself even when challenged to do so on the cross. "He saved others, let him save Himself" (Matthew 27:42).*

The last temptation of the devil is an interesting one as it gives Jesus the opportunity of establishing the Kingdom of God by avoiding the path of the cross.

Matthew 4:8 *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."*

Jesus' mission was to wrest control of God's creation back from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. It is the classic showdown between "good" and "evil." Satan had misused the position of authority delegated to him by God for evil instead of good and had disqualified himself as the legitimate ruler of the earth. Now it was up to Jesus as the legitimate heir to the throne of His forefather King David, to oust this prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), and restore God's legitimate claim and righteous rule to His created order.

Satan with this temptation appeals to two powerful forces of human nature in an attempt to lure Jesus into sin. The first is an appeal to the inner darkness of our fallen human nature by using the desire within all of us for domination and control over others. And second, is an appeal to the powerful drive within all humans for the avoidance of pain and the inner drive for survival. The dark shadow of the looming cross was something Jesus lived with every day. The crafty Satan was offering Jesus an alternative strategy of achieving His goal without going down the road of the cross. Jesus had to stare down the devil's menacing evil not through the use of raw power but rather through faith, love and righteousness. But the Word did not flinch, and quoted back to Satan the very words He had inspired long ago.

Matthew 4:10 *Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Deuteronomy 6:13).*

Jesus knew there was no shortcut available to Him, especially by kowtowing to the devil, and threw Himself back on the will of His Father. Jesus the rightful King over humanity, stares down Satan the usurper this time, but the devil is not finished with Jesus just yet.

Luke 4:13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

That opportune time would present itself soon enough when Jesus set His face to go up to Jerusalem to pay the penalty for the sins of the world.

Jesus believes in a devil

An interesting sidebar to this story is it is a rare instance in scripture where the account of the temptation had to come from Jesus Himself. As no one accompanied Him, He would have had to relate the account to the disciples so they could record it. But with the account coming directly from Jesus, it makes it difficult for those who don't accept a literal devil to dismiss his existence as mere mythology. The devil seemed real enough to Jesus, so real he even included "***deliver us from the evil one***" in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:13).

In addition to defeating and redeeming the fallen nature of mankind, Jesus takes upon Himself in a pure act of grace to free humanity from the evil spiritual forces that hold them captive. The roots of sin are not just confined to the human heart, they are also held captive by the unseen evil forces of the spiritual realm. Humanity on its own is helpless and cannot break free from this influence any more than it can change its sinful heart. It was an integral part of Jesus' ministry to battle these wicked forces and free mankind from the tyranny of evil.

Immediately after the temptation, Jesus returns to a synagogue in Nazareth, stands up and proclaims His mission of freeing mankind from the tyranny of evil.

Luke 4:16-21 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

So beginning with Jesus' baptism, we see three very important aspects of His ministry. First, He assumed the role of being our representative by identifying Himself with sinners so He could vicariously live the perfect life you and I are incapable of living. Second, He had to assume our fallen human nature in order to redeem it by wrestling it to the ground, defeating it and restoring it to God's original intention. And thirdly we see Jesus confronting and overcoming the power of the evil forces holding mankind captive in order to introduce the Kingdom of God. Jesus is systematically addressing and overcoming the evil forces that hold humanity captive.

Chapter 31 – Jesus’ Official Ministry

Right from the start of His official ministry signified by His baptism by John the Baptist we see Jesus rising to the tasks set before Him. He is baptised to identify with us as sinners; He assumes and begins the task of overcoming our fallen human nature; He lives the perfect life we fail to live; and He confronts and overcomes the devil in the wilderness.

But there is much more Jesus needs to accomplish during his earthly sojourn. As we follow the account in the book of Matthew, we see Jesus engaging in a number of other important aspects of His ministry. All of these aspects, beginning with his baptism, point to the beginning of a new age, a new creation or the establishment of the kingdom of God on this earth. As Jesus goes about establishing the kingdom of God, we see Him assuming roles foreshadowed in the Old Testament of prophet, priest and king. The difference being that these three roles that were filled by three different individuals in the Old Testament are now combined in the person of Jesus. Moses and later the prophets were appointed to fulfil the role of “Prophet” or the “Word,” Aaron and his descendants were appointed to fulfil the role of “Priest,” and David and the kings of Israel to fulfil the role of “King.” As we examine Jesus’ ministry we see Him fulfilling these three roles.

Jesus as High Priest

The first is the embryonic formation of the church (Matthew 4:18-22). Here we see Jesus acting in His capacity as High Priest as He begins to establish the “priesthood of all believers” (1 Peter 2:5), those who would be a reflection of the true High Priest, Jesus Christ to the world. Jesus chooses twelve disciples or students who will follow his every move for the next three and a half years of His ministry. Jesus knew His time on earth was limited and so began the important education of those who would continue His work of building His kingdom after His departure. It’s interesting that he doesn’t go to the temple in Jerusalem to choose his disciples; instead He chooses smelly fishermen and low-life tax collectors. There is something unique about these chosen twelve and later the apostle Paul that distinguishes them from all other Christians. All had direct communion with the Word of God. Daily they were walking and talking with the Word who became flesh (John 1:14). Jesus as the head of the church (Colossians 1:18) was emulating for His students what it was like to live entirely in God’s will. He was preparing them for the important role they would later play in laying the foundation of the early church (Acts 2, Ephesians 2:19-21).

No human being before or since has had such an opportunity with the exception of the apostle Paul (Galatians 1:11-13), and as such their witness to the words and works of Jesus play a key role in the development of Christ’s message. As such the title “apostle” should be restricted to those who had direct contact with Jesus Christ Himself. Later, with the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, the disciples had a double relation to Christ, an *historical* one to Jesus Himself, and a *supernatural* connection through the Spirit. They were also the ones under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who recorded and communicated the words and deeds of Jesus and ultimately their writings were included in the canon of Holy Scripture. It is to these writings, “the faith once delivered” (Jude 1:3) that the church, as it expanded and grew in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ through the centuries, would weigh its faith and practice on the foundation laid at that time. ***Ephesians 2:19-20 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.***

The foundations of the church are built on an unrepeatable foundation, Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles. Like the twelve sons of Jacob who were responsible for the development of the kingdom of Israel, now we see twelve men chosen for the development of spiritual Israel, the church. Another one of those archetypes we spoke about earlier. We will have much more to say about Jesus’ role as our High Priest when we come to His priestly and sacrificial role in the events

surrounding the cross. But in His ministry Jesus foreshadows what is about to happen as He goes around forgiving sins, and releasing sinners from their guilt.

Jesus as King

Another aspect Matthew identifies of Jesus' ministry is "He heals the sick" (Matthew 4:23-25). Jesus is here acting in His capacity as King. His title of kingship was revealed to Mary prior to His birth when the angel Gabriel appeared to her.

Luke 1:30-33 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

Healing the sick is Jesus' outward sign to a sceptical world that the kingdom of God had arrived (Luke 16:16). It is very difficult to explain away a miracle and scripture tells us there were thousands of them (John 21:25). He knew people were much more interested in visible signs and wonders than the healing of the human heart which is where Jesus performs His greatest miracle. Even in Christian circles today this preoccupation in outward physical healing seems to take precedent over the inward healing of the human heart. The real miracle needs to happen at the heart level and this is what the kingdom of God is all about, a new creation, with a new heart. These miracles of Jesus are another proof the new age had arrived, the Age of Redemption (Romans 8:21-23). The chaos of the fallen world both physical and spiritual is about to be redeemed and Jesus demonstrates this by His ability to heal sickness, calm the elements, cast out demons, raise the dead and forgive sin. Again in an act of pure grace, Jesus takes on Himself the burdens of the world, not only to heal the physically sick but also the spiritually sick. Each time Jesus performed a miracle there was a personal price to be paid. This is recorded for us in John. ***John 11: 32 (KJV) Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.***

Jesus was transferring the burdens of the world onto himself and in the process redeeming the world. The King of this new kingdom had arrived and the process of redeeming the world was taking place. This aspect of redemption and healing will reach its glorious climax at Christ's return when the whole cosmos will be redeemed (Romans 8:20-22, Revelation 22:2).

Jesus as the Word

Another aspect Matthew identifies as part of Jesus' ministry is He begins to preach the values and principles of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:17). Jesus is now acting in His capacity as the Word. No longer was there a need for prophets to speak on behalf of Jesus, as "the Word" is here to speak for Himself.

Hebrews 1:1-2 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

And to reinforce who exactly has the final word, the Father from heaven at the event of the transfiguration, has this to say.

Mark 9:7 Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

It is significant that standing with Jesus in a glorified state are Moses and Elijah, signifying their roles in speaking on behalf of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) under the Old Covenant. Now with the coming of the kingdom of God and the introduction of the New Covenant, God the Father identifies Jesus as the spokesman or Word we should listen to under this new arrangement. Immediately after Jesus' confrontation with the devil it is no accident that in the next chapter of the book of Matthew, Jesus as prophet, priest and king outlines the constitution of the kingdom of God with what has become known as the "beatitudes." Each of these principles flies in the face of

how the rulers of the kingdoms of this world administer power. When was the last time we heard politicians act and speak about policies that involve, humility, meekness, empathy, righteousness, mercy, being peacemakers, suffering injustice quietly, loving your enemies (Matthew 5:1-48). It's a total contrast to the world we live in today where power is used to subjugate, humiliate and an excuse to line one's own pockets. It's the dawning of a new age where the principles of godly love outlined by Jesus in chapters 5 and 6 of Matthew will reign.

Following His baptism by John, Jesus embarks on His ministry adopting the three roles of Prophet, Priest and King laying the foundation of the kingdom of God in the present world. From this point onwards, there would be two kingdoms at work on this earth, the kingdom of the present age and the kingdom of the future age. One would diminish and the other would increase.

Chapter 32 – Context of Jesus’ Teachings

Last chapter we see Jesus laying the foundation of the kingdom of God in the present world. From this point onwards, there would be two kingdoms at work on this earth, the kingdom of the present age and the kingdom of the future age. One would diminish and the other would increase. We now need to take a look at Jesus’ teachings.

Much has been written and said over the centuries about the teachings of Jesus so we don’t need to cover that in detail here. However, something needs to be said about the context of His teachings as a misinterpretation of what He sometimes intended can lead to serious misunderstandings of His true intent. We will look at four points to help us understand the context of Jesus’ teachings.

Kingdom Ideals

The *first* one is, that Jesus’ lofty teachings like the beatitudes, parables, etc., need to be understood as the “ideals” of the Kingdom of God. If we’re honest with ourselves, none of us would admit to living up to these ideals perfectly while we are in the flesh. There is a huge discrepancy between the ideal and the reality, the “is” and the “ought” when it comes to human behaviour, even for Christians. In an earlier section we spoke about the contradiction, “you don’t have to, I can’t help it.” In fact the only human who ever has and ever will live up to these ideals is the King of the kingdom Himself, Jesus Christ. These ideals give us an insight into the coming kingdom of God but they also reveal the true nature and character of the ruler of that kingdom, God Himself. Jesus is moving his audience into a true representation of God the Father and what He is really like. This is in contrast to the false perception of God taught by the Pharisees. So when we read passages like the beatitudes and the lofty ideals of some of Jesus’ parables like the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son etc., we need to remember these are “kingdom ideals” and not necessarily ideals you and I are expected to attain this side of the resurrection. While we are to strive to live according to these ideals, to expect perfection this side of the resurrection is to set oneself up for frustration and failure.

Jesus tailored His message to His audience

The *second* point we need to understand about Jesus’ teaching is, like any good speaker, He tailored His message to His audience. The audience for the vast majority of Jesus’ ministry were the Jews. As such they were accustomed to living under the Law of Moses. This is critical to understanding much of Jesus’ teachings in the gospels. Jesus was speaking to people living under the legal mindset of the Old Covenant where the way to please God was through obedience or their “good works.” “If you obey, I will bless you, if you disobey, I will curse you” (Deuteronomy 28). This was not a fun time for those living under the law, as it was a harsh taskmaster for fallible human beings unable to live up to the righteous requirements of the law.

Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

The various laws, sacrifices, offerings, washings, rituals of the law were a constant reminder they lived under the “condemnation” of the law. The annual Day of Atonement was a reminder they were sinners and needed forgiveness. They had to go back year after year to have the slate wiped clean. As Jesus went around preaching, He tailored his messages to the various audiences and their understanding of where they stood in relation to the law. For instance, we notice His message to the rulers and Pharisees was much more demanding than it was to the ordinary Jew. Why was that?

Salvation is only possible through “faith”

This leads us to the *third* principle in understanding Jesus' teachings and that is, salvation is only possible through "faith." There are two ways to achieve salvation. 1) Through perfect obedience to the law and, 2) through faith in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, some, including the apostle Paul before his conversion, thought it was humanly possible to live up to the righteous requirements of the Law of Moses.

Philippians 3:6 As for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

Also remember the young man who came to Jesus asking what he had to do to get eternal life? Jesus rattles off some of the Ten Commandments but notice the young man's self-confident answer.

Luke 18:21 "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

Living under the regime of the law based on "works" produced two types of individuals and this is dramatically reflected in the parable Jesus told about the Pharisee and the publican who went down to the temple to pray.

Luke 18:9-12 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

The law, which was to be used as a reflection of the nature and character of God, had instead been turned into a rulebook to measure people's holiness factor. Those like the legalistic Pharisees who thought they were doing okay in the righteousness department would look down on the riff raff like this tax collector, while those with more obvious sins were consumed with guilt because of their inability to live up to the righteous requirements of the law. What Jesus was effectively doing especially with this parable was to shock the Pharisees into seeing past their external self-righteous pretence to the internal sinful heart. Jesus employs the same principle in Matthew 5. Jesus ramps up the pressure on the religious rulers by informing them that living up to the requirements of the Ten Commandments is child's play compared to what was really expected of them in order to acquire salvation through "works."

Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Jesus moves the requirement from the external to the internal where sin is spawned. "If you want to pursue self-salvation, you have to not only master the externals, but also your internal thoughts and attitudes."

Matthew 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

God's demand under the regime of the law is perfection. The Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses is playschool compared to the righteousness required for self-salvation. Paul, prior to his conversion, and both the young man and the Pharisees deceived themselves by focusing on the externals, substituting their own standard of righteousness for God's standard. If we are honest, humans are incapable of achieving righteousness at the lowly level of the Ten Commandments let alone the lofty teachings of Jesus.

Matthew 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

No wonder the disciples were left scratching their heads with the discouraging question, "***Who then can be saved?***" (Matthew 19:25).

What was the point then of Jesus ratcheting up the requirements for salvation? Was it to give people one last chance to measure up? “What you’ve got to do is just try harder. Just follow my example, pray more, study your Bible more, fast and you will achieve salvation through your own works.” Would it make any sense to introduce a tougher set of laws for people to live up to when they couldn’t even cope with the lesser ones? To do that would be no different to the situation the early church faced with the subject of circumcision. The early church struggled with the role the law was to play in the new church age. Notice Peter’s judgment on that subject.

Acts 15:10-11 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.

The point of Jesus ratcheting up the requirements of the law was to convict them of their sinful hearts. As much as we try humanly, we will never measure up to the requirements of God’s holy law. It was to bring them to the point of acknowledging their need for a Messiah or a Savior (Galatians 3:24-25). The Jews totally missed the point of where the real battle lies. Jesus came to battle and destroy the true source of sin and evil, the human heart. Upgrading external forces like the law would never achieve a changed heart. It had to come from an internal source, a new heart, and a new creation in Jesus Christ.

As we read the teaching of Jesus we need to understand what he was trying to achieve with His audience, especially the self-righteous ones. The point of Jesus’ parable of the two men who went down to the temple to pray was to bring the self-righteous Pharisee to the same conclusion the lowly publican had already reached. “Humanly, I can’t do it myself and therefore need to throw myself on the mercy of God.”

Righteousness through “grace”

This brings us to the *fourth* point we need to keep in mind when examining the teaching of Jesus, and that is, He was laying the groundwork for righteousness to be obtained through “grace.” As already mentioned, the Jews were living under the mindset of the Law where the way to win God’s approval was through “works” and obedience to the law. The whole sorry conclusion of Israel’s history of living under the law was to convince them of their complete and utter failure to live up to the righteous requirement of the law. It was to prepare them for a righteousness to come from another source. After softening them up with the impossible demands of the law, Jesus is now ready to reveal the way to true righteousness. This is Paul’s message in Romans 3.

Romans 3:19-20 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

The law was to serve the purpose of showing the vast chasm between God’s righteousness and man’s righteousness so we would recognise our need for a Savior. And what would the Savior do for us?

V.21 But now (after Jesus’ death and resurrection) apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Jesus with his uncompromising stance on the law was laying the groundwork for the transition from law to grace.

However this new way didn’t become evident even to his disciples until after His death and resurrection. The true gospel of grace was veiled behind the law until it was revealed for the whole world to marvel at once they understood the events surrounding Jesus’ death and resurrection. And this is why the writing of Paul and other later New Testament writers present

the gospel from a slightly different perspective to the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke that primarily record Jesus' teachings to the Jews prior to the cross. The disciples, Paul and other New Testament writers after Calvary sat dumbfounded at what had unfolded before them. Acceptance by God no longer depended on their righteousness, but on Christ's righteousness performed on their behalf. Their whole paradigm had shifted from trying to gain favour with God through their "works" to understanding their acceptance by "faith" in the saving work of Jesus. Saving faith is simply an acceptance of what Christ has done on our behalf... it's that simple.

Romans 4:5 However, to the one who does not "work" but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

As only Jesus has lived up to the righteous requirements of God's holy law, it is only faith in His righteous life lived on our behalf that makes us acceptable. There is no other way.

The Gospel context

When we read the teachings of Jesus, primarily the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, we need to examine them from these four perspectives.

- 1) Passages like the beatitudes and many of Jesus' parables need to be understood as the "ideals" of the kingdom of God, and not something we are going to achieve this side of the resurrection.
- 2) Like any good speaker, Jesus tailored his message to His audience. His audience were Jews living under the law so this needs to be taken into account.
- 3) The point of Jesus ratcheting up the requirements of the law was to convict His audience of their sinful hearts. We can never live up to God's holy requirements no matter how hard we try.
- 4) Jesus was laying the groundwork for righteousness to be obtained through "grace." He was saying "It is not possible through your own works, so let Me show you how you can obtain it my way."

Applying these four principles to the Parable of the Prodigal Son

Let's take a look at the parable of the prodigal son to see how these principles apply to Jesus' teachings.

First of all, who lives up to the kingdom ideals in the story? The only character who lives up to the ideals of the kingdom is the father. It is the father who bears the insult when the younger brother wishes he were dead in order to demand his inheritance; It is the father who hangs over the back fence waiting for him to return; forgives him when he returns with his tail between his legs and restores him as a family member despite the shame and scandal he has brought on the family. It is the father as the peacemaker who approaches the self-righteous older brother and entreats him to come join the party. And whom does the father represent in the story? It is God Himself. He perfectly demonstrates the rule of kingdom ideals. This ought to be encouraging news for mankind as we are all prodigals and know that we will be treated the same way when we humbly approach our gracious heavenly Father. He will treat us according to His kingdom ideals rather than man's concept of God's justice represented by the older brother. In the wider context, the parable of the prodigal son is an encapsulation of the story of mankind and how we turned our back on a loving God, yet he lovingly pursues us relentlessly until the relationship is restored.

Second, notice the different approach the father uses as he deals with each son according to his mindset. We spoke about how living under the law produces two types of people personified by the Pharisee and the publican as they went down to the temple to pray. The father dealt compassionately with both the *non-religious sinner* (the prodigal) and the *religious sinner* (older brother) in order to restore the family relationship. He tailored his message according to his audience in order to win them back.

Thirdly, the father, through His actions, ratchets up the demands of God's law by showing the older brother how incapable he was of ever measuring up to God's holy requirements in order to melt

his stony heart. As mentioned earlier, the scribes and Pharisees had the unfortunate habit of hiding behind the law in that they substituted their own standard of righteousness in place of God's righteousness not understanding how vast the gulf was between their standard and a Holy God's standard. Jesus was simply echoing the Old Covenant's admonition of "Become holy, as I am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). Jesus' audience is left hanging wondering how the older brother would respond to his father's plea. Would he remain outside sulking and indignant at the way his immoral brother was being treated while he, as the good son was snubbed? Or did his father's words break his stony heart, allowing him to put aside his feeling of false superiority and righteousness and join the celebrations?

And *fourthly*, Jesus' parable was preparing the groundwork to demonstrate the difference of living under the administration of grace rather than the law. Here is the contrast between the older son who was living the mindset of the law and the father living the mindset of grace. You could imagine both the Pharisees and us nodding in agreement with the concerns of the older brother. ***Luke 15:28-30 The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'***

As mentioned before, living under grace will drive the self-righteous crazy because it is so unfair. But it is a false assumption, because no matter how good we are, ***"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)***. The Pharisees and the older brother failed to realise that from God's perspective, He is dealing with both religious and non-religious sinners. In God's eyes, all are sinners and fall well short of the glory of God. As such all are in need of "grace." As we study the teachings of Jesus we need to be mindful of these four principles in applying them to our lives. In a future session we will come back to the subject of kingdom ideals in the life of a Christian when we get to the section on the church.

Chapter 33 – Fulfilling the Old Covenant

We have been looking at the tasks Jesus has been accomplishing as He begins his official ministry. These tasks are outlined in the early chapters of Matthew. In this chapter we are going to look at another important aspect of Jesus' ministry, the fulfilling of the Old Covenant on behalf of Israel by introducing a new and better Covenant.

We looked earlier at the failure of the Israelites to uphold their side of the Mosaic Covenant through their unbelief. God however remained faithful to His side of the covenant agreement. Now in a remarkable display of grace, we see Jesus taking on Himself the task of accomplishing for the Israelites what they could not do for themselves. In other words, He fulfils the covenant relationship from both the side of God and the side of the Israelites. Again we see the "representation" principle in effect.

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

We need to notice a few things about this verse. First, God the Father has a timetable for the salvation of mankind that has been carefully planned out to maximise His goal of redeeming as many of his children as possible (2 Peter 3:9). Christians rightly mourn for the condition of this world and pray for Christ's return, but we should remember it is God's timetable not ours. Second, Paul reaffirms both the deity and the humanity of Jesus. Third, Jesus was born at a time when the Mosaic Covenant was still in effect. Fourth, the reason He was He born at this particular time was ***"to redeem those under the law"***, Israel, and restore them as His children. Rather than being resentful and bitter about Israel's unfaithfulness, God is the one who takes the initiative in the redemptive process. God is an inclusive, not an exclusive God.

Fulfilling the covenant from God's side

I mentioned Jesus was to fulfil the requirement of the Mosaic Covenant from both the side of God and the side of Israel. When the covenant was presented to the Israelites at Sinai, they had agreed to uphold their side of the arrangement (Exodus 24:1-8). Despite their good intentions, the Old Testament is a sorry chronicle of their repeated failures. However, God had anticipated their failure and in His mercy made provision for their disobedience through the sacrificial rituals associated with the tabernacle. These sacrifices, both the daily and the annual Day of Atonement sacrifice, allowed a holy God, although at a distance, to maintain His relationship with His chosen nation. We should mention that these sacrifices were not designed to placate an angry God, but a reminder to the Israelites of the mercy and forgiveness offered to them by a graceful God and to point them to their need for a Redeemer. The Israelites continued existence relied on a merciful God who was willing to forgive their sins. However these sacrifices were only a temporary measure and a precursor of what was to come. Forgiveness was not granted on the blood of the animals that were sacrificed, it was granted on the future fulfilment of what those sacrifices represented. The book of Hebrews tells us.

Hebrews 10:1-4 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. 4 It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Forgiveness was not extended to the Israelites based on the animal sacrifices the priest offered on their behalf, but on the future fulfilment of what those sacrifices represented. It was never God's intention for the Mosaic Covenant to solve the problem of sin.

The problem of sin was reserved for the Son of God acting in His capacity as the Lamb of God. What the Mosaic Covenant failed to do through the blood of animals was achieved through the institution of the New Covenant by the blood of the Lamb of God. The ritualistic Passover lamb and the ritualistic Atonement goat were personified in the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; (that body was the Lamb of God) 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, my God.’” 8 First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them”—though they were offered in accordance with the law. 9 Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Through Jesus Christ, we see God fulfilling His side of the Covenant promise of being the Israelites God and by making provision for their sin and their faithlessness. Back at Sinai, God made this promise, **“I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people” (Leviticus 26:12).** This is part of the reason why Jesus had to be **“born under the law.”** Jesus did come and walk among them and be their God, or tabernacled with them in order to make them His people through the forgiveness of their sins. But as only God can make atonement for sin, and subsequently offer forgiveness for sin, Jesus had to be God in the flesh. This is precisely what the writer to the Hebrews says as we read earlier.

Hebrews 10:10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

God was not only acting as their gracious God, but also making provision for them to be “His holy people” through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It was never God’s intention for the Mosaic Covenant to make the people holy, as that would be salvation by works. As mentioned in an earlier session, it would be the height of arrogance to think we, the created, could attain the holiness or image of God through our own efforts. This is why a faithful God provided the gift of His Son to obtain salvation for all and in the process fulfil His side of the Mosaic Covenant agreement on behalf of Israel.

Fulfilling the covenant from Israel’s side

But wait, there’s more to the story. Back at Sinai, the Israelites promised to obey God. We know how that turned out. They were a long way from becoming His holy people. So again, in order now to fulfil the covenant from the side of the people, a human (an Israelite) had to faithfully live up to the righteous requirements of the law. We have already discussed how at Jesus’ baptism, He assumed the role of representing mankind in living the perfect life we are unable to live. Here again we see this same principle being applied to the nation of Israel. This is another reason Jesus had to be born under the law as Paul stated in Galatians 4:4-5. If He was to redeem those under the law by His faithful obedience to the law on their behalf, He had to live under those conditions as a faithful Israelite. This is why throughout the period prior to the Last Supper and the institution of the New Covenant with His death and resurrection, Jesus faithfully fulfilled and obeyed the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant. He was circumcised the eighth day, presented to the priests for purification after His birth, attended synagogue, kept the seventh day Sabbath and worshipped on the prescribed Jewish Holy Days. Jesus, by living up to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant, allowed God to impute Jesus’ obedience to His people Israel.

But don’t make the mistake of thinking Jesus only fulfilled the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Not only did He faithfully obey the law of Moses, but He faithfully obeyed the higher ideals of the kingdom of God primarily outlined in Jesus’ teachings in the sermon on the mount and His parables. It was this aspect of His obedience such as His healings on the Sabbath that caused such conflict with the religious leaders in Jerusalem. The well being of a human, healing on the Sabbath

day, took precedence over a ritualistic law (Luke 13:10-17). Jesus obeyed the Mosaic Covenant as God intended it, not according to religious tradition.

To summarise, we see Jesus acting in his capacity *as God* faithfully offering Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of His people, and acting in His capacity *as man* faithfully obeying the requirements of the law on behalf of the people. By doing so, He faithfully fulfilled the Mosaic covenant from both the side of God and the side of man, ***“I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people” (Leviticus 26:12).***

The Old Covenant pointed forward to Jesus

But there was another aspect of the law Jesus came to fulfil. These were the aspects of the law that pointed directly to Him as the Messiah. Jesus Himself made this point.

John 5:39 You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.

Matthew 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.

Jesus was referring to these two aspects of the law He came to fulfil. He fulfilled them in the sense He obeyed the Law of Moses perfectly on behalf of the Israelites, and He fulfilled the role of the Messiah who was to introduce the New Covenant to which the Mosaic Law testified (Jeremiah 31:33). Paul too referred to these ritualistic aspects of the law that testified about Jesus. The early church struggled with the role the Mosaic Law was to play in the life of the church. Some Jews continued to keep the Law of Moses and insisted the Gentiles also observe them (Acts 15). Paul and the writer to the Hebrews went to great lengths to convince these “Judaizers” as they came to be known, that Jesus was the fulfilment of these aspects of the law and therefore there was no longer a need to observe them.

Colossians 2:16-17 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

As we have already discussed there were many aspects of the Mosaic Covenant that were the archetype or shadow of the New Covenant reality, the Passover Lamb, the Atonement goats, the Sabbath rest, etc. Paul recognised it was taking away from and demeaning to the sacrifice of Jesus and the grace of God to continue to focus on the “shadow” after experiencing the “reality” of what those shadows represented. Hence, his strong language in condemning those who insisted on “shadow” observance (Galatians 1:7-9; Galatians 5:12). Nothing should be, nor needs to be added to the saving work of Jesus Christ, especially not our own righteousness. As Jesus said on the cross, ***“It is finished!”*** He had accomplished everything He needed to do to secure our salvation. Red flags and alarm bells should go off any time someone wants to add something to those terrifying moments Jesus willingly submitted Himself to leading up to and experiencing death by crucifixion. When it comes to our salvation, in gratitude to our Savior, our entire focus needs to be on Jesus Christ and Him alone.

The reason Jesus was born under the Law was so He could fulfil the Mosaic Covenant from both the side of God and the side of man. He literally fulfilled Leviticus 26:12, ***“I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.”*** In the same way He became the living embodiment of those aspects of the law that pointed to Him as the coming Messiah who would introduce the New Covenant with His own blood. Now we come to the primary reason for Jesus joining us in our humanity. If the incarnation was a humiliating event for God, imagine submitting Himself to the ordeal of the crucifixion.

Chapter 34 – The New Covenant

Last chapter we looked at Jesus fulfilling and living up to the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant on behalf of Israel. Now we come to the primary reason for Jesus joining us in our humanity, to pay the penalty for all mankind's sin. If anyone has any lingering doubts about God's motivation in joining us in our humanity after witnessing the life Jesus lived on our behalf, they should be quickly brushed aside when they learn the ends to which God was willing to stoop in order to prove His love and to restore relationship with His creation. Contrary to some depictions of God's nature, we see the true revelation of the love that burns for His people.

Philippians 2:6-8 (NLT) Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. 7 He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. (Miracle of the incarnation) 8 And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross. (Miracle of the Atonement). If the incarnation was about God drawing near to man, the atonement was about God providing the way for a sinful mankind to draw near to Him.

We now turn our attention to the astonishing events surrounding the atonement. Jesus knew the ordeal He was about to face. He inspired Isaiah 52-53. He chose to join humanity when the cross was the method of execution. He walked the streets of Jerusalem and saw on a distant hill the crucified silhouetted against the sky. Yet Jesus did not balk at what lay before Him. The apostle John reveals Jesus' motivation.

John 10:17-18 (NLT) "The Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may have it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I lay down my life voluntarily.

We see this extraordinary love voluntarily displayed by the Son of God in order for us to be drawn back to God.

Jesus was simply echoing His own teaching, ***"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).*** We pick up the story at the last supper. The people had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as though He was a conquering king. Little did they realize the strategy the conquering king was going to employ to set them free? It was not the way of force, but of humility; not war, but peace; not hatred, but love. Jesus takes off his robe and washes his disciple's feet symbolizing in dramatic fashion the difference in approach of His kingdom as opposed to the approach employed by the kingdoms of this world (John 13:1-17; Luke 22:24-27; Philippians 2:1-8). Here is the King of Kings washing the feet of mere mortals. As Jesus explained to the resistant Peter, there is a need for all sinners to be washed clean of their sins and the one about to do so is kneeling here before you (John 13:6-9).

Jesus moves back to the table and using simple everyday food items, bread and wine, introduces the New Covenant. The question needs to be asked, "Why was there a need for a New Covenant?" Simply because the first one was not effective! Why?

Jeremiah 31:31-33 "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

God the faithful husband was fulfilling His side of the agreement in being their God, but Israel was not living up to being His holy people through their disobedience and faithlessness. Hence the need for a New Covenant which would bring about the desired result from both the side of God and the side of the people. Because of human weakness, God knows Israel is unable to fulfil their side of the agreement, so now in a remarkable display of grace, God would provide from within

Israel a faithful man to fulfil the covenant agreement from the side of man. But not just for Israel, but for the whole world.

Now back to the last supper. To understand what is happening here, one needs to go back to the introduction of the Mosaic Covenant. Earlier we spoke about Moses being the word, the logos, prophet or spokesman of the Old covenant who mediated the covenant between God and the people. He was the one who went up on the mountain to receive the covenant from God. Not only did Moses mediate the covenant, but you may remember he also stood between God and the Israelites and mediated a settlement when God threatened to wipe out the Israelites after the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:1-14), and when Aaron and Miriam dared to assume Moses' position of prophet/priest (Numbers 12:1-15). Now we see the literal Word, the Logos of God assuming the role of mediating the New Covenant as one who stood as a go-between, between God and man.

Hebrews 8:6 But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

As both God and man, Jesus was in the unique position of fulfilling the covenant from both the side of God and the side of man. As we read last time, it was God in the flesh literally fulfilling the promise made to Israel, ***"I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people"*** (Leviticus 26:12).

As mediator, Jesus had to fulfil all of the covenant promises God had made to the people, while at the same time responding on behalf of the Israelites for them to be a holy people (Exodus 19:1-8). Through His perfect obedience to the law, Jesus fulfilled the Israelites side of the agreement of being a holy people. He was the Lamb of God without blemish. He was the bread of life, the unleavened bread without sin. These were the requirements if Jesus was indeed to be our sacrificial atonement for sin.

Up to this point in His ministry, Jesus was primarily fulfilling the role of King and Prophet, living a perfect life, overcoming the devil, teaching about the kingdom of God, revealing the Father. You may remember while Moses performed the role of the prophet/priest, Aaron preformed the role of liturgical priest, those functions associated with the tabernacle and sacrifices. Jesus of course assumed both of these priestly functions. Now the time has come in His ministry for Jesus to assume the role of High Priest. You will remember Aaron went into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement presenting the blood of the sacrificed goat on behalf of the people to God. However, now under the New Covenant, the High Priest, on behalf of the people, went into the holy of holies not with the blood of an animal, but to present His own blood. Jesus was not only priest but also the sacrificial victim. This is now God fulfilling His side of the New Covenant agreement of being our God, *providing even for our unfaithfulness.*

Jesus' "active" and "passive" obedience

Despite Jesus living a sinless life for us, sin is not given a free pass. Justice demands the price be paid. A sinful mankind still stands under God's judgment. But instead of requiring us to pay the penalty for our sin, a merciful God steps down from the judgment seat and assumes the sentence of death Himself. The most precious commodity in the universe, the blood of the Lamb of God is presented to the Father to cleanse humanity of their sins. And the Son as we read above, voluntarily, lovingly, goes like a lamb to the slaughter. This willingness to go ***"like a lamb to the slaughter"*** is referred to as His "passive obedience" while His life of obedience is referred to as His "active obedience." So we see the stage set for the reconciliation of mankind back to God through the dual ministry of Jesus Christ. He has lived the perfect life so His righteousness can be imputed to us, and secondarily, He is about to shoulder the burden of the sins of the whole world so justice is served.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

By combining His life of perfect obedience (active obedience) and His bodily sacrifice (passive obedience) on our behalf, Jesus has accomplished at-one-ment with God and mankind. Both His life and His death bring about this rapprochement. Both aspects are necessary for atonement to be effective.

It is now with this background that Jesus willingly submits Himself to the judgment of God on a sinful humanity. The Lamb of God voluntarily offers Himself to the wicked devices of the sons and daughter of men who defiantly mock, torture and finally murder the Son of God on the cross. In our determination to live independently of God, we see a rebellious humanity rise up in prideful arrogance and expose the deep-seated hostility towards God that resides deep in the human heart. Rather than seeing “sinners in the hands of an angry God” as portrayed in the famous 18th century sermon by Jonathan Edwards, at the cross, we see “God in the hands of angry sinners” (Hebrews 12:2-3). The cross not only exposes humanity’s deep-seated hatred of God, but it also reveals just how seriously God takes our sin. He doesn’t give us a free pass or simply excuse it; He chooses instead to suffer the terrible consequences Himself.

1 Peter 2:24 “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”

Not only did Jesus go to the hell of the cross on our behalf so we wouldn’t have to, but also to magnify what an affront sin is to all that a holy God stands for. Sin places us in that God-forsaken spot alienated from God, something God does not desire, and something He has gone to great pains to display (Mark 15:34). However it is only because of Christ’s willingness to take our place on the cross that now allows God to offer humanity the gift of grace. Whereas before we lived under God’s judgment and the law that condemns, now that we have been liberated from the death sentence of sin, we now live in the freedom of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). In the prophetic words of the prophet Jeremiah, **“For I will forgive their wickedness, and will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34)**. Christ’s sacrifice for the sins of all humanity means God does not hold us accountable for those sins anymore. He is not going to ask us to pay that penalty a second time. However, as grace is a gift, it has to be received, and if any are unwilling to receive it, the option remains for God to reinstate it, but it is all together unnecessary. We will speak more of this later.

Our response to God’s grace

What should be humanity’s response to this remarkable act of grace? Just as God spelled out for the Israelites how they were to respond to His mercy and grace under the Mosaic Covenant through the sacrificial system, now Jesus spells out to His disciples how they are to respond to this supreme act of mercy and grace under the New Covenant. So using the simple everyday items of bread and wine, representing His selfless sacrifice on their behalf, Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper. And as the “cup of thanksgiving” signifies, the emphasis of the Lord’s Supper is not performed to placate an angry God, but to remind us of God’s love and faithfulness in His willingness to provide an atoning sacrifice for our sins. It is God who performs the saving work, He is the one who provides the sacrificial lamb, He is the one who atones, He is the one who justifies, He is the one who forgives, He is the one who welcomes us back with open arms.

Our response should be twofold. First, to remember Jesus’ great saving work on our behalf. As Jesus said, **“Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24-26)**. To whom does the credit for salvation go? Jesus Christ. We bring nothing to the communion table that is why we come with empty hands.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

The Israelites, the Pharisees, and many other groups down through history have tried self-salvation through their own works. It didn't work then, and it won't work now. God intended it this way, **"lest anyone should boast."** Salvation purely and simply is a gift of God through faith. From start to finish, this sacrifice is entirely an act of God's grace, an expression of His love for us. And secondarily, to be thankful for His saving work. That's why Paul calls it the **"the cup of thanksgiving" (1 Corinthians 10:16).**

It is only fitting then that we raise up the name of the One who the Father Himself has exalted above every name for the sacrifice He was willing to shoulder in order to redeem mankind. **Philippians 2:9-11 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

Chapter 35 – New Covenant Chart

Last chapter we looked at Jesus fulfilling the role of mediating the New Covenant at the last supper. Now after washing the disciple's feet, and instituting the New Covenant with the symbols of the bread and wine, Jesus, in a remarkable discourse after supper, gives the disciples an insight into what the Godhead has in store for mankind once the broken communion between God and man has been restored.

John 17:20-24 *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.*

So we see the promise is not just for the present disciples, it is expanded to include future generations of those who believe in Jesus Christ.

V.21 *that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity.*

Here Jesus spells out the ultimate purpose God has for mankind, to share in the intimate life and love of the Godhead itself. This is where the term “perichoresis” comes from. The Godhead experiences a relationship so intimate the best description humans can come up with is “mutual indwelling.” The purpose of making us in God's image is so we can participate in this same intimate relationship.

V.23 ... *Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*

And what is the promise to those who believe in Jesus Christ? *“to be with me where I am, and to see my glory.”* Not only to be with and see Jesus' glory, but as we learn later on, to be given a glorified body to participate fully in the spiritual community of heaven (Romans 8:17).

This is why the New Covenant is so far superior to the Old Covenant as the author to the book of Hebrews points out.

Hebrews 8:6 *But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.*

Besides the fact the Old Covenant was temporary whose effectiveness relied completely on the fulfilment of the New Covenant anyway, the New Covenant was far superior in that the saving priestly ministry of Jesus is superior to Moses' and Aaron's; the Mediator, Jesus, is superior; and the promises, spiritual blessings, are superior. The New Covenant comes into effect the next day when Jesus literally sacrifices His body and blood as the penalty for our sins. Now we can look at the completed chart on the covenants between God and mankind.

Chart on the New Covenant. (See chart below).

Covenants Between God and Man

	Noah Gen 9:8-17	Abraham Gen 12:1-3 Gen 17:1-22	Moses Ex 19:3-8, Deut 4:1-14, Deut 5:1-32	Jesus Jer 31:31-34, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Cor 11:23- 26, 2 Cor 3:1-17, Heb 1-10
Parties to Covenant	God/Noah, descendants, every living creature (Gen 9:8-10)	God/Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:7)	God/Moses and the Nation of Israel (Ex 19:3)	God/Jesus on behalf of all mankind (Acts 2:1-21, Rom 10:12-13, Gal 3:26-29, Eph 2:11-22, Heb 9:15)
Type of Covenant Conditional/ Unconditional	Unconditional – Man didn't have to do anything	Conditional - on Faith (Gen 15:6, Rom 4, Gal 3:6-9)	Conditional - on obedience (Ex 19:5-8, Deut 4:13, 5:32)	Conditional - on faith in Jesus (Acts 2:21, Rom 4, Rom 5:18-19, Eph 2:8-10, Phil 3:7-11)
Type of Blessing (Promise) Temporal/Eternal	Temporal – no more floods (Gen 9:11)	Temporal and Eternal – “Great Nation” and “All nations blessed through you” – referring to Jesus (Gen 12:1-3)	Temporal – “Blessed in the city, blessed in the country” etc. (Lev 26, Deut 28)	Eternal – Eternal Life (John 3:15-16, Rom 6:23, 1 John 5:11-13)
Entry into Covenant	No Condition	Faith (Gen 15:6)	Circumcision (Ex 12:43-51, Lev 12:1-3)	Faith/Repentance/Baptism/Born Again through the Spirit (John 3:3-7, Acts 2:37-38)
Signs of Covenant	Rainbow (Gen 9:12-16)	Circumcision (Gen 17:11)	Sabbath (Ex 31:12-17, Ez 20:12,20)	Lord's Supper/Love one another as I have loved you (1Cor 11:24-26, John 13:34-35)
Status of Covenant Still in effect or terminated	In Effect	In Effect (Gen 17:7)	Terminated – even though it was an everlasting covenant, it was terminated because Israel did not keep their side of the covenant (Jer 31:31-33, Ez 20:1-49, Matt 27:51, John 19:30, Heb 7:11,18, 8:6-13)	In Effect – Jesus died for our sins and lived up to the righteous requirements of law for us (John 1:29, 1 Cor 15:3, 2 Cor 5:2, Heb 7:18, Heb 10:8-14)
Dietary Changes	All food – no restrictions (Gen 9:3)	No change	“Clean” Foods only (Lev 11)	All food – no restrictions (Rom 14:14, 20, Gal 2:11-16)
Additional Comments		Foreshadowed the New Covenant (Gal 3:29)	Ineffective against sin (Heb 7:18) External Regulations - standards written on stone (2 Cor 3, Heb 9:9-10) Motivation based on “blessing and curses” (Lev 26, Deut 28) Human effort (Gal 2:16, 21) Shadow (Col 2:16) Relationship through priesthood and law (Heb 9:1-10) Available to Israel only (Eph 2:11-22)	Effective against Sin (Heb 7:22-28) Internal Relationship - standards written on hearts (2 Cor 3) Motivation based on grace and desire to love and serve God (2 Cor 5:14-15) God's Grace (Heb 7:22-25) Reality (Heb 10:1) Personal Relationship with God through Jesus (Heb 4:14-16, Heb 10:19-23) Available to all (Eph 2:11-22, Col 3:11)

Chapter 36 – From Law to Grace

We have seen that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was not meant only for the salvation of Israel. It was a sacrifice intended for the salvation of the whole world. You will remember from our discussion on the various covenants that although the Mosaic Covenant was terminated and replaced by the New Covenant, there was another covenant still in effect. This was the covenant God had made with Abraham. A key part of that covenant, was the promise made to Abraham that through his offspring, "all nations" of the earth would be blessed.

Genesis 22:17-18 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Who was this offspring by whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed? Jesus Christ. Paul confirms this promise made to Abraham.

Galatians 3:29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This promise needs to be kept in mind as we examine the proceedings leading up to Jesus' crucifixion.

The choosing of the nation of Israel to be God's special people was a blessing to the Israelites. God delivered the nation out of Egyptian slavery. He provided for them as He led them through the desert. And He gave them victory over the nations occupying the Promised Land. Had they obeyed God rather than being a stiff-necked and rebellious people, they would have continued to enjoy God's blessings. However, being chosen as God's special people also came with a burden. Not only did they have to remain obedient, a big ask for humans, but they also carried the burden of being "representative" of all nations. We have looked at this "representative" principle before in relation to the "first Adam" and the "second Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45, Romans 5:12-20). We also discussed how Israel preferred to maintain a distance between themselves and God when they asked Moses to go up on the mountain and communicate with God on their behalf (Exodus 20:19). The difficulty of this relationship was only intensified the closer a holy God tried to draw nearer to His people as it only magnified their sinfulness. The giving of the law for instance imposed an added burden on the people as it only magnified their sinfulness (Romans 7:7-9).

But now with the incarnation, God was no longer at a distance, but actually came to dwell amongst them. And we see the terrible nature of man's sin contrasted with the love and grace of God especially from the religious establishment as they plotted to kill the Son of God. Such is the deceitfulness and wickedness of the human heart that it blinded them from even recognising the Messiah in their very midst. But this had to happen if God was to fulfil his promise to Abraham in bringing about salvation to both Israel and the world. Israel, in the corporate sense, is used by God to represent all the nations of the earth. It would not have made any difference which nation God chose, as all, because of our fallen evil nature, would have done exactly the same thing. But by choosing or electing Israel to be representative of a rebellious mankind under the judgment of God, it also enabled them to be included in the resulting grace of God in being complicit in the most hideous crime of putting the Son of God to death.

It is no accident that in Jesus' ordeal in leading up to the crucifixion, representatives of all humanity is implicated in the execution. Individual Jews such as Judas who betrayed Jesus; the disciples who fled in the garden; and Peter who denied Jesus; the Jewish religious establishment, such as the high priest and the other religious leaders; the Jewish civil administration represented by Herod; the Jewish nation represented by the crowd crying, "crucify Him, crucify Him"; the Gentile nations represented by Pilate and the Roman soldiers who administered the sentence. In

one way or another, all are implicated in the death of the Son of God including you and me. As the hymn goes, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” And of course the answer is “yes.” However it is in reference to this same group of people that Jesus asks His Father, **“forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34).** Such is the love of God, that not only is Jesus willing to substitute Himself for the sins of mankind, but as He is the one being executed on their behalf, and against whom sin is such an affront, He is willing to extend forgiveness even to His tormentors. God is committed to being our God despite humanity’s sin. **“I will be your God and you will be my people” (Leviticus 26:12)** even if it costs me my life.

This gracious act of love on the part of Jesus fulfilled the promise made to Abraham and inaugurated the New Covenant which was to encompass both Jew and Gentile.

Romans 4:16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law (the Jews) but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

So Israel, by their stubbornness in rejecting the grace of God extended to them, unwittingly gathered all humanity into God’s embrace. Not only was forgiveness of sin extended to Israel, but also to the whole human race by nature of the fact Jesus’ blood was shed for all mankind. Jesus was fulfilling John the Baptist’s earlier prophecy, **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).** Mankind is forever linked to God through the substituting love of Jesus Christ.

From Law to Grace

This act of sacrifice on Jesus’ part had a dramatic impact on the relationship between God and mankind. No longer would mankind live under the condemnation of God’s law.

Colossians 2:14 having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

The legal demands of the law along with its power to condemn all humanity, that great debt we had no way of repaying, Jesus by accepting it’s just demands, has effectively stamped it, “paid in full.” Jesus, by His willingness to die on our behalf can now offer forgiveness of sins to all. Our status in God’s eyes has changed. Rather than living under the condemnation of the “law,” mankind now lives under God’s free gift of “grace.”

Romans 5:15 For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, (Adam) how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

If all men are condemned by the act of one man, Adam, then following this representative principle, the grace of God is also extended to all men. God no longer regards mankind as sinners, but rather as forgiven sinners, not because of anything we have done, but because of what Christ has done on our behalf.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

This change of status is dramatically reflected when at the precise moment of Christ’s death, the temple veil separating the holy of holies from the rest of the temple is torn from top to bottom. The fact it was torn from the top shows it was a miraculous event done by the hand of God. It was His way of signifying this change of status where mankind, through Jesus, now has access to, and direct communion with God Himself. Jesus, as our High Priest representing both priestly roles earlier fulfilled by Moses and Aaron, through His Word and through His self-sacrifice opened up the way to the Father.

John 14:6 “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

As mentioned earlier, if the incarnation was about God drawing near to man, the atonement was about God providing the way for a sinful mankind to draw near to Him. The way is thrown open to all mankind through the mediating role of Jesus Christ.

Now before anyone implies this truth suggests universal salvation that would be a mistake. Just because grace is available to all men, does not necessarily mean all will take advantage of it. Grace is a gift, bought at a terrible price. But as with all gifts, there is the act of giving and the act of receiving. A gift offered has to be accepted. We will come back to this very important subject later.

Chapter 37 - Election

Last chapter we saw how the sacrifice of Jesus on behalf of humanity had a dramatic impact on the relationship between God and mankind. No longer would mankind live under the condemnation of the law because justice had been served. If the penalty has been paid, how can God require it be paid a second time? When Jesus died on our behalf, it allowed God to offer forgiveness to all, and as a consequence, our status in God's eyes changed. Rather than living under the condemnation of the "law," mankind now lives under God's free gift of "grace."

But now we have to look at another aspect of this representative principle and that is the subject of "election." Election comes down to the question, whom does God elect to save and not save? "Election" or "predestination" as it is also called, is a controversial subject that has been argued down through the centuries. It is not my purpose here to discuss in detail the various theories on election but they can be summed up under three basic headings.

First, is Double Predestination, where some are elected to life and salvation while others are condemned to death and damnation? God has predetermined this decision and there is nothing anyone can do about it. The *second* theory is Universalism where the grace of God is all-encompassing and all are destined to be saved. Again, Universalists believe God has predetermined this and one can't reject God's gift of grace even if they want to. The *third* theory is Pelagianism, which basically says we are saved or condemned by the "good works" we either do or refuse to do. This theory is different to the others in that we are the ones who determine our destiny. God grants us grace and salvation if we obey His commandments and laws and if we disobey those same laws we get the punishment we deserve. In other words, our "works" determine where we go! There is a variation on this theme that is called Semi-Pelagianism. In this version, we again are the ones who determine our destiny, but in this case, we decide either to accept or reject God's free gift of grace through our own free will. One has only to look at what human free will has accomplished so far in our story to know what a dubious proposition this is! And a good follow-up question would be, after all God has done so far to grant us the opportunity for salvation, would He now leave this important last step to our fallible free will? We will cover this subject of "calling" later when we get to the subject of the church. All three of these theories tend to overemphasise either the aspect of the sovereignty of God or the grace of God.

God's Nature

But if we are to understand the subject of election correctly, the place to begin is with the nature of God. It is true that God is sovereign, He is just and He is graceful, but first and foremost, scripture emphatically tells us God is "love." So we have to understand as we did earlier with the subject of God's wrath, that all of his holy qualities including wrath and judgment are initiated from a position of "love." The subject of election begins with a God who is "love." So far in this series we have been looking at the extraordinary lengths to which God has gone in order to achieve reconciliation with his creation. After all this effort, are we to believe this has been done only to benefit a few? And is the Gospel really "glad tidings of great joy for *all men*," or is it just for a select few (Luke 2:10)? Are we to believe that God our Father only loves some of His children while He hates others? What is the point of bringing children into existence only to condemn some to destruction or to an eternity in hell? How many of us as parents would like to be placed in a position where we are forced to consign one of our children to heaven and the other to hell?

Are we also to conclude that God, in deciding who is saved and who is condemned, shows partiality? Yet over and over in both the Old and New Testament, showing partiality and favouritism is condemned and the patriarch Job tells us God Himself does not show partiality (Job 34:18-20). Even parents with poor parenting skills know it is not love to favour one child over

another, yet it seems some are willing to attribute partiality to God, the perfect parent, as He chooses which child to save and which one to condemn? And what does it say of God's love, in the case of Pelagianism, where His love is conditional on our response? "I will only love you, if you first love me." Then what do we do with scriptures like 1 Timothy 2:4.

1 Timothy 2:4 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

It is very clear in this scripture what our sovereign God's plan is for mankind, He desires "***all people to be saved.***"

This section of scripture also gives us a very clear answer as to who is both elected and predestined. It is none other than the mediator between God and mankind, Jesus Christ. As it says, "***He gave himself as a ransom for all people***" (1 Timothy 2:6). "He", Jesus Christ is the second Adam, representative of all mankind (1 Corinthians 15:22, Romans 5:18). He is the lamb chosen (or elected) by the Father to be slain from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:8).

Luke 9:35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."

And perhaps the most heartening section of scripture on this subject of predestination is Ephesians 1:3-11. This section of scripture is Paul's testimony to three things.

- 1) The extent of the Father's love and grace for mankind.
- 2) How this love and grace is displayed through the saving work of Jesus Christ.
- 3) How mankind is inextricably bound to the predestined One, Jesus Christ (see underlined passages below).

Notice these three aspects as we read it.

Ephesians 1:3-11 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will

By his election, Christ has bound himself to all men. This is good news for both Christians and non-Christians because our salvation does not depend on an unpredictable capricious god, or our works, or our fickle freewill, but rather on the love and grace of the Father and the saving works of Jesus Christ. This is the nature of our "electing" God, and the nature of the "elected One," Jesus Christ. Through their love and through their grace, mankind has been "elected" as Paul says to become sons "***in the heavenly realm with every spiritual blessing in Christ.***"

These and questions like them should cause us to pause before consigning some of our fellow sinful humans to heaven and some to hell as frankly it does not accurately reflect God's true purpose and God's true nature of love. Sometimes there can be a smug arrogance in Christian circles to paint ourselves as being superior to non-Christians which can cloud our judgment on the subject of predestination. We need to remember we too were once counted amongst the wicked (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). None of us deserves to be chosen, and none of us can earn that right. It is purely a gift of grace from our gracious God who loves all His children. We need to remind ourselves it is God's will for "***all people to be saved***" and work towards that end.

Under God's Judgment

But for Christ, His election as our representative is a double-edged sword. This choice starts Him down a road that inevitably leads to the cross as it puts Him directly under the judgment of God. By choosing to become incarnate with us and join us in our humanity, Jesus puts Himself squarely into the enmity between a holy God and a sinful mankind. On the one hand He is the God who judges mankind, and on the other He is the representative of sinful man judged by God. In the person of Christ, a Holy God and a sinful mankind come face to face and the result is God's ultimate and final solution to sin. It is on the cross that God unleashes His fearful judgment on sinful mankind. But instead of condemning mankind to damnation, Jesus as the "elected" One, elects to substitute Himself in the place of sinful mankind and bears the full brunt of God's wrath against sin. God's wrath is unleashed on His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

There is much talk and speculation about the final judgment at Christ's return, but in reality, this is the true final judgment. But it is at this precise moment of final judgment that a condemned mankind experiences the amazing love and grace of their heavenly Father. The Judge, Jesus Christ, walks around the judgment bench and substitutes Himself in our place to bear the full brunt of God's holy wrath against sin.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus accepts the justice of God so that we can experience the mercy of God. As the price has been paid by the substitute, Jesus Christ, there is no need for any human being to ever experience the final judgment. Instead of death, now Jesus offers us the gift of eternal life. It beckons to be accepted and Jesus stands at the door and knocks (Revelation 3:20).

Through His substitutionary life and death on our behalf and His willingness to forgive our sins, Jesus removes the enmity between God and man, so we can now live in the liberty of God's grace. The "elected" One as the one slain from the foundation of the world knew this was His lot if He joined Himself to humanity. But it was a burden He was willing to bear such was His love for his children. In fact it was a burden He accepted with joy in His heart.

Hebrews 12:2 For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

But it was through this process of joining Himself to humanity that the predestined One, Jesus Christ, has allowed all humanity to also be predestined to share in His sonship. This is what Paul is saying in ***Ephesians 1:5 ...In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ.*** God has elected Jesus to be our substitute to bear the sins of the world on the cross and therefore by extension as our representative, has made it possible for all mankind to have the opportunity to become sons of God.

To go back to the question we asked at the beginning, "Whom does God elect to save and not save?" The question itself is misleading as it misrepresents God's clear intention. Scripture and the actions of God displayed through the incarnational and atoning works of Jesus Christ makes it very clear that God's intention is for all to be saved if possible (1 Timothy 2:4).

But a problem still remains. Now that the way has been opened for mankind to be forgiven and accepted by God, how is this knowledge communicated to an unsuspecting world? And how will a hostile world respond to this remarkable display of God's love and grace on their behalf? That is for a future chapter, as now we have to deal with Jesus' death on the cross and what it means for the world.

Chapter 38 – Personhood

Jesus after being sentenced, humiliated and beaten, is led to face his agonizing death on the cross. However, Jesus' death on the cross was not a normal human death. To understand why, we have to go back to the original creation of man. We discussed earlier the distinction between the animal kingdom and human beings. It was not animals God created "in His image" but rather humans. Unlike animals, we have the ability to "know" good and evil and the capacity to "choose" between good and evil. The fact that the first humans sinned showed they were not truly in God's image at that time, and creating humans truly in His image is a work in progress. However, mankind was created with abilities far beyond the animal kingdom most of which relate to the human "mind" e.g. consciousness, ability to think outside of ourselves, ability to communicate, to create, ability to plan, sense of justice, and most importantly, the ability to relate to others. God built into us humans the ability and need for relationship with others, both on a physical, emotional and social level with other humans, and on a spiritual level with our heavenly Father. It is these qualities, along with individual talents, abilities and personality that distinguish each of us as a unique "person." God did not walk and talk with the animals in the garden, but with the unique human persons showing we occupied a special place in God's eyes.

One could make a good argument that when God breathed the breath of life into man it was more than just air to start the cardiovascular process. It could be argued it was at this time that God gave us these unique human abilities, which distinguish us from the animal kingdom, that also allow us to relate socially to Him and others (Genesis 2:7). As mentioned earlier, neurologists still can't distinguish the physiological causes of this quantum gap between the animal and human brain. It's interesting to note Jesus did something similar when He commissioned the disciples at the beginning of the new spiritual creation and breathed the Holy Spirit on them (John 20:22).

However, these unique human persons shared many other qualities with the animal kingdom, most of which related to physical survival. We were even created on the sixth day along with the land animals. We all need air, food, water and sleep for continued existence. We also share with the rest of creation the relentless process of decay built into the life of the universe. Which also means we share with the animal kingdom a biological death.

Death of Personhood (the soul)

But unlike the animal kingdom, we humans face the prospect of an additional death. This death has more lethal consequences than the physical death we share with animals. Right from the beginning, God warned Adam and Eve about the consequences of this additional death. This death was not brought on by mere physical means such as an accident or a deterioration of one's health; it was brought on as a result of a moral deficiency. The distinction between these two deaths is made when God commands Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Now we know that Adam and Eve didn't drop dead on the day they took of the forbidden fruit. They lived out their physical lives, had children and died the normal biological death appointed to both animals and humans. This natural death should not be confused with God's judgment on them for their disobedience. However, something else died on the very day they ate of the fruit. Prior to their disobedience in rejecting God's command not to eat of the tree, the "persons" of Adam and Eve had uninterrupted communion with God. They enjoyed God's presence. This special relationship they had with their Creator came to an abrupt end when they were literally cast out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24).

This symbolised a change of status between God, the source of life, and mankind whose continued existence relied on this vital relationship. This was not just the death of a physical body but also the death of “personhood” whose continued existence relied on the relationship between God and humans. Humanity was not created with an immortal soul, but had the capacity to move from the mortal to the immortality by partaking of the tree of life. It was disobedience or sin that led to this rupture, the consequences of which would lead to not only physical death, but also spiritual death if this rupture were not somehow repaired. This is the death of the “person” Jesus warned about in Matthew 10:28.

Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Jesus in this verse is distinguishing between a biological death, the “body,” and a spiritual death of the person, the “soul.” In other words, Jesus is saying, “Don’t fear man who can only inflict biological death, but rather fear God who controls the ultimate destiny of the “person” even though you may have to put at jeopardy your own physical life.

As we have seen which is implicit in God’s statement, “Let us make man in our image,” God’s purpose for humankind is life not death. It is a life lived in eternal communion in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But now, because of sin, that goal has been put in jeopardy. Humankind has been cut off from the life-sustaining source of immortality that can only come from God Himself, pictured by the tree of life. Not only will mankind experience a natural biological death but also a second death of “personhood” and with it the ability to transcend physical life and join His creator in eternal life. Adam, along with the rest of mankind, is judged as sinners and therefore deserving of this second death, the death of the person.

However, God is not going to allow this to happen. His purpose of making mankind in His image will stand. So in order to reverse the damage done by Adam, God in the incarnate person of Jesus Christ, elects in love to substitute Himself in the place of sinful mankind and bear this second death so the relationship between the two parties can be restored.

Romans 5:18-19 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Notice the two aspects of Christ’s righteous act. First, we are justified, i.e. restored to a right legal standing with God, but secondarily, this righteous act also gives access to “**life for all people.**” The unique “person” Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, sacrificed Himself on the cross to enable our unique “persons” to again have access to the life-sustaining source of immortality that can only come from God Himself. Jesus substituted Himself in our place and allowed Himself to be cut off from His heavenly Father which resulted in His terrible cry, “**Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?**” (“**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**”) (**Matthew 27:46**). Of course the Father had not abandoned Him, He was right there by His side through the whole ordeal (Psalms 22:1,24). Even though Jesus knew He was about to enter that God-forsaken abode, hell, He willingly inserted Himself in order for humanity to regain access to the true source of life, God.

Crossing the great gulf between heaven and hell

Mankind, since the sin in the garden has been living in its own type of hell as it has cut itself off from the source of true life. Not only did Jesus insert Himself into this man-made hell with His Incarnation, but with His Atonement inserted Himself into the second-death hell reserved for the destruction of the “person.” This is the hell Jesus spoke about metaphorically in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man to describe the plight of mankind were it not for God’s work of salvation to cross this vast gulf between “hell,” life apart from God, and “heaven,” life with God.

Luke 16:22-26 *“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ 25 “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.”*

All mankind, because of our sin, find ourselves in the same plight as the rich man. There is nothing we can do to cross this great chasm that separates us from the source of eternal life. However, there is a Savior, Jesus Christ who is able and did cross this chasm on our behalf so we didn’t have to experience the second death that results in permanent isolation from God, which the Bible calls “hell.” This is the powerful simplicity of Paul’s statement in **Romans 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death* (the second death, the permanent death of the person), *but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* The difference between the two men’s destination described in this parable is not because one was more righteous or less wealthy than the other, but simply because Lazarus accepted the gift of grace of His Savior and the rich man did not.

Other descriptions of hell in the New Testament, where men are “cast into outer darkness, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13); “Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48); and “...the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night” (Revelation 14:11), are simply metaphorical descriptions of the fate of mankind were it not for Jesus’ willingness to insert Himself into our “hell” of being cut off from the source of true life, God.

Galatians 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.*

If Jesus has died the second death for us and He has descended into hell for us, (as the Apostle’s Creed states), then where does this leave man’s relationship to the source of true life? Well, as we saw earlier, the veil separating a sinful mankind from a holy God has been torn asunder by the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ. Now instead of man being driven from access to the presence of God as portrayed by Adam and Eve being driven from the garden, Jesus, as the “way” and the source of “life”, invites mankind back into the presence of God. The pathway back to the source of true life has been restored through Jesus Christ. He has made it possible for our “person” to live again. But as we will soon look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will see it is not just restitution to physical life, but the opportunity to inherit eternal life and live forever in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Chapter 39 – The Great Exchange

So far we have talked about the amazing lengths God has gone to, through the saving work of Jesus Christ, to restore mankind's relationship with God.

- ◆ We started by speaking about how God the Logos, humbled himself by setting aside His heavenly glory and joining humanity as one of us.
- ◆ We learned when Jesus became incarnate, He assumed our fallen human nature in order to wrestle it to the ground, defeat it and restore it to God's original intention.
- ◆ We spoke about how Jesus was baptized in order to represent us through all aspects of his life, not just his death. In other words, he lived for us, he worshiped for us, He trusted the Father for us, He lived a perfect righteous life for us.
- ◆ We saw Jesus confronting the devil and overcoming the evil spiritual forces holding mankind captive in order to institute the kingdom of God.
- ◆ He chose twelve disciples for the embryonic formation of the church.
- ◆ He announces the arrival of the new age, the age of redemption by healing the sick, calming the elements, casting out demons, raising the dead and forgiving sin.
- ◆ He taught the ruling principles of the kingdom of God with his teachings and parables to show salvation was obtained through grace, not through obedience to the law, which is an impossibility for human beings.
- ◆ We saw how Jesus was born "under the law" in order to redeem those "under the law." Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant requirements from both the side of Israel and the side of God.
- ◆ At the last supper, Jesus introduces the New Covenant which has real forgiving power as it is based on His sacrificed body and blood, not the body and blood of animals. This New Covenant included not just Israel but all of mankind as it also embraced the Abrahamic Covenant. It was through Abraham's seed (Jesus) that "all nations of the earth would be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).
- ◆ With Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we saw how the relationship between God and mankind changed forever. Rather than living under the condemnation of the law, mankind now lives under the free gift of grace.
- ◆ We saw how Jesus as the "predestined" one or the "elected" one, willingly substituted himself in the place of guilty mankind to accept the wrath of God's just penalty against sin, so as forgiven children we could be adopted into the family of God.
- ◆ And finally we saw how Jesus went to that God-forsaken place called hell and died the second death so we wouldn't have to.

I hope we're getting an accurate picture of who is responsible for our salvation. So far mankind has contributed nothing to the process. It is all from, and of, God. And here's another news flash, things aren't about to change. The other important message to take away from what we have covered so far is to realise "Jesus" is the message. One cannot separate the work and the message of Jesus from the person.

Genuine Reconciliation

Now we need to step back and take a closer look at what Jesus' atoning work has accomplished so far.

As the word atonement or at-one-ment means, it is about restoring or reconciling broken relationships. On the one hand, we have the creator of mankind, a holy righteous God, and on the other, sinful human beings who have chosen to reject their Creator and go their own way. In order for there to be genuine reconciliation or at-one-ment, these two parties have to be brought together in such a way that God's holiness is not compromised, while sinful mankind has to acknowledge God's righteous judgment on their sinfulness so they can be made right with God and therefore be forgiven.

How God chooses to do this is testimony to the love and grace our heavenly Father is willing to extend to his children so the two parties can be reconciled. What we witness in Jesus' act of atonement is the fulfilment of a plan that originated prior to the creation of mankind and is alluded to in various stages of God's dealing with His people. In the atonement, we see the scripture fulfilled "***the lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world***" (Revelation 13:8). It alludes back to Adam and Eve when God, after discovering their sin, spilled the blood of an animal and used their skins to cover them. It refers back to God providing a ram to be sacrificed in the place of Abraham's son, Isaac. It refers back to the Passover when the blood of a lamb was slain and smeared on the doorposts so the death angel would "Passover" the occupants. And we see it enacted year after year in the nation of Israel in the annual Day of Atonement. All of these were a shadow of the reality God had planned to restore the relationship between Him and his rebellious children. In each case an animal is substituted in the place of the guilty party and bears the death penalty on their behalf. This is precisely what God planned to do with his own Son so atonement and reconciliation with sinful mankind became possible.

The astonishing fact is, God chose to do this for us without requiring any reciprocal effort on our part and while we were still dead in our sins. As we have learned so far, since sin entered the world, mankind has been doing his best to push God out of his life. We have also learned how totally incapable humanity is of obtaining the righteousness required by God's law. Furthermore, the closer the holy Son of God approached sinful mankind, the more their unrighteousness was exposed. And exposed to the extent that it led to the created, crucifying their Creator. But amazingly, it was in this very dreadful act of execution which exposed man's true wickedness that also enabled God to justify the ungodly. Because by crucifying the Son of God, His very death would allow God to release mankind from the wrath they deserved.

Romans 5:6,8 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly... 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Through His death on the cross, Jesus had substituted Himself as the focal point of God's final judgment on the world and ended the conflict between God and humanity. As the death penalty had been paid for by their Creator this in turn allowed God to then extend grace and forgiveness to the ungodly. This action satisfied the demands of a holy God that the supreme penalty of death had to be paid in order for justice to be served, and subsequently so grace and forgiveness could be extended.

However, there was still the necessary acknowledgement on the part of mankind of God's righteous judgment on their sinfulness before reconciliation was possible. The fact we need to be justified is also an admission we are sinful, rebellious children, something the ungodly are loath to admit. By passively and willingly submitting Himself to the wrath of God's judgment on sin, Jesus on behalf of sinful mankind fulfilled this requirement. Earlier we spoke about Jesus throughout His life living up to the righteous requirements of the law on our behalf. Now we see this same righteous man willingly dying for us and in the process acknowledging God's right to punish our sinfulness. In other words, this is Christ repenting for us, acknowledging our sin and God's right to punish us for our sin. Don't make the mistake of thinking repentance is something we have come up with on our own. As with the rest of the salvation process, it has already been accomplished for us by Jesus Christ. Even our saving faith is not ours but Christ's, but that is getting ahead of the story (Romans 1:17).

Dealing with the problem of sin without destroying the sinner

So when you put all this together, this is what leads to our being justified in God's eyes. Justification is an interesting challenge for God in that the problem comes down to the simple question of, "How is God going to deal with the problem of sin without destroying the sinner?" As mentioned, a holy God requires justice for sinfulness and an acknowledgement on the part of the

sinner of God's right to judge and punish his sinfulness. What Christ has accomplished through His atoning work has fulfilled the three requirements needed for justification.

1) The death penalty demanded for the sin of the world has been satisfied through the death of the only One who was capable of fulfilling this role, the Creator of mankind, the Son of God who has joined Himself to mankind in His incarnation (Colossians 1:15-17, Mark 10:45). The justice then demanded by a holy God has been served.

2) With His passive obedience of going to the cross on our behalf, Jesus acknowledged our sinfulness and God's right to judge and punish this sinfulness. In other words, Jesus repented for us and acknowledged God's right to punish our sinfulness.

3) While Jesus bore the weight of the world's sin when He went willingly to the cross on our behalf, God in turn, now imputes the righteous life Jesus lived on our behalf to us so that we are now considered as righteous as Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is called the "great exchange," the bargain of the cosmos. We gave Jesus our sin, and in return He gave us His righteousness. This righteousness of Christ that is credited to us is not just a nice way of tidying things up legally, it is an actual fact because we are united to Him through His incarnation in the same way we are united to Him in His death (2 Corinthians 5:14).

It helps if we think of this in the context of the Old Covenant Day of Atonement. The act the high priest performed as he administered the rituals of the atonement ceremony benefited the whole nation. It was a corporate event. He wore the twelve stones on his breastplate signifying his status in representing the whole twelve tribes (Exodus 28:29). The atonement proceedings centred around two goats. The first goat was sacrificed and its blood presented to God on behalf of the nation. This sacrifice allowed God to extend His grace to the people in an act of forgiveness, which was applied to the whole nation. The second goat was then taken out into the wilderness and released representing the important fact God no longer held their sins against them as He had forgiven them. In both cases, the whole nation benefited from God's act of grace.

If we now go back to Romans 5 we witness this same scenario in the saving act of Jesus Christ but this time for the benefit of the whole human race.

Romans 5:18-19 Consequently, just as one trespass (Adam) resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act (Jesus) resulted in justification and life for all people. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Jesus) the many will be made righteous.

Through this process, Jesus acting as both high priest and the sacrificial goat, has justified humanity which means mankind no longer needs to strive to somehow try to justify themselves.

Romans 3:21-24 But now apart from the law (the Old Covenant) the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. (The law pointed to what was to come, a righteousness via the New Covenant) 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

So through the atoning work of Jesus we see the justice demands of a holy God satisfied and the appropriate response of sinful mankind acknowledging their sin and God's right to judge them.

This is how God chooses to deal with the problem of sin. Man's attempts to attain the righteousness of God through the law and his own efforts will always result in abject failure. Despite our best attempts to obtain righteousness by our own efforts it is foolishness to think it will survive God's holy judgment on our efforts. This stark fact is confirmed here in v.23, **"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."**

However, in our place our Savior, Jesus Christ, substitutes Himself to bear the divine judgment on sin. Through Jesus, God steps out from behind the law and deals with mankind personally. And what do we see? A God of love and grace that has set us free from the “law of sin and death.”

Romans 8:2-3 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh

And the good news of the gospel is, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”(Romans 8:1).

Chapter 40 – Justification

Christ by substituting Himself on our behalf has fulfilled the requirements needed for justification. Consequently, the justice demanded by a holy God for mankind's sin has been served. But one has to marvel at this godly act, as no court in the land would allow this type of transaction to occur. There is no way a judge would allow an innocent person to substitute himself to accept the punishment of the guilty party. Yet this is precisely how God chooses to justify us. The judge sentences the guilty then steps around the bench and assumes the penalty on behalf of the guilty party. Here we see God in the ultimate act of love bearing in His own incarnation His own judgment on mankind. God Himself endures His own wrath against sin.

Justice tempered by Grace

What we see here is the breaking in of the new order of the kingdom of God, a system of justice accompanied by terms such as grace, forgiveness and mercy. As we have learned earlier, all of God's characteristics including anger and judgment are governed by "love." "Love" necessarily involves a relationship between parties, something sadly missing in man's system of justice where everything is kept on a strictly legalistic basis. But such is God's love for His wayward children, He has initiated a system of justice that not only sets them free from the demands of the law, but also demonstrates to those same rebellious children His unwavering love and commitment to them.

However this is not to say that God has suspended the demands of the law in order to come to this arrangement. Forgiveness and pardon has come at the supreme price, the death of the Son of God. Absolute judgment has been administered on the One substituted in our place. But this very fact introduces the other benefit of dealing with sinful humanity through grace rather than the law. While there is the unmistakable sense of joy associated with this good news for sinners, there is also the shame of knowing that our sin has caused the death of God. Love by its very nature is a choice. A response generated by fear of punishment, as occurred under the administration of the law is not "love," it is coercion! However the whole dynamic of the equation changes under the administration of "grace." Under "grace" we are dealing directly with a loving God who has already justified and reconciled us despite our sinfulness. The chances of a positive response of love on the part of sinners to this act of godly love and grace dramatically increases in this scenario as compared to living under the demands of the law. The usual result of living under the law is guilt and condemnation, while grace produces remorse, gratefulness and thankfulness. Let me share with you a story by Søren Kierkegaard that illustrates this dynamic.

"Suppose there was a king who loved a humble maiden. The king was like no other king. Every statesman trembled before his power. No one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all opponents. And yet this mighty king was melted by love for a humble maiden. How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his very kingliness tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her body in royal robes, she would surely not resist – no one dared resist him. But would she love him? She would say she loved him, of course, but would she truly? Or would she live with him in fear, nursing a private grief for the life she had left behind. Would she be happy at his side? How could he know? If he rode to her forest cottage in his royal carriage, with an armed escort waving bright banners, that too would overwhelm her. He did not want a cringing subject. He wanted a lover, an equal. He wanted her to forget that he was a king and she a humble maiden and to let shared love cross over the gulf between them." For it is only in love that the unequal can be made equal," concluded Kierkegaard. The king, convinced he could not elevate the maiden without crushing her freedom, resolved to descend. He clothed himself as a beggar and approached her cottage incognito, with a worn cloak fluttering loosely about him. It was no mere disguise, but a new identity he took on. He renounced the throne to win her hand.

A God who is “love” does not want cringing subjects. He wants equals so that shared love can pass between them. Jesus made Himself like us so we could be made like Him. Mankind, whether he likes it or not, is inescapably implicated by love to their Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus through His saving work has achieved salvation for every single human being.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

Each has been gathered up to receive the gift of salvation so we can share in the divine fellowship that exists in the very godhead itself. This inconceivable gift of God is held out there ready for the taking.

Justification leads to Reconciliation

This ought to be wonderful news for all mankind. If the conditions for our justification before a holy God have been satisfied by the saving work of Jesus Christ, what does it mean for mankind?

Romans 5:9-11 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

What we learn in this verse is that “justification” leads to “reconciliation.” But unlike the limited forgiveness of sin that resulted in the offering of the Old Covenant atonement, this New Covenant atoning sacrifice has real power to forgive. Because of its limited power to justify, the Israelites, year after year, went back to living under the condemnation and resulting guilt of the law. However, now that true justification has been achieved through the covenant of grace, not only is total forgiveness real, but it also sets men free from the debilitating power of guilt that holds mankind in its grasp (Hebrews 10:1-22).

Hebrews 10:16-22 “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” 17 Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

We are not just issued with a pardon for our sins, but God chooses to purposely blot out from His memory those guilty debilitating memories that we humans tend to hang on to. We humans have the unfortunate habit of handing the power of sin back to something God has utterly removed and forgotten. Jesus has liberated us from our guilty past and ushered in a new age, the age of reconciliation. In this new age, the past is undone, God puts the clock back or in the terminology of the prophet Joel, ***“He restores the years the locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25).***

The atonement goat on which the sins of the nation were placed and then taken out and released into the wilderness is symbolic of how God now treats our sin and guilt.

V.18 And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

It is no longer necessary because God has chosen not to remember them.

V.19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

When Jesus descended into that awful hell of the cross under the final judgment of God, He brought to an end the power of sin and guilt over mankind. The age of the fallen creation is coming to an end, and the new age has dawned. This is why Paul can say, ***“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:1-2).***

By accepting God’s judgment on our sinfulness, Jesus has satisfied the legal requirements necessary for the relationship between a holy God and His creation to be restored. However, the ultimate goal of atonement is not just to satisfy the legal obligations, it’s the restoration of the

relationship, at-one-ment. This is the point where “justification” passes over into “reconciliation.” To go back to Kierkegaard’s story of the humble maiden, it’s about shared love passing between the two parties. Jesus’ incarnation (lowering Himself) and act of justification (making us right with God) has levelled the playing field to make it possible for mankind to respond to His gracious act of love. We will take up the subject of reconciliation next chapter.

Chapter 41 – Reconciliation

Last chapter we talked about the justifying work of Jesus Christ, which was necessary to satisfy the legal requirements necessary for the relationship between a holy God and His creation to be restored. However, the ultimate goal of atonement is not just to satisfy the legal obligations, it's the restoration of the relationship, or at-one-ment. This is the point where "justification" passes over into "reconciliation." Jesus' incarnation (lowering Himself) and act of justification (making us right with God) has made it possible for mankind to respond to his gracious act of love. We now pick up the subject of reconciliation.

As with the rest of the story of salvation, God is the one who takes the initiative in the process of reconciliation. Jesus joined us in our humanity so He could act on our behalf. He lived a righteous life so it could be credited to us. And He suffered the judgment of God against our sinfulness and imputed His righteousness to us so we could stand justified before our God. *Justification* stresses setting us right with God whereby He forgives us and imputes Jesus' righteousness to us. *Reconciliation*, on the other hand, stresses God joining us in our humanity in order to draw us back into fellowship with Him.

We need to think of the process of reconciliation in much the same way as the process whereby Jesus justified us. Just as Jesus the judge stepped around the bench and assumed the position of the man judged in order to justify us, so with reconciliation, Jesus acts on behalf of sinful mankind and responds in perfect obedience as God's beloved "Son." So now rather than acting in His justifying capacity as the "judge," Jesus now acts in His reconciling capacity as a faithful "son" of God. We learned earlier how man's natural inclination since the fall is enmity towards God. Now, out of the midst of our fallen human condition Jesus turns man's natural enmity towards God into a son's loving response, thereby restoring fellowship with God. Jesus maintained this loving response even through the hell of the cross when confronted with the combined forces of evil, both human and spiritual. During this awful ordeal, the bond of love between the Father and Son held firm. Jesus lived His perfect life of loving obedience from the manger to the grave, responding to and trusting His Father every step of the way. He is in fact acting as God's beloved son in the true image of God.

The voice from the cloud at His baptism and transfiguration was more than a nice platitude. It was God the Father acknowledging the first human to respond perfectly to His overtures of love (Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5). Even more incredulous is the fact that because of what Jesus has done, the Father can now say the same thing to us, "You are my beloved sons."

1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Jesus has invaded our sinful humanity, defeated it and turned it back to God so that we are no longer enemies pushing God away, but sons in loving fellowship with our heavenly Father. Jesus through the incarnation has brought the two parties together, God, through Jesus, lovingly approaching mankind, and mankind, again through Jesus, lovingly responding. The barrier preventing reconciliation between the two parties has been removed. Peace between the two parties has been restored.

Colossians 1:19-22 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

So we see the enmity between God and humanity has been removed. God is no longer opposed to the sinner because of his sin, and man no longer needs to fear God's judgment. Jesus by interposing Himself as the sacrificial victim accepts God's righteous judgment on our sin in order that peace can exist between the two parties.

But there is a second “peace” we experience as Paul goes on to say.

V.21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

Mankind, up to this point stood under God’s judgment. The prospect of spiritual death for our sin is not a peaceful existence (Romans 6:23). But now that Jesus has substituted Himself in our place to accept the wrath and punishment of God on our sin, the sword of Damocles no longer hovers over humanity’s head. It would be completely duplicitous of God to now hold us to account for our sin after He has executed the final judgment on His very own Son, let alone what it would say of God to have allowed His Son to suffer and die unnecessarily. The Father will not go back on the death of His Son and therefore has nothing more to say about our sin. And that is why Paul can say Christ can present us to the Father, **“holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.” (Colossians 1:22)**. So not only is there peace between the parties, but also the forgiven party can experience the “peace of God.”

It’s important to note that Jesus through His saving substitutionary work has worked out reconciliation in both a general sense for all mankind, but also in a subjective sense so it touches each individual. It is one thing to understand God has worked out this reconciliation between the parties in a general or corporate sense as it affects all mankind. But if this were as far as it went, it would mean the salvation of all mankind or “universal salvation.” But now the challenge is to reveal this subjective reality to the individual members of mankind so they recognise and accept what Jesus Christ has performed on their behalf. This is the point of decision where each individual, after a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, will either accept or reject the gift of salvation offered to them. We will speak more of this later, but for now it is important to point out, a positive response to this matter is far more likely based on two important changed realities. First, a complete understanding of the lengths to which God has gone in order to offer this gift, and secondarily, the natural enmity which existed in mankind’s fallen nature has been defeated and turned back towards God. And as God’s plan for reconciliation progresses, other realities, again provided by God, come into play to facilitate a positive response.

True reconciliation demands a response from both parties

God will insist on this step, as true reconciliation demands a response from both parties. God has gone to extreme lengths to make it as easy as possible for us to respond to his overtures of love. Notice the lengths God has gone through to bring us to this point.

Romans 5:8-11 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!

This is the process of justification to bring us into legal standing with God.

V.10 For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

“His life” is talking about Jesus’ saving work of reconciliation in two senses. First, His perfect righteous life lived for us as the loving obedient son prior to His death, and secondarily, the risen resurrected Son, our living mediator actively drawing us into the divine relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

John 12:32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation did not cease when He returned to heaven. Although it is not always obvious to us human beings, Jesus Christ is fulfilling this prophecy and actively drawing people into relationship with Him. We will talk more about this in a future session.

Romans 5:11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received (past tense) reconciliation.

So through the love and grace expressed through the saving work of Jesus Christ, God has in an objective and subjective sense provided the way for reconciliation between the two parties.

But as mentioned, true reconciliation demands a response from both parties otherwise atonement is not possible. And as reconciliation, relationship and love are dependant on free will in order for it to be genuine, the onus passes to the forgiven party to respond and accept this God-given gift. Cast your minds back to the story by Søren Kierkegaard of the king who lowered himself in order to win the hand of the humble maiden. The king can do all in His power to facilitate a positive response, but ultimately he cannot force his will upon her. The final choice of whether she will reciprocate in kind to his love is up to her. This is the position in which humanity now finds itself. Will it respond to God's act of pure love and participate in the divine act of reconciliation?

This is a very important step in the reconciliation process. If the process of atonement just stopped at the legalistic aspect of "justification" where the judge is satisfied the penalty of our sin has been paid, and Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us, then there is the danger of our developing complacency to our sin and simply continuing to live in our previous lifestyle. It would effectively mean, we could continue in our sinful lifestyle and still escape the wrath of God. The goal of atonement is much more than simply making us righteous. It is all about reconciliation. It is the restoration of a personal relationship between humanity and God. Justification without reconciliation results in "cheap" grace. It would be the humble maiden accepting the king's overtures of love simply to enjoy the benefits of the position without a reciprocating love. It would be an empty, loveless marriage. God is not mocked and He will not allow the death of His Son to be mocked. God has gone to extreme measures to break down the barriers preventing reconciliation and will not rest until his purpose is achieved. The onus is in the hands of the forgiven party to accept the gift. If it is rejected, it is not because God has rejected them. In point of fact, He has already taken their rejection upon Himself at the cross. God has chosen in Christ to love and accept sinners. If they now choose inconceivably to reject that acceptance, then they deserve the fate of the rejected. There is a place reserved for those who choose "rejection." It is that god-forsaken place called "hell," life cut off from a relationship with God. But it is not God's will for any to be assigned to this place. It is a result of their decision to reject the loving grace of God. God's goal is not destruction, but salvation. A salvation that results in a restored relationship with humanity sharing in the divine life of the Trinity.

But here again, humanity is not left to himself to work up this personal response. God takes the initiative. To again quote ***John 12:32 "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself"***

Through Jesus Christ, God has eternally bound himself to humanity. And if necessary, the Good Shepherd will pursue the lost sheep to the gates of hell in order to restore the relationship. We will pick up this aspect of the reconciliation process later, but before we leave the ordeal of the cross, we need to go back and address two more important aspects of Jesus' ministry.

Chapter 42 – Defeating Evil

We can't leave this section surrounding the events of the cross without saying something about the destructive force that is "sin." After all, this is the primary cause of the broken relationship between a holy God and His creation. Humanity was created to be in relationship with His Creator. The Creator not only brought man into existence, but also provided the means by which he would be sustained (Acts 17:28). His existence though, was dependant on the created maintaining a healthy relationship of love and trust with His Creator. Under this arrangement, mankind enjoyed harmony, security, assurance and peace, not lacking anything.

However, as we know when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by insisting on being their own gods rather than their Creator, this special relationship was terminated and although God did not disinherit nor destroy his wayward children, He continued to sustain them but allowed them to reap the consequences of their decision to substitute themselves in the place of God. So rather than enjoying the peace and security offered by living a life under the guidance of their Creator, Adam and Eve now found themselves in the anxious, stressful and harrowing experience of living a life alienated from God, a life characterised by sin and guilt. Their sin was to assume a position reserved only for God Himself. The "created" assumed the role of the "Creator." This is the basis of all sin, a lack of trust by the created in their Creator. The command, "**You shall have no other gods before me**" (Exodus 20:3) was given to preserve the Creator's place of honour in the relationship and why it is mentioned first in the Decalogue. This is why God takes our sin very seriously as it is a direct affront to Him personally. It is a rebellious creation thumbing their noses at their Creator and Father. Adam and Eve's temporary existence continued but fellowship with a Holy God ceased as a result of their sin. This is why they went and hid themselves and humanity has been following their example ever since. But more than hiding is at stake. Now that humanity has cut themselves off from the true source of life, there can be only one consequence, physical *and* spiritual death. This is the ultimate result of self-willed humanity rebelling and choosing to trust themselves rather than His Creator. Mankind has, in effect, committed a form of suicide.

But there is an additional problem. Not only has man cut himself off from the source of true life and fellowship with God, but also now his sin has created a corresponding separation from God's point of view. As God's holy nature is opposed to sin and evil, it now means humanity finds itself under God's judgment. For God not to oppose sin would mean a total denial of all God stands for. He is a holy loving God, full of light and truth and as such has to oppose sin and evil in whatever forms it takes.

But His opposition to, and judgment of sin, is with the intent of restoring the creature back into relationship with Him. As mentioned earlier, God's goal is not the destruction of mankind, but salvation. Salvation means the restoration of the relationship where the creature trusts the design of the Creator. But it is precisely here in His opposition to sin and evil that God exercises His righteous anger. He is not going to allow evil to frustrate His purpose of sharing the life and love of the Trinity with His creation. And the means he chooses to express His wrath against sin and evil is to do so in a very unorthodox way. Instead of holding mankind to account for their sin, He chooses to substitute His very own Son to pay the penalty for their sin. The intent of this approach is to provide the way whereby humanity can be drawn back into relationship with Him. So God's anger is not expressed in the destruction of mankind, but rather as redeeming love. Rather than casting us off, God through the incarnation and the atonement of Jesus, reaffirms His commitment to His wayward children. He will not let us go. His judgment and wrath is directed at the sin and evil that is preventing restoration.

In addition to providing salvation for mankind, the incarnation and the atonement are also designed to remove once and for all the two sources of evil that hold mankind under its deadly sway. We have spoken at length about the Lamb of God accepting the penalty of sin on our behalf. Now we see Jesus going forth as the conquering King to destroy the two sources of evil that are at the heart of our sin. If we can use the medical analogy again, it would not be of any use to save the patient without taking care of the disease that is the cause of His impending death. Humanity is trapped in a fearful spiritual disease not entirely of their own making from which they cannot extract themselves. If Jesus is to deliver humanity from the chaos of sin and evil into which it has disintegrated, then He has to confront and destroy these evil powers and break their unrelenting dominance over humanity and reclaim the lost for the kingdom of God.

Confronting the two sources of evil

Here at the cross, Jesus will face His greatest challenge hazarding everything on His ability to faithfully rely on the Father to overcome the combined forces of evil as they attempt to lead Him into sin. The forces arrayed against Him are formidable. Not only is Jesus confronted with the evil resident in the human heart, but also the dark forces of evil in the spiritual realm led by the devil himself. In contrast to the normal spiritual battleground where the confrontation between God and the devil take place, such as revealed in the books of Job and Revelation, this battleground is the flesh, the “flesh of sin” which Jesus has invaded to destroy these two enemies and free mankind once and for all from the scourge of sin.

We last spoke about the devil in regard to Jesus’ baptism where Jesus willingly submitted Himself to the devil’s temptation. We finished that section with an ominous threat.

Luke 4:13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Although the devil is given little press in regard to Jesus’ ministry, we see his influence working behind the scenes in the various players surrounding Jesus all in an effort to derail His ministry. We see his name associated with the disciples, Peter (Matthew 16:33), Judas (John 13:2), and of course the Pharisees (John 8:44). At other times we see the angry mobs being whipped up into a frenzy in an attempt to end Jesus’ life. These were all “opportune” times for Satan to disrupt or wreck God’s plan for the salvation of mankind. Throughout His lifetime, Jesus, because of who He was, was besieged as no other human has been before or since by the devil and his demonic forces. These vicious attacks came to a climax in the ordeal of the cross when we see the full extent of the evil nature of fallen humanity under the wicked influence of Satan and his demons determined to tempt Jesus into sin.

And it is here too at the cross that the spotlight is rightly focused on the true extent of humanity’s sin. The symbol of the cross has both a light and a dark side to it. While on the one hand, it symbolises God’s loving redemption of mankind, it also carries a dark shadow that should remind each of us that we too are implicated in this shameful deed. It is no accident that in Jesus’ ordeal leading up to the crucifixion, representatives of all humanity are implicated in His execution. Collectively, Jews, Gentiles, church, state, and individuals in the crowd, all of humanity as sinners have the blood of the beloved Son of God on their hands. That “wicked deceitful heart” (Jeremiah 17:9) of mankind rose up and spat in the face of God.

Yet in the midst of this, the beloved Son asks His Father to ***“forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)***. Such is the contrast to the way we humans would have reacted to the terrible injustices He suffered. Instead the love of God shines through Jesus even while suffering innocently the wrath of God against our sin.

1 Peter 2: 21-25 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 “He himself bore our sins”

in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” 25 For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Through the whole awful ordeal, Jesus remained faithful to His Father and His heavenly kingdom. He did not sink to the level of man’s fallen nature by retaliating in kind; neither did He succumb to the temptation to call on the divine power at His disposal. We see the devil’s influence in this regard when a similar question to his earlier temptations is raised, ***“if you are the Son of God!” Matthew 27:39-40 “Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”***

Although the forces arrayed against Him were formidable, they are dealing with the King of Kings who would not betray His kingdom for the passing glories of this present age (Matthew 4:8-10). Nor would He yield to the demands of the flesh to use His divine powers to end the ordeal (Matthew 26:53, Matthew 27:40-43). His sights were unswervingly set on the task set before Him, to free once and for all His wayward children whom He loved and for whom He was determined to be their Saviour (Luke 9:51).

By not yielding to humanity’s fallen nature nor the temptations of the devil, Jesus overcame and defeated the two sources of evil holding man captive. Jesus by His perfect trust and obedience to the will of His Father overcame and defeated our hostile fallen nature so that it died at the cross. It was the death of the old man (Romans 6:6). In its place was the new redeemed human nature of Jesus Christ, the first true human in the image of God. And in fulfilment of the prophecy made back in Genesis 3:15 speaking about the impending clash between Jesus and that serpent, the devil, for dominion over the earthly kingdom, ***“he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*** Despite the best efforts of the dark forces of the spiritual realm, Jesus in the flesh overcame and crushed them.

Hebrews 2:14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.

Jesus seized back from the devil the position that was rightfully His, lordship over His subjects. No longer would it be business as usual for the dark forces of the invisible world. Their hold over mankind was greatly diminished and humanity had access to a new redeemed nature.

The combined evil forces of both the visible and invisible powers arrayed against Jesus in this battle for supremacy were unable to bend Him from the task of delivering mankind for the dark forces that held them captive.

Colossians 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Jesus’ work of delivering humanity took a giant step forward. But there was still one last enemy to defeat!

Chapter 43 – Resurrection - Defeating Death

As the Roman soldier thrust his spear deep into the vital organs beneath Jesus' ribcage and His precious blood poured out on the ground, He willingly submitted to the welcome relief of death. But not before He uttered two last cries. ***"It is finished"*** (John 19:30) and ***"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."*** (Luke 23:46).

The cry, ***"It is finished"*** showed just how confident Jesus was that He had faithfully fulfilled every task the Father had asked of Him in order for the gift of salvation to be offered to all mankind. After "working" for millennia to restore the relationship between Creator and created since the first sin, Jesus at last could rest.

John 5:16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. 17 In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."

The Father and Jesus who enjoyed rest on the seventh day of creation had to recommence working after sin entered the world in order to restore the relationship with His rebellious children. The Sabbath commandment pointed forward to this day when spiritual rest and peace between God and mankind would be accomplished through Jesus' saving "work."

Hebrews 10:11-13 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.

The duties of the Levitical priesthood of the Mosaic Covenant merely pointed forward to the true saving work of Jesus Christ. Nothing more needed to be added to His work as far as Jesus was concerned, hence His cry, "It is finished", rendering the Old Covenant obsolete.

One Last Enemy

However, having accomplished all this, there was still one last task Jesus could not complete on His own. There was still one last enemy that had to be defeated otherwise everything that Jesus had accomplished up to this point would be wasted. For this last task, Jesus had to rely on His heavenly Father to accomplish. That one last enemy remaining was death itself. If God could not demonstrate His power over the grave itself, then all His previous saving work would be for naught. To use the medical metaphor again, the disease causing death was cured, but unfortunately the patient died. Jesus lay dead in the tomb after submitting to the hell of the cross and bearing the sins of the world.

But His last cry, ***"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"*** showed the vital connection between Jesus and His Father had not been broken by the evil forces arrayed against Him. Jesus, as demonstrated throughout His entire life, had complete trust that His spirit was in the safe hands of the Father until He was restored to life through His resurrection (John 2:19). Jesus did not have an immortal spirit or soul anymore than we do. He had to rely on His Father to resurrect Him.

Romans 8:11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Only God has the power to raise the dead. If we want to live again, this is where we too need to put our trust.

A unique Resurrection

But this resurrection is no ordinary resurrection. This one is unique in the annals of history. Other resurrections had taken place throughout the biblical narrative. Jesus Himself had already demonstrated He had the power to raise someone from a biological death and grant them back

their physical existence (Lazarus - John 11:1-43; Jairus' daughter - Luke 8:49-54; Dead raised at Jesus' death - Matthew 27:52). But what makes Jesus' resurrection so unique is that this is the first time a "mortal" man has been raised to "immortality." He has passed through a gateway no man had ever passed before. Jesus' resurrection was not resuscitation to His former life as in the case of Lazarus, but a resurrection to eternal life. What was stunning to the early Christians, who already believed in a general resurrection at the end of history, was the timing of Jesus' resurrection. What was supposed to happen at the last day had suddenly been telescoped into the present. Earlier we spoke about Jesus' birth from "above" signifying the beginning of the new creation, now at the end of His earthly ministry we see further proof the new creation has arrived in the midst of the old decaying creation.

In an earlier session we talked about "personhood." "Personhood," you will remember, is the unique quality God has built into us humans which separates us from the animal kingdom and gives us the ability to relate to others, including our heavenly Father. For humanity to make the transition from mortality to immortality, it was critical this unique relationship with the Father be maintained, as God is the only one who can grant us immortality. However, because of Adam's sin, mankind has cut himself off from the source of true life, and as a consequence now faces the prospect of both a biological and a spiritual death. This is the "second" death we spoke about in an earlier chapter, a death we referred to as the consequence of sin, **"the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23)**. So mankind finds himself under the sentence of spiritual death pictured by their denial to the "tree of life."

However, as we have learned, Jesus through His incarnational and atoning work has restored the relationship between God and man pictured by the tearing of the temple curtain. The created again has access to His Creator. The door to immortality has again been opened. But this whole scenario is contingent on God's ability to raise Jesus from the dead. What is at stake here is God's ability to grant immortality to mortals and for the person's unique "personhood" to continue through to the spiritual dimension. So if God can raise Jesus from the grave and bestow on Him immortal life, it proves once and for all, God has the power to do the same for us (John 11:25). We see both of these criteria fulfilled when Jesus appears to His disciples the evening of His resurrection.

John 20:19-20 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

For Jesus to suddenly appear out of nowhere in a locked room ought to tell us something about His new body. It had powers way beyond the natural. Jesus was either a great magician or this was a supernatural occurrence. So we have undeniable proof of the Father's ability to raise someone from the dead and to grant immortality to mortals.

V.20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Jesus wanted to assure the disciples that He was the same *person* they knew before His crucifixion so He asked them to check His hands and His side. Not only is Jesus raised immortal, but we also see his unique "personhood" transcending death in the miracle of the resurrection. The disciples' recognition of the person who was Jesus Christ proves His "personhood" had crossed with Him from mortality to immortality. We have living proof we serve a God who has power to raise someone from the dead. And not only raise them but to grant them immortality and restore their unique identity that died with them when they suffered their biological death.

Man in his arrogance likes to think he can control most circumstances in life. But one thing he can't control is this last enemy, death. We may be able to postpone it for a while but eventually it strikes us all. So the resurrection of Jesus is great news for humanity, not only because Jesus our Savior is raised from the dead, but also we have a heavenly Father who has the power to raise the

dead. Death has lost its sting in the face of the living God (1 Corinthians 15:55). But now that Jesus has defeated death, the Father passes this authority to the one who has defeated both death and hell to Jesus.

Revelation 1:18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Jesus now holds the keys to mankind's destiny. He is the one who has gone to death and hades on our behalf, defeated them and as a result is given the authority to offer us the gift of eternal life. It is no longer death, sin, the devil or any other power that controls the destiny of mankind. That power is in the merciful hands of our Savior.

Hebrews 2:14-15 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Instead of being held captive by the power of sin, death and the devil, Jesus has set us free from those evil forces that held us under their sway.

And if we are set free, what has God in store for us?

1 Corinthians 15:20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

"Firstfruits" implies "secondfruits." Just as Adam's sin decreed death as the destiny for humanity, now Jesus' resurrection sets the stage for humanity to make the transition from death to life. And not just biological life, but eternal life in relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Mortality is not part of God's plan for humanity. We may experience a physical death, but the resurrection of Jesus proves the nature of a finite person, their "personhood" can extend beyond death into immortality.

Chapter 44 – Salvation Extended to All

We have been looking at the resurrection of Jesus. Up to this point, we have spent quite a bit of time examining the various aspects of Jesus' saving ministry. Through it all, we emphasised Jesus' willingness to submit His own will to that of the Father's, **"not my will, but yours be done."** (Luke 22:42). What we see in the resurrection of Jesus is the Father's validation of Jesus' cry on the cross, **"It is finished"** (John 19:30). The Father has given His stamp of approval on Jesus successfully fulfilling every task the Father had given Him in order to provide salvation for humanity. It's the Father effectively saying, **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."** (2 Peter 1:17). In other words, the Father is saying, "I am satisfied Jesus has fulfilled all we set out to accomplish in order to restore our relationship with our wayward children. In theological terms this is called the doctrine of "Satisfaction."

- ◆ The Father is *satisfied* justification of sinners has occurred by Jesus' willingness to accept God's judgment on sin by submitting to the death penalty on our behalf.
- ◆ The Father is *satisfied* sinners have been clothed with Jesus' righteousness which He lived on our behalf.
- ◆ The Father is *satisfied* our fallen human nature has been sanctified and infused with Christ's righteousness through union with Him.
- ◆ The Father is *satisfied* reconciliation has occurred as the barrier of sin preventing peace between the two parties has been removed.
- ◆ And remarkably, the Father is *satisfied* the way has been opened for Him to forgive His dear children so He can adopt them into "sonship."

And if the Father has given His stamp of approval to all Jesus has accomplished, what does it mean for humanity? Well it effectively means the relationship between a holy God and His creation has changed dramatically. It is entirely built on a new basis pictured by the New Covenant instituted by the saving work of Jesus Christ. Prior to the atonement and the resurrection, because of man's sin, the relationship between God and humanity was based on law and as a consequence, judgment, because of our failure to obey the requirement of the law.

Ephesians 2:1-18 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

We opposed God through our sinfulness, while God rightfully opposed us because of His holiness. But God was not going to abandon His children in our lost and sinful condition.

V.4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions— it is by grace you have been saved.

But now that Christ has taken care of the problem of sin and our lack of righteousness, the law no longer exerts its deadly hold over us. How can it when the penalty for our sin demanded under the law, spiritual death, has been paid for by our Savior? To now turn around and demand it be paid a second time would mean Jesus' death was totally unnecessary and make the good news of the gospel a grotesque fabrication. God is not a liar and He certainly would not subject His dear Son to the horrendous ordeal of the crucifixion unnecessarily. So if the demands of the law have been satisfied by the saving work of Jesus Christ, God's dealings with His creation can now proceed on a whole new basis.

And this is where the New Covenant based on grace makes its glorious entry.

V.6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

God is no longer opposed to humanity as Jesus Christ has abolished the barrier caused by humanity's sin. So God's mission of reconciliation can now proceed on the basis of grace, no longer hindered by the demands of the law.

At this point it's important to understand that this new covenant of grace is extended to all mankind in a general or corporate sense. In other words, this New Covenant is extended so all can have access to its promises. But a gift extended has to be accepted and this is where it has to move from the corporate to the personal.

V.11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

The promises of the Mosaic Covenant were only made to Israel, but now we see the promises of this New Covenant of grace based on Christ's blood being extended to all peoples.

V.14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.

Not only did Jesus break down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, but more importantly the dividing wall between God and humanity. But notice He did it by setting aside the unrelenting demands of the law through the sacrifice of ***His flesh*** on the cross.

V.15...His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Labels now become a thing of the past. As far as God is concerned we are all part of the ***"one new humanity."*** So we see confirmed all ***"have access to the Father by one Spirit."***

The Mission of the Holy Spirit

This last phrase all ***"have access to the Father by one Spirit"*** is also important because it gives us an insight into how God plans on drawing us into this new humanity in a personal or individual sense. As we just read, all humanity is embraced in this circle of grace in a general or corporate sense. However as in all gift giving, a gift offered has to be *accepted* by the recipient. This is what moves the gift from the corporate sense to the individual sense. There has to be an acknowledgement on the part of the individual receiving this remarkable gift of the terrible price paid by God in order for this gift of eternal life to be offered to them. But as in the rest of this remarkable saga so far, this last critical step in the process of salvation is not left to us otherwise we would surely mess it up.

The "Spirit" mentioned above, the Holy Spirit, has the mission of drawing us as individuals into the fellowship of this ***"new humanity."*** We will speak more of this later when we get to the subject of Pentecost but wanted to mention it here to dispel any notion we are condoning universal reconciliation (the belief all humanity will eventually be reconciled to God).

Relationship placed on a whole new basis

For the moment though we need to understand the vital connection between the Father giving His stamp of approval on all Jesus had accomplished by raising Him from the dead, and how that has changed the basis on which the relationship between God and all humanity rests. No longer is God dealing with mankind on the basis of the law, but on the basis of grace. The act of the Father in resurrecting Jesus and the Father's acceptance of Jesus when He presented Himself as the first sheaf of the first-fruits (Leviticus 23:9:14) after His appearance to Mary in the garden (John 20:17)

confirmed the statement, ***“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”*** The whole basis of the relationship between God and man had been placed on a whole new basis because of the saving work of Jesus Christ. The task of the law was to judge and condemn us, but now that that has been satisfied by the cross, God can extend grace to sinful humanity so that we are raised up with Christ, justified, reconciled and at peace with God. The task of Immanuel (God with us) has been accomplished in all its fullness. God humbling Himself in turn has exalted mankind to an entirely new status in his relationship with God. And if “God is with us,” then the opposite is also true, “We are also with God.”

One New Humanity

Now we need to go back and take a closer look at Paul’s comment in Ephesians 2:15, ***“His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity.”*** As mentioned earlier, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was different from all other resurrections in that He was the first human to be raised to immortality. But God is not satisfied with just one new human. His purpose as stated above is ***“one new humanity.”*** Jesus is the first of the “firstfruits” the implication being there are more fruits to follow (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

1 Corinthians 15:22-23 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

So the emphasis that leaps off the pages of scripture as we have already discovered is for “inclusion” rather than “exclusion.” The pattern for the way God operates is preserved for us in the way He dealt with the “old” humanity, ancient Israel. He started with one man, Abraham and then extended it to Abraham’s offspring, Isaac, Jacob, then Jacob’s twelve sons who eventually became known as the twelve tribes of Israel who comprised the nation of Israel. We see this pattern being followed with this new humanity, or “spiritual” Israel. Jesus is the first of the firstfruits, then come other firstfruits, the twelve disciples, the church, then by implication, secondfruits. There is this ever-expanding circle as more are included in the process of raising up this new humanity. It’s a very important principle to remember as we move forward in God’s plan of redemption.

Chapter 45 – New Creation

The resurrection of Jesus is living proof that we serve a God who has power to raise someone from the dead. And not only to raise them to immortality, but the resurrection of Jesus proves the nature of a finite person, their unique identity or “personhood” can extend beyond death into immortality. We finished last time talking about God’s purpose to create through the saving work of Jesus Christ, **“one new humanity.”** Salvation is not only offered to Israelites but also to Gentiles under the New Covenant.

Much is made of the creation event in Genesis, but as far as God is concerned, this creation of the **“new humanity”** in Jesus Christ is the one that really counts. The resurrection of Jesus to immortality has heralded a new creation event. It is more than coincidence that here at the beginning of this new creation as at the old, Jesus is the central figure.

John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

And so it only fitting when it comes to the pinnacle of God’s creative event, man in the true image of God, Jesus is key to the process. With the incarnation, the Creator lovingly inserted Himself into our corrupt and fallen world in order to create the perfect union between the Creator and the created. Then from within our corrupt and fallen existence, Jesus creates a new humanity the pinnacle of which is His own resurrection from the dead. A new creature now exists in God’s spiritual world that has not existed before. For the first time a human truly in God’s image exists, one who through His sinless life, His death on the cross and His resurrection on the third day has opened the way for mortals to join God in eternity. In the symbolism of the Old Covenant, Jesus, as the Pascal Lamb sacrificed at Passover, has saved us from death so that we may be granted “life”! We have “passed over” from death to life.

Romans 5:18 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

Jesus the Creator, and our mediator, has restored access to the source of true life so that eternal life is now available to all those who seek it.

Jesus’ Resurrection sets humanity and creation on a whole new trajectory

We should not underestimate what Jesus’ resurrection from mortal to immortality means for humanity. The course of the created world including humanity is set on a whole new trajectory as a result of the resurrection. Because of Adam’s sin, mankind’s destiny was set on a trajectory of decay, corruption and death. Not just physical death, but also spiritual death, because they lived under God’s righteous judgment. Also in this corruptible state, they became easy prey to the forces of darkness and evil arrayed against them. And as we have seen, they had no means within themselves to free themselves from the process of decay, corruption and death or the hold the evil forces exerted over them. Under this scenario, humanity would cease to exist and descend into “oblivion.”

But we have seen how Jesus, through His life, death and resurrection by eternally attaching Himself to humanity has defeated the enemies of mankind. He defeated and overcame our fallen human nature and the devil through His life and crucifixion, and He defeated death through His resurrection to immortality. Death had no power over Jesus, as He was sinless. It was impossible for Him to remain in the grave as death can only exert its power over sinners. When Jesus “set His face to go up to Jerusalem” it was with the intention of allowing Himself to be put to death in order to pay the penalty for our sins, but also to invade and defeat this last enemy, death. His bursting forth from the tomb on the third day demonstrated this last enemy had been defeated. We see Jesus as the Creator, first of all injecting Himself into our fallen humanity in order to re-create it

and restore true humanity, and secondarily, by intentionally allowing Himself to be put to death, He shattered the stranglehold of death and established the gateway to immortality.

The course of humanity has been set on a whole new trajectory, one that no longer results in “death” and “oblivion,” but one that results in “life” and “true” humanity in the image of God. This is what makes the “new humanity” possible. Through His incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has brought about the “redemption” of humanity. No longer is our destiny under the control of our fallen nature, the forces of evil, or death, but under the control of the one who declares, “***I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die. (John 11:25)***.” Jesus through the ordeal of the atonement has forged a new humanity out of the old. Our inclusion in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis then for the creation of the “***new humanity***” which will live on into eternity.

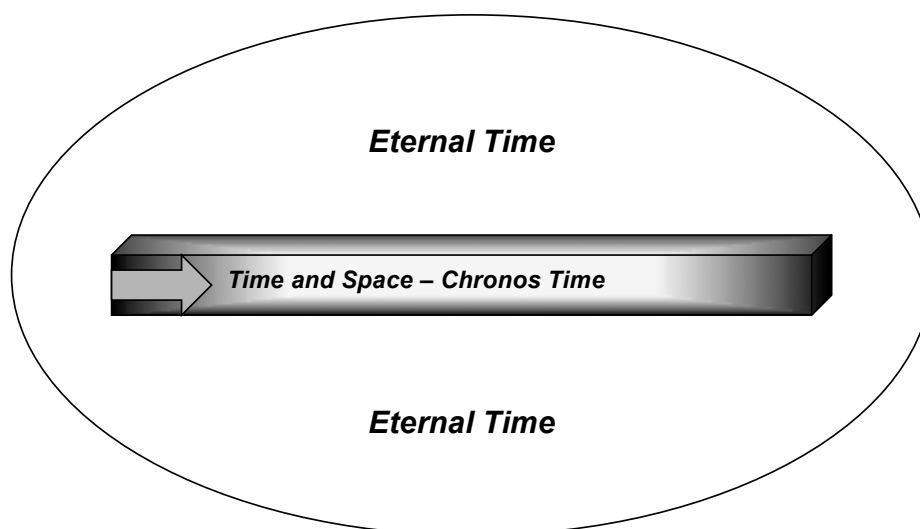
2 Corinthians 5:17-18 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ

But it is not just man that is redeemed by Jesus’ resurrection. It has implications for the whole of fallen creation. As we discussed earlier, because of Adam’s sin, mankind’s destiny was set on a trajectory of decay, corruption and death. But this applies equally to the four-dimensional world of time and space we live in. We see this process at work every morning when we look at ourselves in the mirror and observe it in the natural world around us

Romans 8:20-22 (NLT) Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse.

The natural world’s fate under the present conditions, including humanity, is on a path to oblivion. And neither the natural world nor humanity can do anything about it. It is beyond our control. Fortunately there is someone who can and has done something about it. God’s intention from the beginning was to share His “life” with His creation, not see it descend into decay, corruption and death. So when we see God, the Creator, showing up in the birth of Jesus, it is with the intention of restoring life to a dead and dying world. You may remember this diagram used earlier to try to give some indication of the two dimensions we are grasping to understand when it comes to God’s eternal time and our chronological time.

Chronos Time and Eternal Time. (See figure below).



It is our “chronos” time that is descending into decay, corruption and oblivion. But something dramatic is about to happen to this chronos time when the Creator from eternal time invades it. As Creator and the source of “life”, Jesus is about to restore “life” as the guiding principle to a

planet fated for oblivion. This process of “recreation” begins with the incarnation when the source and giver of life joins Himself to humanity.

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

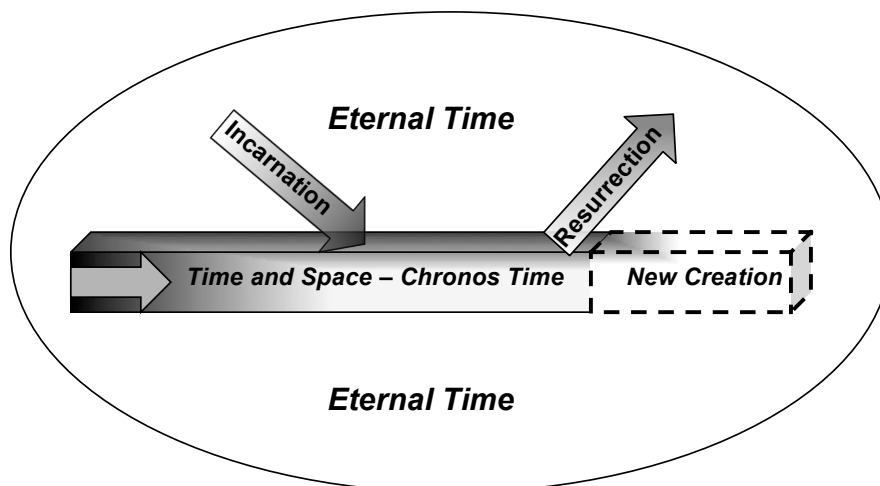
Notice Paul’s distinction between the two dimensions. The created first Adam was given life in a physical body in time and space, the second Adam, Jesus, not only was raised immortal, but has the power to give spiritual life to others, “a life-giving spirit.”

V.46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. **47** The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. **48** As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. **49** And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

This is the rebirth of the new humanity we read about in Ephesians 2. With Jesus’ resurrection, humanity’s trajectory is set on a whole new path. No longer is it destined for oblivion, but rather, sharing glorious eternal life in communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ resurrection is the beginning of the end for earthly chronos time as the old is being replaced by the new creation. Both times continue to exist for the time being, but inexorably, the kingdom of God will advance and the old creation will fall away into oblivion.

The New Creation. (See figure below).



Decaying chronos time which results in death and oblivion is not the end game. The Creator God set it in motion to serve His higher purpose of creating a new spiritual humanity, which is redeemed out of the old by Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:20-22 But with eager hope, **21** the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. **22** For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

What we see with Jesus’ resurrection to immortality, is not only the creation of the new humanity to share in the life and love of the godhead, but our cursed chronos time being liberated from death and decay so it too can share in the life-giving dimension of God’s eternal time.

Chapter 46 – The Kingdom of God

Last chapter we discussed how Jesus' resurrection has allowed for the "new humanity" to share in the life and love of the godhead. But we saw Jesus' resurrection has implications far beyond that of humanity. It has implications for the whole of the fallen creation. In His ministry prior to the cross, Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God breaking into human affairs.

Mark 1:14 *After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

Jesus "came near" to us with His incarnation as the anointed King of the kingdom of God. But at this point in His ministry, much more needed to be accomplished before the kingdom could be established. However, after performing His saving work through His life, death and resurrection, the kingdom of God was established on earth and could be expanded to include all those who believe in the King, Jesus.

Mark 9:1-4 *And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power. 2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.*

Normally in this section, the reference to the kingdom of God coming in power is interpreted as referring to the three disciples, Peter, James and John witnessing the transfiguration of Jesus meeting with Elijah and Moses. And that is fine as far as it goes. But Jesus was referring to an event much more significant than just His transfiguration before His disciples. In reality, He was referring to the consequence of what His saving work would achieve for the whole of the fallen creation.

The Beginning of the New Creation

His resurrection from the dead on the third day signified *the beginning of the new creation*, the new creation that included the possibility of humanity joining Jesus in immortality to share and commune in the life and love of God.

2 Corinthians 5:17-18 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.*

The resurrection of Jesus, crossing the gulf between mortality and immortality through the power of God also signified the start of Christ's rule over the kingdoms of this world. Satan had promised Jesus dominion over the kingdoms of the world at the temptation if Jesus would bow down and worship him (Matthew 4:8-10). Now with the defeat of sin, Satan and death, this was the inauguration of the kingdom of God on earth with Jesus as its newly coronated King. As prophesied in the book of Daniel, this kingdom would grow until it crushed all opposing powers (Daniel 2:31-35). This was the beginning of the end for kingdoms built on the power of ruthless force the culmination of which is recorded in the book of Revelation.

Meanwhile, the present age will continue in the same old way, but the whole framework of history has been set on a whole new path as Christ has embedded Himself in the very heart of it all. What was previously destined for decay, death and oblivion, has now been set on a whole new trajectory thanks to the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. Here now stands a man who has defied death and corruption and is no longer subject to the natural laws of this world. In addition, He now has the power to draw all humanity into the divine dimension where God lives when He declares, ***"I am the resurrection and the life."*** (John 11:25). Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of the end for earthly chronos time as the old decaying world is being replaced by the new creation, the kingdom of God.

Both times continue to exist for the time being, but inexorably, the kingdom of God will advance and the old creation will slowly fall away into oblivion.

Proof that the kingdom of God has arrived is characterised by a number of significant points. This new age is under the Lordship of the risen One who claims, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 21:6). Now that those forces that have to this point defied God’s intentions, i.e., our fallen human nature, sin, the devil and death, have been defeated, our destiny is in the capable hands of Jesus Christ. The “Alpha” or “beginning” Jesus is referring to in this verse is the start of the new age, the kingdom of God inaugurated with His resurrection from the dead. The “Omega” or “end” is a reference to the end of this age when those who have accepted Christ as their Savior are led through the gates of the New Jerusalem to be forever with their God.

This new kingdom is characterized by grace rather than law (Romans 6:14). Through His death on the cross, Jesus had substituted Himself as the focal point of God’s final judgment on the world and ended the conflict between God and humanity. Mankind no longer lives under the judgment of God’s law as Jesus’ saving work has cancelled the written code which judges us guilty and now lives under the forgiving power of the New Covenant’s blessing of grace (Colossians 2:13-15). In addition, this new age is characterized by the spiritual healing work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16-18). Whereas the old age was dominated by evil spiritual forces intent on separating mankind from His Creator, this new age is characterized by God’s Holy Spirit drawing humanity back into relationship with His Creator. We will talk more of this later.

This new age is one of inclusion where all, both Jews and Gentiles are invited to share in the kingdom (Acts 2:17, Ephesians 2:14-15). The dividing wall of hostility between competing parties has been broken down and now all are one in Christ Jesus. This is the new humanity or the citizens of the kingdom of God (Galatians 3:28). This is the age of the “firstfruits” or the church age (Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 2:19-22). The world needs to hear the good news about the God who loves them so much He was willing to die for them. In addition, a people, the church (firstfruits) needs to be prepared to assist with the great harvest of souls (second-fruits) at the end of the age.

So when Jesus said in Mark 9:1, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power”, He was referring to much more than His transfiguration before His disciples. He was speaking about the dawning of the new age, the age of the kingdom of God, the age of grace, the age of the healing work of the Holy Spirit, and the formation of the early church. The whole course of humanity was set on a whole new trajectory when the first human, Jesus, was raised from the dead.

We shouldn’t make the mistake of minimizing the full implication of what occurred on that resurrection morning. It was much more than Jesus being brought back to life, joyful event though that was. It was the culmination of all that Jesus had set out to do through the incarnation and the atonement. All He had accomplished would have been in vain if not for His resurrection. The resurrection proved God not only had the power to grant humans immortality, but it was His stamp of approval on all Jesus had done to make this transition possible. In addition, it was the arrival of the new age, the kingdom of God under the loving rule of the rightful King and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

The Millennial Age

This new creation period between Jesus’ resurrection and His second coming is also the prophesied millennial age or the “1000 year” reign of Christ. Now you might ask, “Wait a minute, you’re saying this present evil world with all its troubles and woes is the prophesied millennium?” Bear with me while we pursue this a little further. There are three major theories regarding the millennium: Pre-

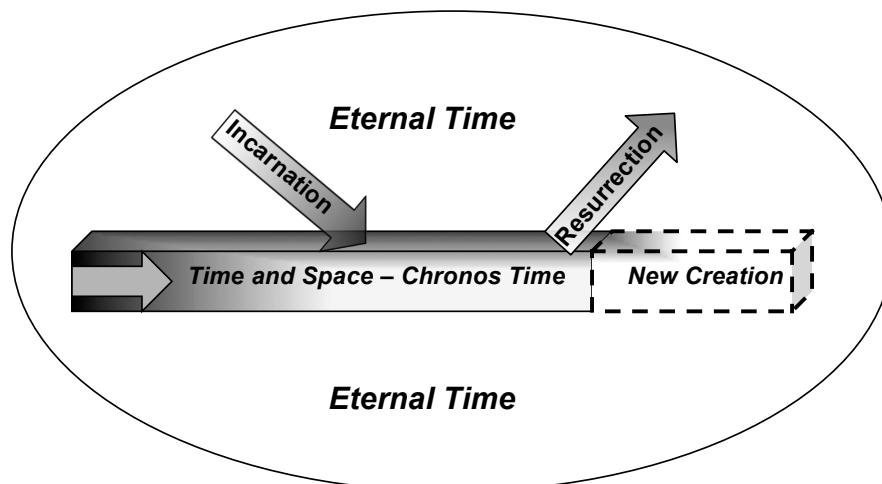
millennialism, Post-millennialism, and A-millennialism. The major difference between these teachings is the timing of Christ's second coming.

Pre-millennialism, teaches that Christ will return to earth *prior to* a literal 1000-year earthly reign. The greatest development and spread of pre-millennialism thinking came in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the rise of U.S. fundamentalism and dispensationalism. It was also during this period that concepts like the rapture of God's people prior to the tribulation would occur. In that sense it is a relatively recent theory.

Post-millennialism, states that Christ's return will *follow* a 1000-year golden age ushered in by the church. The world will have been Christianized and mankind will be living in peace and prosperity. Christ will return after this has happened, hence the term "post" millennialism.

A-millennialism, is the view which states that Christ is *presently* reigning on earth through the church, and that the "1000 years" of Revelation 20:1-6 is a metaphorical reference to the present church age which will culminate in Christ's visible second coming.

What both the "pre" and the "post" millennial positions fail to understand is the profound impact Jesus' resurrection had on the old creation of time and space. As we have just read the resurrection of Jesus to immortality wasn't just about a man moving from mortality to immortality, but the introduction of the new creation of the kingdom of God. (**See figure below**).



To regard what occurred from the perspective of old time and space is to miss the spiritual implications of this momentous event. To see what is really happening, we need to look past our limited earthly perspective and look at things from God's perspective. As we have seen, we have two times running in parallel; the new creation of the kingdom of God is steadily advancing, while chronos time is falling away. To view the 1000-year earthly reign of Christ as returning to the old decaying structure of chronos time fails to recognize what transpired when Jesus rose from the dead. What would be the point of going back to the old decaying structure of chronos time after Christ has gone to great lengths to defeat it and has instituted the age of the new creation?

As we have seen, the course of humanity has been set on a whole new trajectory as a result of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It is the age of the new creation; there is no going back to the old, decaying structure of the fallen creation. Notice how Jesus tried to explain this concept of the kingdom of God to the Pharisees.

Luke 17:19-21 *Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed. Viewed from the purely physical perspective of chronos time, it can't be observed, because it is part of the new spiritual dimension.*

V.21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."

The kingdom of God revolves around the one standing in their midst, and the one who has made the new creation possible, Jesus Himself. Viewed purely from an earthly perspective of time and space it may appear as though the kingdom has not yet arrived, but viewed spiritually, it came into being at Jesus' victory over sin and death. In the same way we believe through faith that the risen Lord now sits *out of sight* at the Father's right hand, so it is with the kingdom of God. Just because it is not always physically discerned, doesn't mean it is not operating behind the scenes of secular history. However, at the apocalypse, the revelation, all will be revealed, hence the title of the book named for this event. Jesus will be unveiled as the God who entered our world as the Lamb of God in order to save the world and establish the kingdom of God.

At this present time, this knowledge can only be discerned spiritually through faith by the people of the new creation (1 Corinthians 2:10-14). But at His second coming, a now visible Jesus along with His saving work will be revealed for all to see. This is when the visible and the invisible merge as one in the new heavens and the new earth. Until that time, the kingdom remains veiled behind chronos time. But make no mistake; there is no going back to the old decaying structures of this present evil world. Jesus will return visibly as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in all the glory of the kingdom of God revealing to all what He has done to accomplish the salvation of humanity. If we want to understand the workings of the kingdom of God we need to put on our "kingdom glasses" and look at it from the perspective of Jesus Christ. A-millennialism does this. It holds that Christ's reign during the millennium is spiritual in nature and is operating behind the scenes as part of the church age. At the end of the church age, Christ will return in final judgment and establish a permanent reign, not in the old creation of time and space but in the new spiritual dimension of the new heavens and new earth.

Chapter 47 – Evil in the New Creation

As we have seen, the course of humanity has been set on a whole trajectory as a result of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It is the age of the New Creation. There is no going back to the old, decaying structure of the fallen creation. We made the point that at this present time this knowledge can only be discerned spiritually through faith by the people of the new creation (1 Corinthians 2:10-14).

A second point that needs to be made about the kingdom of God is it is a kingdom that grows over time. When we look around our troubled world today, it's obvious to any rational person that sin, evil and death still exist. We will look at the question of why this evil is allowed to continue shortly, but for now we need to understand the kingdom of God is designed to expand over time. ***Luke 13:18-21 Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches."***

We see Jesus comparing the kingdom of God to the growth of a tree. We don't plant a seed and gather the fruit the next day. The kingdom of God began with Jesus' resurrection, then expanded to 3000 at Pentecost, and has since spread around the world. But it has not as yet reached its fullness, and won't until Jesus' second coming.

V.20 Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? 21 It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Again we see the element of time introduced into the process. Yeast has to be mixed with the dough and then given time to rise before it is baked. This example also reinforces our first point about learning to view events from a spiritual perspective. In the same way we cannot see the chemical process of the yeast at work in the dough, we don't always see God's hand in how the kingdom of God is expanding behind the scenes of world events. We live in a period that theologians call, "between the times," a reference to the beginning of the new creation at Jesus' resurrection and when the kingdom of God reaches its fullness at Christ's return. Although this is frustrating to those of us wishing the fullness of the kingdom now, we have to be patient and recognize God has designed it this way for a purpose - so the greatest number of people can be saved.

Evil in the New Creation

A third principle addresses the question of evil. Even though the kingdom of God has arrived on earth, it's obvious to any rational person that sin, evil and death still exist. From our earlier discussion on evil, we know that right from the beginning, the devil has been allowed to exert his evil influence on mankind. He was allowed into the Garden of Eden at the original creation. We also read in the book of Job how Satan was allowed to test the patriarchs' faith. He tested Jesus in the desert and now we see him still at work in the new creation. But now a new contradiction is introduced because we are told Jesus defeated the devil at the cross. So how is it possible that on the one hand the New Testament tells us the devil was comprehensibly defeated at the cross by Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18, Ephesians 1:21, Colossians 2:15, Revelation 17:14), then on the other it tells us he still goes about like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8) exerting his powerful influence over humanity? Scripture reveals this evil influence will continue until his final and complete defeat at Christ's second coming when he is thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

How does one resolve this seeming contradiction? The answer as to why evil exists has to be viewed in the larger context of God's purpose of creating mankind in His image. If Jesus was in all points tempted as we are (Hebrews 4:15), and we are called to follow His example (Philippians 2:5-8), and God's goal for us is to be "overcomers" (Revelation 3:12) and to be His holy people

(Leviticus 26:12), then why do we Christians feel we will not be expected to walk the same path Jesus walked?

Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

First thing we notice is God's ultimate plan for mankind is to conform us to the image of His Son. We will go into more detail about this aspect when we get to the subject of the church. But what Paul is referring to here is a process whereby humans will be moulded and shaped into the image of Jesus Christ. And he follows this statement by calling those who *willingly* submit to this process as brothers and sisters. Sometimes I think we Christians underestimate what a privilege and honor it is to be given this opportunity to become sons and daughters of the living God in this age (Hebrews 2). The point is we do not become like Jesus Christ without going through a process that has been designed by God to reach that objective. Key to that process as we have learned is Jesus Christ. All that is needed for salvation has been provided for us, but Christians in this age are also asked to grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13). Jesus Christ has already walked that path we are asked to walk.

Hebrews 4:14-15 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

It goes back to this subject of spiritual maturity we talked about earlier. In the same way we Christians find ourselves still battling the pulls of the flesh in this present age, and death remains a part of our existence, the devil too retains a role in God's purpose of developing Christ-like brothers and sisters. This principle is explained in Jesus' parable of the weeds in Matthew 13.

Matthew 13:36-39 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

Again we see the two overlapping dimensions, one, the advancing kingdom of God with "the people of the kingdom" ruled by Jesus Christ, and second, the corrupt decaying kingdom ruled by the devil. However, when asked by his servants if they should uproot the evil weeds, the master told them to leave them alone.

Matthew 13:29-30 "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

As Jesus is the one telling the parable, there had to be a good reason for His refusing this legitimate agricultural request.

One of those reasons is the devil, although defeated, still has a role to play in God preparing a holy people for His name. In order to be an overcomer and to grow into the fullness of Christ there has to be things to overcome so we can develop Christian maturity. This is why we find ourselves in a world that still includes sin, the flesh, death and the devil. It is within this environment of the competing kingdoms that a Christian is asked to be an overcomer (1 John 2:13-14; 1 John 5:4-5) and to grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13). Notice the qualities the Thessalonians were developing as a result of the persecutions and suffering they are experiencing.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-5 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, 4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, 5 which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;

The difficulties of life in this old corrupt world are there to serve God's purpose of developing a holy people who reflect the righteousness of their elder brother, Jesus Christ.

But don't think for a moment that God is not in charge of the process. As we learned from the example of Job, there are restrictions on how far Satan can go. God, not Satan, is the all-powerful one, and although the devil has been given a certain amount of latitude to perform his evil work, God is powerful enough to turn what the devil means for evil into good. We see this ability demonstrated in powerful ways in the story of Joseph in Egypt, the case of Job, and of course, in the crucifixion of Jesus. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, not knowing that in the future, he would be God's instrument in not only saving them, but the people of Egypt as well. Joseph's comment in forgiving his brothers shows the power of God to make good come out of evil.

Genesis 50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

The same can be said in Job's case. The devil's intention of destroying Job's faith only made it stronger.

Job 42:5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Job's trial ended with him having a stronger faith and a closer spiritual relationship with God than he had prior to his trial. This is a powerful lesson for all Christians to remember when we are facing our own personal trials. We need to remember there are times when God is more concerned with our spiritual development than with our physical well-being. We have a heavenly father who knows us intimately and knows what is best for us spiritually in order to mould and shape us into His image (Isaiah 64:8). And like Job we need to learn to trust Him with this process.

There is a similar example to Job's story in the New Testament where a "messenger from Satan" is used to prevent the apostle Paul from becoming conceited.

2 Corinthians 12:6-10 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

Apparently this messenger was allowed to harass Paul so he would keep a healthy perspective on the task at hand, preaching the gospel to the Gentiles rather than boasting about his unique spiritual revelations.

V.8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

And, like Jesus, Paul's prayer for relief was not granted, ultimately because there was a higher spiritual purpose at work. But notice another important principle regarding sin and evil in our spiritual development.

V.9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Our failure to measure up under our own human strength, which is inevitable, forces us back to the One whose power we should be relying on in the first place. That is why Paul says, ***v.10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.***

And the most powerful example of God overcoming evil with good is in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The evil intent of the powerful physical and spiritual forces that schemed to destroy the Son of God resulted in the salvation of the world. This principle is still in effect today as we witness God preparing a holy people for Himself by turning the temptations of the flesh and the evil intent of the devil into godly righteousness. As prophesied right from the beginning in the book of Genesis, Satan sustained a fatal blow when Jesus rose from the dead (Genesis 3:15). His

fate is sealed as we will soon see, but until that time he is allowed to perform his evil work as part of God's plan to prepare a holy people molded in His image.

Chapter 48 – Full Extent of Evil

The course of humanity has been set on a whole trajectory as a result of Jesus life, death and resurrection. It is the age of the new creation; a human has crossed from mortality to immortality. There is no going back to the old, decaying structure of the fallen creation.

We saw from the very beginning how the devil has been allowed to exert his evil influence on mankind. Although the devil was comprehensibly defeated at the cross and delivered a fatal blow, he, along with the other difficulties of life in this old corrupt world are there to serve God's purpose of developing a holy people who reflect the righteousness of their elder brother, Jesus Christ.

There is another reason the devil has been allowed to exert his evil influence on mankind and that is, humanity needs to realise the true and full extent of the evil that resides in the human heart. Up to this point we have identified three stages humanity has experienced throughout its history. We witnessed the age of anarchy that resulted in God having to destroy all mankind with a flood except for the eight in Noah's ark. Such was the depravity of mankind God had to step in and wipe out this evil before they annihilated themselves. We get a taste of what this world might have looked like with what we see happening in Iraq and Syria today with the likes of ISIS. The second age occurred with the introduction of a written code of law. The first written code we are aware of can be traced back to Mesopotamia and was introduced by Hammurabi, a Babylonian king about 1760BC. Much of the common law we use today can be traced back to the code of Hammurabi. The Law of Moses followed this at the time of the exodus about 1446BC. What is unique about the Law of Moses is it included offenses against a deity as well as against society. The age of the Law was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand it put a restraint on human behavior so that the world did not fall back into anarchy, but on the other hand it pointed to the failure of humans to live up to its ideals. There is this vast gap between the "is" and the "ought." This of course is why it was necessary for Jesus to come and live up to the requirements of the law on mankind's behalf so His righteousness could be attributed to us. This introduced the third age, the age of grace that began with Jesus' death and resurrection and the start of the new creation.

However, there are those in our society who naively think that given enough time, enough education, more laws and better forms of government, that humanity will reach a golden age all by itself. It's a noble ideal of course. Unfortunately, each generation goes to its grave with dashed expectations and the world about the same as it has always been. But scripture tells us, just so mankind gets the point that life without God is hell, that just before Christ's second coming, the restraints holding back the full extent of evil will be removed so no one is left with any doubt that we are deeply flawed creatures in desperate need of help.

The following scenario is subject to interpretation, as we are not given a blow-by-blow account as to how events unfold, but scripture does give us a basis outline. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul is responding to the false claim by some that Christ had already returned.

2 Thessalonians 2:5-9 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works.

This passage of scripture confirms what we saw revealed in the book of Job, that Satan's hand is restricted by God in what he is allowed to do. Actually there are three restrictions God has put in place to restrict evil. We just mentioned one of them, the law, second, human governments

(Romans 13:1-7), and third, most importantly, God Himself. God is the one mentioned here in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 who puts the restraints on Satan's evil activities in the same way he was restricted when dealing with Job.

But what we see revealed here in the book of Thessalonians is Paul making reference to these restrictions being removed just before the return of Christ and Satan being unleashed and allowed to go forth to deceive the nations. John in Revelation 20 picks up this scenario.

Revelation 20:1-3 *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended.*

This binding of Satan occurred at Jesus' resurrection. The devil and his evil spiritual forces were defeated and his activity restricted as we have discussed. If you like, he was put on a chain like a wild dog that restricts his ability to create havoc. But notice what occurs shortly *before* Christ's second coming.

V.3 *...After that, he must be set free for a short time.*

The chain restricting his activities is removed and he is allowed to go forth and deceive the nations once more. This initiates the final confrontation between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this age, between the Lamb of God representing the new creation and the beastly and brutal apocalyptic images of the old age led by Satan himself.

One could make a good argument that we are already in this period of a "short time." Over the last 2000 years, many have died from wars and other unnatural causes as a result of Satan and man's evil actions. However, no other century comes close to the number of unnecessary violent deaths as the 20th century.

This century also produced four of the most evil men in recorded history, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Pol Pot. Estimates of those who died from war and the ensuing collateral damage in the last century range from 170-200 million, half of which can be attributed to the two major communist dictators, Stalin and Mao Zedong. I would hazard a guess the vast majority of those 200 million would agree, "Man's heart is evil indeed and life without God is hell!"

Revelation 20:7-10 *When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.*

Again we see who is in charge. God, not Satan, is the all-powerful one who rains fire down from heaven.

V.10 *And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

At last, the devil and those who aid and abet his evil ways are removed forever. Again we see God allowing the devil to exert his evil influence on mankind so humanity realizes the full and true extent of the evil that resides in the human heart.

Jeremiah 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

So the devil, along with sin and death, are used by God to reinforce the point that "the human heart is evil and life without God is hell."

Bear in mind that all this occurs prior to the general resurrection when the small and great will stand before the One seated on the great white throne (Revelation 20:11-12). It's important to consider evil in the context of this resurrection. The devil is no longer around to exert his evil influence on mankind. All have experienced the hell of what life is like without God. Is God going

to allow all this accumulated pain, suffering and death experienced over the millennia by all peoples to count for nothing? We will come back to these questions when we take up the subject of the judgment in the future. But for now we need to address another subject surrounding Jesus' resurrection, and that is, what kind of body did the resurrected Jesus have?

Chapter 49 – Jesus’ Resurrected Body

The last couple of chapters have focused on the subject of the new creation inaugurated by Jesus’ resurrection. He was the first human who passed from mortality to immortality, so there is a new creature in God’s good creation. A human has been infused with the life of God. A human has crossed from death to life, not just physical life, but to eternal life. The question we are going to look at in this chapter is, what kind of body did this new immortal creature have? And I hope to show you there is a very important connection between the resurrection and the incarnation.

The reason this question is relevant for us is, the time is coming when we will have the same type of immortal body as the risen Christ has.

1 Corinthians 15: 20-23 *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

Firstfruits, as mentioned before, imply something to follow as this section of scripture goes on to explain.

V.21 *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22* *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

Notice again the representative principle at work. Adam introduced sin and death, while Christ introduces righteousness and eternal life. Now Paul goes on to explain the progression of those who will follow Christ to immortality.

V.23 *But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

This is the culmination of God’s plan of making man in His image. Physical human beings who have fallen asleep will follow in Christ’s footsteps and be resurrected to share eternal life and fellowship with God.

1 John 3:1-2 *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2* *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is* Incredibly, humans will be infused with the very life of the godhead so we can share their existence as their children. We will speak more of that in the future, but for now, we will concentrate on the “body” of the resurrected Jesus. Notice though, both in this section and as we will see in 1 Corinthians 15, there is a limited amount of information on what our resurrected body will be like, ***“and what we will be has not yet been made known.”*** A complete revelation of what our body will be like won’t happen until we encounter the risen Christ. However, until that time, there are some things we can know.

Different bodies designed to function in their appropriate environment

The first thing we need to understand is there are different bodies designed to suit different environments. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul goes to great lengths to explain how these various bodies have been designed to function in their particular environment.

V.39 *Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.*

Human bodies and animals have been designed to live primarily on land, while birds have been designed to fly, and fish designed to live in water. The bodies they have are designed to function in their particular environment. He then makes the same point in reference to the celestial bodies.

V.40-41 *There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. 41* *The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.*

The sun provides the light, heat and time we earthlings need to function, the moon regulates the tides, and the stars are there to confound the proud atheists who refuse to admit the designer behind the universe. Now Paul turns his attention to what our resurrected body will be like, and

like the examples he has just cited, they will be bodies designed to function in the environment of the new creation. We have already made the distinction between chronos time and eternal time. Our present physical bodies were designed to function in the four-dimensional environment of time and space. But now that we are being raised to live in the spiritual realm of the new creation, eternal time, we will need an appropriate body to function in that dimension.

V.42-50 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

The physical body that relies on food, water and air for basic survival in the decaying world of chronos time is not an appropriate body for the spiritual world of eternal time.

V.45 So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

As humans came into existence through physical procreation from Adam, so these new bodies will come into existence through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, and the ***"life-giving spirit."*** The gift of immortality comes through the ***"life-giving spirit"***, Jesus Christ. There is no intrinsic power in man such as the immortal soul that can make the transition from mortal to immortality. We, like Jesus Christ, rely on God to raise us from the dead and receive the gift of immortality.

V.46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

In the same way we are presently in the image of the earthly man Adam, one day we will be in the image of the heavenly man, Jesus Christ.

V.50 I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

In the same way Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." (John 3:5), so Paul confirms we will have a spiritual body suitable to function in the heavenly realm.

Spiritual Bodies

But notice Paul's emphasis on the word, "body." Although it will not be a flesh and blood body, the spiritual body we will have still retains an important connection to our physical bodies. When Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, He was recognizable as Jesus, not only by His appearance, scars from His crucifixion, but in the way He conducted Himself when He broke bread (Luke 24:30-40). Paul confirms this connection between the old physical body that has gone before and the new spiritual body when he uses the analogy of a seed that produces a plant.

1 Corinthians 15:35 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

Although the seed disappears or dies in the process, there is still a connection between the seed and the plant that grows from it.

V.38 But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.

That is why those who want to inherit eternity must be born again of the Holy Spirit. In that process the old physical body dies and is replaced by the new spiritual body.

It was with this new spiritual body that Jesus appeared to His disciples.

John 20:19-20 *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"*

For Jesus to suddenly appear out of nowhere in a locked room ought to tell us something about His new body. It had powers way beyond the natural. Jesus was either a great magician or this was a supernatural occurrence.

V.20 *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

We spoke earlier how each of us is a unique "person" with our own personality, gifts and talents. Jesus wanted to assure the disciples that He was the same *person* they knew before His crucifixion so He asked them to check His hands and His side. So not only is Jesus raised immortal, but also we see his "personhood" transcending death in the miracle of the resurrection. In other words, there was a continuation of His personal being and existence of the man Jesus before and after His resurrection.

Jesus was recognisable, but there was also something very different about the body of this resurrected Jesus. It had the capacity to pass through doors, able to appear and disappear, to eat or not to eat. It had the capacity to communicate and fellowship with physical humans. And as other spiritual heavenly bodies have related to humans in the past, it had the capacity to function in both the physical and spiritual dimensions. The Lord along with two others appeared to Abraham before He destroyed Sodom (Genesis 18:1-2). Jacob wrestled with the Lord (Genesis 32:23-25). The commander of the army of the Lord appeared to Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15). Two angels appeared to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb (John 20:11-12). So this spiritually transformed body of Jesus was capable of functioning in both dimensions when the need arose.

A Spiritual Glorified Body

But don't for a moment think this was the true spiritual body that appeared to the disciples. This was merely a shadow of the now glorified Jesus Christ. A better description of the glorified body of the risen Christ is found in Luke 9 when He was transfigured before Peter, James and John.

Luke 9:28-30 *About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. 29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.*

This spiritual body was a little different from the body that appeared to the disciples post resurrection. Here was the living Christ in all His divine glory, the same body He will have on His return, and we will then see Him as He truly is, because **"we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).**

Philippians 3:20-21 *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

This amazing truth is confirmed here at the transfiguration.

Luke 9:30 *Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.*

Both Moses and Elijah, humans, also appeared with glorified spiritual bodies. Here again is proof that we serve a God who has the power to raise humans who have died from the grave and give them glorified spiritual bodies. But notice here too there is some connection between the old mortal bodies and their new spiritual bodies as both of these men were recognizable as Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:3-4). But just as a plant is so much more glorious than the seed it grew from, so it will be with our glorified spiritual bodies.

The connection between Jesus' Incarnation and His Resurrection

We have spent most of this chapter focusing on the type of body Jesus had when He was resurrected. But if this is all we focus on, we miss the most important aspect of Jesus' resurrection event. This new human creature that rose from the dead on the third day is the culmination of

God's creative purpose of making man in His image. And this is what ties the resurrection to the incarnation. As Jesus mentioned in His parable of Lazarus and the rich man, there is this vast gulf between mortality and immortality (Luke 16:26). There is no way we humans can transcend this gulf as our physical bodies were designed to die. However, we have a Savior who can and did cross this vast gulf. He willingly lowered Himself to our level in order for us to join Him at His level. The *Incarnation* is about God joining us in our humanity, whereas the *resurrection* is about us joining God in eternity. If the Son of God who sat at the Father's right hand were not willing to humble Himself and join us in our humanity, then this pathway to eternity would never have opened (Philippians 2:5-8). But by adding humanity to His divinity, Jesus opened the pathway for humans to join God in eternity. He is the life-giving spirit who connects finite humanity with His being as the divine Son of God. This is why Jesus calls Himself "the gate for the sheep" (John 10:7).

But as Jesus goes on to say in John 10:4, access to this pathway is contingent on a relationship with the life-giving spirit, Jesus Christ. Only those who know His voice and follow Him will be admitted (John 10:4-5). Only those who are willing to give up their false humanity and allow it to die with Christ will be admitted. Jesus, by joining Himself with that false humanity, was able to draw us into the healing fold of the Trinity and grant us the ability to share in the life and love of the godhead. Ultimately, humans were created to relate to our God and Father.

The upshot of all this is, as humans our lives are limited. We are finite. However, we serve a God who has the power to extend the finite nature of human personhood beyond death. The extension of this personhood is based on a relationship to God through Jesus Christ Himself who is infinite. When Jesus rose from the dead, He destroyed the hold the power of death has on mortal human beings. The mortal body died, but in its place rose the glorified spiritual body with its personhood intact. Because Jesus Christ was willing to join us in our humanity, death no longer limits the history of a finite person. He will be raised up with his personhood intact with a glorified spiritual body designed to live in eternity with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Chapter 50 – Jesus’ Ascension

We now move from Jesus’s resurrection to His ascension to the Father. The ascension is one of those overlooked aspects of Jesus’ ministry and to neglect it impoverishes an important aspect of the gospel message.

Let’s start with the question, “What do you think would have happened if Jesus had not returned to the Father and simply stayed here on earth?” Do you think mankind’s reaction to the risen Christ would have been any different to the pre-resurrection Christ? In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus Himself gives the answer.

Luke 16:30-31 “No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’31 “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

It would be naïve to think humanity would have a change of heart and suddenly accept Jesus as their Savior even though He had risen from the dead. No, more work needed to be done before this would happen. This is one of the reasons Jesus had to withdraw Himself physically from the earth.

True reconciliation requires a personal response

However this did not mean he was not involved in the ongoing process of drawing humanity back into relationship with their Creator. In fact, there is no way He could not be involved after all He has done on behalf of mankind to make this incredible notion possible. He is the mediator between God and humanity. Although not physically visible, Jesus Christ is intimately involved in directing the Father’s ongoing work of restoring the relationship with mankind. Through His life, death and resurrection, Jesus had prepared the groundwork for the salvation of mankind. Humanity, through Jesus Christ’s saving work has in a corporate sense been reconciled to God. However, true reconciliation, in order to be genuine requires a response from both parties. Jesus has achieved this response in a *corporate* sense in that He obediently responded to the Father on behalf of mankind, but the task now is to elicit a positive response from *individual* humans. The corporate or *objective* reality has to become *subjective* or personal reality.

The primary task of moving individuals from the objective reality to the subjective reality would be the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the promise Jesus made to His disciples at the last supper.

John 14:16-17 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth.

John 14:26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

We see the primary task of bringing individual humans to the knowledge of what Jesus Christ has accomplished on their behalf is delegated to the Holy Spirit. However, as in all other aspects of God’s saving work, all three persons of the Trinity are intimately involved in the process. The major advantage the Holy Spirit has in this task over Jesus is that He could move wherever He willed while Jesus was limited in His capacity to influence by His physical presence. As spirit, the Holy Spirit would not draw the same negative attention of those who opposed Jesus in the same way if Jesus were physically present. We will talk more of this later, but for now our focus is on Jesus’ ascension.

A human now sits at the Father’s right hand

Jesus has spent 40 days since His resurrection reassuring the disciples He is the same Jesus they knew before the resurrection, and preparing them for the task of taking the gospel to the world.

Luke 24:50-52 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into

heaven. 52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

With Jesus' ascension to heaven we come full circle. When Jesus arrived in Bethlehem, it was God joining us in our humanity. Now as He ascended from Bethany to heaven, Jesus is taking our humanity into the very presence of God. The incarnation is God humbling Himself to join us in our earthly realm, whereas the ascension is the exalting of humanity to meet God in His heavenly realm. God's purpose from the beginning is to bring humans into union with Him so they too can share in the life and love of the godhead. Now sitting at the right hand of the Father is a human being. This is not a sin-racked decaying human we normally think of. This is the sinless, glorified head of the new race, the pinnacle of true humanity, the firstborn of the new creation. The ascension of Jesus is the completion of the miraculous journey from the darkness of death, to the glory of heaven.

Philippians 2: 8-11 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is the new reality. Under the new creation, humanity is now wedded to eternity through the mediator, Jesus Christ. And amazingly, as the new Adam, he is the forerunner of the whole human race. What has happened to Jesus can happen to every human being (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Philippians 3:20-21 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

But as this verse implies, Jesus is not sitting idle now that he has returned to heaven. He is the risen Christ charged with the responsibility of completing the task of bringing fallen humanity into fellowship with God. As Philippians 3:21 says, He now has the **“power that enables him to bring everything under his control.”** With His ascension, Jesus is enthroned as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will rule righteously until all His enemies are put under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:25) and every tongue acknowledges that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:11). The Father has delegated this power to Jesus, as it is rightfully His to exercise. After all He is the one best equipped to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity. Not only does He know what it is like to be both divine and human, but He has also been the one to pay the supreme price in paving the way through His life, death and resurrection to bring about reconciliation between the parties. Of all people He is unique in that sense. It is this uniqueness that qualifies Him to fulfill the reconciling role of prophet, priest and king on behalf of mankind.

Hebrews 5:7-9 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

“Once made perfect” is not a reference to Jesus' character, but rather speaks of Jesus being in this unique position by what He has experienced during His earthly sojourn to qualify to be the mediator between God and humanity. He is the perfect candidate to fulfill the role of being prophet, priest and king acting on behalf of humanity in bringing about reconciliation between God and mankind.

Jesus as Prophet, Priest and King

Let's take a look at these three roles now that Jesus has ascended to heaven. The first thing we should consider about all three roles is how they are exercised. Surprisingly, we see little difference between how Jesus exercises His pre-resurrection ministry and His post-resurrection ministry. His role may have changed from being the “suffering servant” to one of “Lord of lords,”

but we see little, if any difference, in His approach to the task at hand. After all, His main title still remains one of being humanity's "Savior." Sometimes even we Christians may want Him to exercise His unlimited power as King of kings and Lord of lords with a little more gusto, and show the world who is boss. But this a God of love we are talking about and He would rather "every tongue confess He is Lord" by leading them to that admission voluntarily rather than forcing them to do it with an iron fist. To restate a popular phrase, "A man convinced against their will is of the same opinion still." So it is when it comes to "love." We cannot force another individual to love us. It has to be a personal choice. To go back to our earlier story of the king who wanted to win the heart of the humble maiden by Søren Kierkegaard, the challenge now is to get the maiden to respond voluntarily to the king's overtures of love. Jesus, through His incarnation and His atoning work on behalf of humanity, has more than demonstrated God's love for His creation. The task now is to make mankind aware of the love this self-sacrificing God has demonstrated on their behalf. The goal of Jesus' ministry remains the same, to save the world. The hard work of providing justification and reconciliation for all humanity has been accomplished. The emphasis of His ministry now changes to enlightening an oblivious humanity of what God has accomplished on their behalf and to get them to respond voluntarily to His overtures. They need to be made aware of the "good news," as that is what the "gospel" is all about. And He would prefer to do it through the conquering power of love, rather than with an iron fist.

And this, too, is why Jesus' ascension is so important, as His removal from the scene forces us to focus our attention on the historical Jesus, the God of love who willingly joined us in our humanity, who suffered, bled and died on our behalf so that we could join Him in eternity. This is why the primary focus of the gospel writers is on the "suffering servant" rather than the "Lord of Lords" as this demonstrates for all time the enormous love God has for His children.

Next chapter we will explore how Jesus exercises these three roles of prophet, priest and king from heaven as He begins the process of spreading the gospel message.

Chapter 51 – Christ’s Three-Fold Office

We have been looking at Jesus’ ascension to the Father after His resurrection. Jesus through His incarnation and His atoning work on behalf of humanity has more than demonstrated God’s love for His creation. The task now is to make mankind aware of the love this self-sacrificing God has demonstrated on their behalf. The goal of Jesus’ ministry remains the same, to save the world. The hard work of providing justification and reconciliation for all humanity has been accomplished. The emphasis of His ministry now changes to enlightening a mostly oblivious humanity of what God has accomplished on their behalf and to get them to respond voluntarily to His overtures. They need to be made aware of this “good news,” as that is what the “gospel” is all about.

With His ascension to the Father, Jesus assumes three very important roles in order to complete the process of restoring reconciliation between God and humanity. Like many other parts of Jesus’ reconciling ministry, all three roles have been foreshadowed in the Mosaic Covenant God negotiated with ancient Israel. They are the role of prophet, priest and king.

However, there is a very important difference between the roles fulfilled by His ancient counterparts and the role Jesus assumes under the New Covenant. Whereas in the past these roles were a mere shadow of the coming reality, Jesus is the genuine article. Moses, in his role as prophet only passed on God’s Word as it was relayed to him. Aaron, as high priest acted in a purely representative role as he led Israel in their worship of God, and King David was only king over an earthly kingdom. As we will see, Jesus is the realized embodiment of these three functions.

Neither did Jesus come by these titles lightly. They were agonizingly earned through His incarnation and His atoning sacrifice. His prophetic ministry began when the “Word” humbled Himself and became flesh (John 1:14). His high priestly ministry is primarily associated with His being led as a lamb to the slaughter as He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. His kingly ministry began when He stepped forward as our representative to be baptized by John, then went about the countryside proclaiming the kingdom of God, and finally submitting to the degradation of being raised up on a cross wearing a crown of thorns under the sign proclaiming Him to be, King of the Jews. However, it is only after He has completed each of these tasks and has ascended to the Father’s right hand that He is rightfully proclaimed to hold the threefold office of prophet, priest and king. And it is from here at the heavenly sanctuary as part of the new creation, that Jesus continues His ministry as prophet, priest and king, in completing the task of bringing humanity into personal communion with their God. So then, let’s look at these three roles.

Christ the King

A king, in order to be a king, has to have a kingdom. As we saw, the establishment of this new kingdom begins with Jesus’ resurrection and His ascension. This forerunner, as He is called in the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 6:20), now represents all humanity and is enthroned as King of kings and Lord of lords over all the powers in the universe. As Jesus prayed in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come” has become a reality. And this kingdom has a worthy king who has more than qualified for that position through His selfless sacrifice.

Hebrews 2:9 But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

The “***grace of God***” is also the defining characteristic of how Jesus administers His reign. Unlike earthly kingdoms, which are normally ruled by the power of the sword, this heavenly kingdom is ruled by the power of sacrificial love (Matthew 20:24-26).

The kingdom has been established, it has a king, but there is one other crucial ingredient a kingdom needs if it is to be a genuine kingdom. It needs subjects. Among the last words Jesus spoke to His disciples before He ascended to heaven, He signaled His intention to accomplish the task of populating this heavenly kingdom with other humans.

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

We see the Father appointing the Son as the King of this kingdom, but then assigning Him the task of populating this kingdom with subjects. His final instruction to His disciples before leaving them was to "go, and make disciples of all nations."

V.19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Here is the so-called "great commission" to gather peoples from every nation and tribe to become citizens of this heavenly kingdom. This is the task that preoccupies the King, Jesus Christ now that He has ascended back to heaven. And surprisingly, as indicated in this section of scripture, He enlists the help of mere mortals, the disciples, in this task. But not before He provides them with the godly resources they need to accomplish this task. Of course we are talking about Jesus' promise made to the disciples about the soon-coming support of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17).

Christ the High Priest

With Jesus' ascension to the Father, we see the fulfillment of the ritual played out under the Mosaic Covenant of the annual Day of Atonement. However, the sacrifice offered to the Father by this high priest has real forgiving power.

Hebrews 10:11-12 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God

This high priest approaches the Father's throne not just representing Israel, but the whole human race. And the sacrifice He brings with Him is His own spilt blood substituted in our place to cleanse us from our sins, but also the righteousness of His sinless life that He has lived on our behalf. Remember we spoke about Jesus' passive obedience and His active obedience. His passive obedience was His willingness to go as a lamb to the slaughter to cleanse us of our sins, and His active obedience was the righteous life He lived in response to the Father's command for us to be holy. This once for all time sacrifice by Jesus has been taken up into the life of God so that now forever before the face of God is the perfect offering guaranteeing forgiveness for all those who willingly accept Jesus' sacrifice on their behalf.

Hebrews 7:24-28 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.25 Therefore he is able to save completely] those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.26 Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

The Father's acceptance of this offering presented by this high priest is proof our sins have been forgiven and the Father has accepted us as His holy children. Because Jesus has united Himself to us in our humanity as our Savior, His acceptance is our acceptance. And because of His union with the Father, He is the guarantee of our redemption. Our standing with God is now on a whole new basis.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Notice Jesus' high priestly ministry is not just something He has accomplished in the past, but He continues to dispense grace and mercy to help us in our time of need. He continues to intercede on behalf of His people.

This introduces another important aspect of His priestly function. Under the Old Covenant, Moses would go up to the mountain to receive instructions from God and then relay them to Aaron and the children of Israel. In other words, he fulfilled the function of the word or prophet of God under the Mosaic Covenant. The high priest, Aaron, on the other hand was commissioned with the role of implementing the word that was relayed to him by Moses. He led the children of Israel in their liturgical response to God's Word through their sacrificial and ceremonial worship. What we see happening now under the New Covenant is Jesus assuming and fulfilling both of these roles of both prophet and high priest. It is the amalgamation of these two priestly roles into the person of Jesus that necessitates the establishment of a new order of high priest, the Royal Order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:19-20). The true Word of God no longer spoke from heaven as in the time of Israel, but humbly joined us with His incarnation (John 1:14). And He provided humanity's perfect response to that word through His righteous life and His sacrificial death. And just as Aaron led Israel's worshipful response to the grace and mercy extended by God, so this new high priest leads us in our worshipful response.

Have you every wondered why we conclude our prayers with the phrase, "In Jesus' name we pray"? It's because of this high priestly function. Jesus by joining himself to us in our humanity and substituting Himself sacrificially on our behalf provides the perfect worshipful response on behalf of mankind to the Father's love. What this means is well before our pitiful and pathetic attempts of worship ever reach the father, they are absorbed into the perfect worship and prayers of Jesus Christ offered on behalf of humanity to the Father. It is also in this spirit that we accept the bread and the wine of the Eucharist. It is the acknowledgment of the perfect sacrifice offered on our behalf by Christ to the Father. This is why we come to the table with empty hands. It is a reminder of our inadequacy to contribute anything to our acceptance, as it is only in Christ's offerings that we find true acceptance that enables us to then enter the holy of holies and enjoy the presence of the Father (Hebrews 10:1-14). It is here at the Father's throne that Jesus performs His priestly ministry, interceding on our behalf dispensing grace and mercy as we read earlier (Hebrews 4:16), but also leading in heavenly worship all those who are united to Him.

Hebrews 2:11-12 Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises."

Christ the Prophet.

Hebrews 1:1-3 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

In the past, prophets were merely instruments to pass on the word relayed to them by God to the Israelites. But now that *the Word* has joined Himself to humanity in the New Covenant, a whole new relationship exists between the God who made the universe and mankind. The Word who spoke personally to us in the incarnation, has returned to ***"the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."*** Humanity has a spokesperson at the Father's right hand that speaks on their behalf. This verse points us back to the historical Jesus, as it is His *life and teachings* that demonstrate for us who God is and what His will is for humanity. There is a caution here for upstarts who falsely claim they are modern-day prophets who assert they have a revelation that either supersedes or adds to what *the Word* has spoken. There is no new revelation. Jesus Christ is the final word. The Word has accomplished all that needs to be said and done for humanity's salvation.

But the Word's work is not finished. The task of spreading the good news about what the Word has accomplished on behalf of humanity is what now preoccupies the Word. And it is here through the Holy Spirit that the Word meets us personally.

John 14:16-18 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Notice two things here. First, Jesus promises the disciples the help of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. But notice a dramatic change from what has occurred in the past. Where once God resided in the tabernacle or the temple, in other words removed from the people, now the promise is that He will come and live personally in individuals. ***“But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”***

A resource, previously unavailable to humanity, now becomes a reality for those who throw themselves at the foot of the cross and worship the King. The second thing we notice here is the Word will come to them through the Spirit and exercise his prophetic word to them, ***“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”***

John 14:26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

As a result of this Advocate, we hold the apostolic witness of the words of Jesus preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures. Two powerful resources are made available to the citizens of this new kingdom. The preserved word of *the Word*, the Holy Scriptures, and the presence of *the Word* Himself through the power of the Spirit.

One final thought on the role of the One who holds the three-fold office of prophet, priest and king. The Word or prophet who inspired the prophecies recorded in the scriptures, is also the all-powerful king who bends and shapes history so that His purpose shall stand despite what we see happening in the world around us. So it should be a source of enormous encouragement for those of us who wait for Christ's triumphal return that sitting at the Father's right hand is our Savior who holds the three-fold office of prophet, priest and king. From His throne in heaven, Christ is reaching out to those who will obey Him as king, trust Him as priest and learn from His prophetic and wise teachings.

Chapter 52 – The Advocate

I want you to cast your minds back to your early courting days, that time when you couldn't wait to spend time with that significant other. You would think of them during the day, call them on the phone at night or even write letters across the ocean. But nothing could compensate for their physical "presence" when you could look dreamingly into their eyes and whisper sweet nothings in their ear. Adam and Eve before the fall were in a unique position in that they could enjoy the presence of their Creator on a daily basis. It must have been a wonderful experience for both parties as they sat and chatted in the beautiful surroundings of the Garden of Eden. But as we know, sin came along and shattered that special relationship.

Genesis 3:8 (NKJV) *And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.*

This was to be their last personal contact with their Creator as they were driven not only from the garden but also more importantly from the presence of God.

Last chapter we looked at Jesus' ascension to the Father after His resurrection where He assumed the threefold office of prophet, priest and king. But Jesus had made an extraordinary promise to His disciples before He left them. The disciples like Adam and Eve had the delightful experience of enjoying the presence of God, in Jesus, on a daily basis. But this privilege came to an abrupt end when Jesus disappeared into the clouds as He ascended back to the Father. Anticipating the reaction of the disciples as they were about to be abandoned, Jesus reassured them with the following promise

John 14:16-21 *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth.*

This word, advocate, is best understood to mean, "one who gives support." The type of support given by this Advocate is qualified by the word, "another." "Another" points back to the same type of support that Jesus gave His disciples while He was physically present with them. Although He was going away, this replacement, this "***Spirit of Truth***", will carry on the ministry begun by Jesus.

Now comes a remarkable statement.

V.17 ... *The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*

This "***Spirit of Truth***", another like Jesus, yet invisible, is not only going to walk beside them as Jesus did, but will come and live "in" them. Up to this point, God had dwelt personally with Israel in the corporate sense through the tabernacle and later the temple. But now the promise of God's presence is expanded to include individuals. Then comes another remarkable statement.

V.18 *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*

Jesus repeats His promise not to leave them abandoned, but then in a very Trinitarian statement, says that, He will also be with them through the Spirit.

V.19 *Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.*

This is a reference to the miraculous transformation that occurs to those who welcome Christ into their lives. The Spirit as we shall see, opens up a whole new dimension not available to those in the world. It is the spiritual insight and awareness brought about by the same Spirit who indwelt Jesus while He walked this earth. It also makes us aware of a presence (there's that word again) that we are connected in an intimate way with the God of the cosmos. When the temple veil was torn apart it not only gave us access to God's presence once again, but restored God's access to us. We will talk more about "faith" later. But this sense of presence, only available to believers, gives us that wonderful sense of "assurance" our faith is not in vain.

The Trinitarian circle of love now made available to humanity

But not only does this sense of presence strengthen our faith, but it is also our “assurance” that we are “loved.”

V.20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

This speaks of a much more intimate relationship with God than either Adam or Eve had with God or the disciples had with Jesus.

V.23 Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Here is the ultimate promise of “presence,” God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit living with us and in us. God had interacted with humanity in the past as we have seen, Adam and Eve, the children of Israel, and Jesus with the disciples. But Jesus’ promise here to His disciples’ raises the relationship with mankind to a whole new level. In fact it heralds a whole new beginning to the relationship between God and humanity. This dramatic change is brought about through the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

This short passage in John 14 gives us a rare insight into the relationship that is the Trinity. We have introduced the Greek word *perichoresis* to describe the relationship that exists in the Trinity earlier that is usually translated as “mutual indwelling.” It is the term used to highlight the dynamic, spiritual and intensely personal relationships within the Godhead itself.

Perichoresis refers to that eternal love between the Father (lover) and the Son (beloved) and the Holy Spirit (Spirit of love that binds both the lover and the beloved). But what we see here now in v.20 is this dynamic, spiritual and intensely personal relationship which was in the past limited to the Godhead, is now extended to include the disciples of Jesus. “...***that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.***” The promise Jesus is making to His disciples is that through the Spirit they would be gathered up, embraced and included in the life and love of the Godhead. In other words, they would be included in this circle of “mutual indwelling.”

The “Embracer”

Earlier we used the title “Advocate” to describe the Holy Spirit. But this term for me is a little too technical in describing the role and work of the Holy Spirit. It conjures up cold legalistic images such as courtrooms and attorneys. Other warmer titles have been used such as Counselor, Helper, and Comforter. And each of these titles has its place, but in light of what we have just seen I would like to add an additional term that for me sums up the work of the Holy Spirit and that is “Embracer.” “Embracer” – the One who is sent by the Father and the Son to embrace humanity with the love of God. This whole movement of embracing humanity begins with the coming of Jesus and it is in Him that we see the intimate connection between the Holy Spirit and the incarnate Jesus. First of all Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. At His baptism, the Spirit of God descended on Him like a dove. It was the power of the Holy Spirit that allowed Jesus to defeat the devil and perform His miraculous ministry (Acts 10:38). Every aspect of Jesus’ life was inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The best way to know what the Spirit is like is to look at the inspired life of Jesus. With this in mind, look how Jesus describes the role assigned to Him by the Holy Spirit.

Luke 4:18-19 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me, to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

In other words, Jesus through the power of the Spirit is instructed to go out and embrace the poor, the blind, and the downtrodden, with the love of God. And this is precisely what Jesus did. He went looking for the lost sheep, the prodigals, and the sinners that He was accused of spending too much time with (Luke 15). And now that He is about to leave for heaven, what does He instruct His

disciples to do? Go forth in the power of the Spirit and embrace more disciples with the love of God (Matthew 28:19-20). The Father's mission does not change whether it is through Jesus, the Holy Spirit or His disciples. It's to go forth and embrace humanity with the love of God.

But this whole process is ramped up with the coming of the Holy Spirit for two important reasons. First, it is not only Jesus who is filled with the Holy Spirit, but mere men, His disciples. With more involved, the impact obviously will be greater.

John 14:12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Second, because Jesus will be working hand in hand with the Spirit.

John 14:18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

The Word and the Spirit combine with the disciples to embrace humanity with the love of God.

Jesus foretold His part in this process of embracing humanity before His death.

John 12:32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

So the stage is set for the "gathering in" or harvest of the "firstfruits."

Chapter 53 – Breathing the Holy Spirit

Last chapter we talked about Jesus giving His disciples the promise of the Holy Spirit. God made the promise humanity could enjoy His personal presence individually through the Holy Spirit. This was a crucial step in God's mission of making man in His image. The Israelites enjoyed God's presence in a corporate sense as He dwelt with them in the tabernacle, and later the temple. But God had much more in mind than a mere corporate presence. He wanted a personal relationship with each of His people.

Leviticus 26:12 I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.

Once again we see God taking the initiative. He has been faithful to His people by being their God and making salvation possible for them through the saving work of Jesus Christ. Now the emphasis switches to preparing for Himself a holy people. But again, this is the work of our faithful God. The One who justifies us also sanctifies us.

The prophets of old, foretold this time when God's Spirit would be poured out on all flesh.

Joel 2:28-29 "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

Notice the use of individual terms in this verse, sons and daughters, old men, young men, both men and women. What was new about this promise was making the Holy Spirit available to individuals. Israelites would have associated God working with prophets and priests, but never with the common man. The coming of the Spirit would make it possible for individuals to have an intimate personal relationship with their God.

The Holy Spirit and new beginnings

In an earlier session we spoke about the Holy Spirit being associated with new beginnings.

Genesis 2:7 Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

As mentioned before, here at the beginning of the physical creation, the spirit of God moved on the face of the water (Genesis 1:2). Just as God breathed life into man at the original creation, this same action is now duplicated at the beginning of the spiritual creation when Jesus breathes on his disciples.

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

We see the work of God the Holy Spirit active at the milestones in God's plan of salvation, at the beginning of the physical creation, at the creation of man, at Jesus' birth and baptism, and now at this pivotal point in the birth of the New Testament church. The coming of the Holy Spirit is further proof that this is the beginning of the age of the New Creation. We saw on the eve of His crucifixion Jesus introducing the New Covenant. With His resurrection, we saw the first human pass from mortality to immortality. Now we see God through the Spirit coming to take up residence in individual humans. We should not underestimate what is happening as far as humanity's salvation is concerned with God making the Holy Spirit available to mankind. This is the time of the new age, the age of the New Creation, the kingdom of God. Because of the barrier of sin, God could not pour out His Spirit on all flesh until Jesus had completed His salvation work on behalf of mankind. However what we see happening with the giving of the Spirit is recognition by God that He can now accept humanity because of Jesus' atoning work on our behalf.

Not only do we have access to God through the torn temple veil, but now God has access to us through that same torn veil. And God approaches us in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told the disciples to wait for the coming of the Spirit at Jerusalem (Acts 1:4-8). But just after His

resurrection and prior to Pentecost, Jesus performed another very important ceremony with His disciples.

John 20:19-22 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

A couple of significant events are happening here. As just mentioned just as God breathed life into His physical creation (Genesis 2:7), now we see Jesus breathing life into God's new spiritual creation. Second, Jesus is passing on His personal commission given to Him by the Father to His disciples. ***"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*** The Father "sent" his only begotten Son (John 3:16) not only as the Word of God, but the one who actively fulfills that Word by becoming the Lamb of God sacrificed on behalf of mankind. Just as Jesus was the unique apostle (envoy) sent as the representative of the Father, now Jesus appoints the disciples (up to this point students) to be his special representatives to represent Him in preparing a holy people for God.

The Holy Spirit brings spiritual understanding

Prior to this point, the disciples, on their own were not capable of understanding the full implications of what God through Jesus had accomplished on behalf of mankind. Remember how Jesus had to explain to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus the prophecies concerning the Messiah from the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27). But we get a special insight into the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' promise to the disciples at the last supper.

John 14:26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Up to this point, the disciples' understanding of spiritual things was limited simply by the fact spiritual understanding is only gained through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:10 these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

But the Spirit could not be given until this breach between God and humanity had been healed by Christ's saving work. Now in hindsight, after the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection, and the giving of the Spirit to the disciples, much of what Jesus had previously told the disciples began to make sense. The Holy Spirit opened their eyes and gave them this new spiritual insight. The Spirit was to be the conduit to bridge this gulf between fallen human reasoning and divine revelation.

But just as Jesus promised, He too through the Spirit would be there personally with them as they carried out their apostolic commission on His behalf. He was not going to leave them "orphans." And what was to be the core message the apostles under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and Jesus were to take?

John 15:26-27 "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. 27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

The Holy Spirit has been said to be self-effacing, diverting attention away from Himself and directing it instead to Jesus Christ. He does this with the intention of drawing people into a relationship with God through our Savior Jesus Christ. The core message the disciples were to take to the world was the gospel message of Jesus Christ and His saving work. What we see revealed here with Jesus breathing on the disciples is the apostolic commission given by the Father to Jesus, who passes it to the Holy Spirit, who in turn carries it out through the apostles. The one directing it all is the now glorified prophet, priest and king, Jesus Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father.

John 16:12-15 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.

This title, Spirit of truth, used of the Holy Spirit is revealing in a couple of ways. As mentioned earlier, it brought spiritual understanding to the disciples of what Jesus had accomplished on behalf of mankind through His life, death and resurrection. However, this Spirit of truth also plays a key role in correcting humanity's distorted image of God. Because of the fall, our concept of God has become distorted and we have pushed our Creator away. This occurred when Adam and Eve rejected God's instructions and decided for themselves to be their own gods and decided for themselves what was "good" and what was "evil." But you can't reject the source of "truth" and not pay a price. By cutting themselves off from the source of truth, humanity consigned themselves to a life of falsehood. The two go hand in hand. Mankind went off deciding for himself what is "truth" with the ensuing problems we see recorded in our sordid history. However, with the coming of the Spirit of truth, this deficiency in our fallen nature is healed as part of the new creation.

The coming of the Spirit of truth enlightens us to three important truths: It reveals the truth about a loving God who has gone to extreme measures to redeem us; it brings understanding of Christ's saving work on our behalf; and it leads Christ's disciples to distinguish truth from falsehood. We will cover many more benefits with the coming of the Spirit in more detail later.

V.13-15 He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

Just as Jesus gives deference to the Father, so the Spirit gives deference to Jesus Christ. But what we see here now is the Word and the Spirit of truth working together to reveal the truth of God. And who was it that said, "***I am the way and the truth and the life***"? (John 14:6). The Spirit of truth gives us the spiritual insight that allows us to understand and accept the Word (Jesus) in a personal or subjective way. This is the means by which God has chosen to reveal Himself and make Himself available now to individuals.

Jesus appoints His disciples as His chosen envoys (Apostles)

When Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit onto His disciples, He was appointing them as His special envoys under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to carry on the redeeming work of the Father. He was in effect establishing the foundation of the new order, the age of the Spirit. And like any building, its foundation had to be rock solid in order for it to endure. This building has been established on the most enduring foundation possible, Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

But notice Jesus is not the only part of the foundation. Also included are the prophets of old, plus the twelve disciples trained and now inspired by Jesus Christ Himself and the Holy Spirit. As the disciples were to be His human witnesses of His saving work, to be His instruments in establishing the church and to record for all time the inspired writings of the New Testament, it was crucial they received the spiritual support and the authority they needed.

It was the giving of the Holy Spirit that transformed the disciples from students to apostles. It is through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as He inspired their words and miraculous deeds that they gained legitimacy as Christ's appointed envoys. By breathing on His disciples, Jesus was commissioning them as His appointed envoys, i.e., His apostles, to carry on the work He had begun. Jesus was establishing the apostolic tradition on which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church was to be built.

V.21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Chapter 54 – The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Jesus, by breathing the Holy Spirit onto His disciples, was in effect commissioning them as His apostles or envoys to represent Him in taking the Gospel to the world. After His resurrection and prior to His ascension, Jesus told the disciples not to leave Jerusalem but wait for the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. Finally that day arrived.

Acts 2:1-4 *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

As explained last chapter, this was a dramatic change in God's dealing with humanity. He had dwelt with Israel in a corporate sense in the past, but now God is dealing personally with individuals as prophesied in the Old Testament (Joel 2:28-29). The reason He is able to do this is as a result of Jesus' saving work. As we have learned, it was through the "blood of Jesus" that we have been "justified" and "reconciled" to God (Romans 5:9-10).

But God's work of redemption is not completed until humanity stands glorified in His presence. Jesus, through His atoning sacrifice, has overcome sin, the devil and death on our behalf. The world is no longer under the domain of the devil, but Jesus Christ. But as yet, we do not see "**all things put under His feet**" (Hebrews 2:8). To go back to **Leviticus 26:12** *I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people*. The first part of this verse has been accomplished in that God has been faithful in delivering us from evil. Jesus Christ has paid the death penalty for our sin so God's righteous judgment against sin has been satisfied. In addition, Jesus has responded faithfully to God the Father in being a worthy and faithful son on behalf of mankind. From God's point of view, there is now no impediment on His part in preventing a full restitution of sonship. Christ has died for every human being. He has credited His righteousness to every human being, so there is no longer enmity between God and humanity, but only divine love (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 19-21; Ephesians 2:5). Through Jesus' incarnation and atonement, the gift of salvation has been graciously prepared, gift-wrapped and is now ready to be offered to a mainly ignorant humanity.

The second phase of Redemption - Preparing a Holy People

The emphasis of God's work now switches to preparing a holy people. This is where the work of the Holy Spirit comes in. The purpose of the Spirit is to reveal to blind and broken humanity knowledge of this precious gift and to bring them to the point of accepting this gift. Again, we see our faithful God taking the initiative in restoring the relationship with mankind and preparing a holy people to share in the life and love of the Godhead. This, in effect, is the second phase of redemption. The first phase occurred when we were redeemed from the guilt of sin through the "blood of Christ." Now through the "Spirit of Christ" we are redeemed to share in the life of God. Earlier we spoke of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of love that intimately binds the persons of the Godhead together. Now through the granting of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, that circle of love or mutual indwelling is expanded to include humans. Through the Spirit they would be gathered up, embraced and included in the life and love of the Godhead. This is how the promise of the new life, of being "born again" as part of the new creation is actualised in us. The tongues of fire that settled on the disciples were the external manifestation of this new reality, that mere humans were included and participating in the very life and love of the Godhead.

It is our inclusion in this gift of the Holy Spirit that is to transform us into God's holy people. Notice the transformation the Spirit will accomplish in the lives of individual humans.

Romans 8:29-30 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...

We learned earlier that Jesus is the predestined one who represents all humanity. What we see revealed in this verse is God's ultimate goal - to take condemned, diseased sinners and through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to mould and shape them into the very image of Jesus Christ.

V.29 "...that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."

Just as the Father has accepted the Son, so now we see additional brothers and sisters given the same reception as Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to explain the process of how this is to be accomplished.

V.30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Through this whole process, we see God taking the initiative, providing the means whereby we can obtain salvation, and He will not rest until redemption is completed with our glorification as His adopted children.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to awaken humanity to the new reality of who they are in Jesus Christ. What we see in Jesus for the first time is what a true "human being" is supposed to look like. This is what we were created to be, God's holy people in the image of Jesus Christ. There is now a new identity available to mankind to the diseased and false image humans erect of themselves. The Holy Spirit is to awaken us to our new identity in Christ, of who we were meant to be. Unlike the spirit of selfishness that has permeated humanity's history, the Spirit draws us out of our self-centred existence and draws us into the loving, outgoing relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is why the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of "fellowship."

2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The Spirit is to lead us to the point where we, like the prodigal son, finally come to ourselves, accept the fact we have gone astray, and accept the gift of salvation graciously offered to us.

A personal encounter with the living Christ

But again, Jesus has already prepared the way for the Spirit to perform this work. With His incarnation and atoning work, Jesus has invaded, overcome and thrown out the evil strongman leaving the house clean and ready for the Holy Spirit to occupy (Luke 11:24-26). The ground has been prepared for the Holy Spirit to now draw humanity into the divine relationship. What we see is Jesus as the good shepherd now working through the Holy Spirit going out to gather His lost sheep (Luke 15). For it is only "through Christ" and "in Christ" that salvation is completed. Salvation for all humanity has been completed in the person of Christ, but it is not automatic until the One, who is, in Himself *the gift*, is accepted individually. We cannot separate the work and person of Christ; they are one and the same.

In order for this to happen, individuals need to be made aware of the gift so they have the opportunity to respond. It is inconceivable after God has gone to such extraordinary lengths to make this gift available that this opportunity to accept the gift is not offered to every individual human. To not do so would be to invalidate all that Jesus Christ has achieved on humanity's behalf to this point and the Father would not allow this to happen. If Jesus, in love, has personally died for each individual lost sheep, it is only fair and natural all will be given the opportunity to respond to that love. After all, Jesus is the one who told the parable of the good shepherd leaving the ninety-nine and going after the lost sheep. Jesus will make sure of that as He has bought each of them with a terrible price (1 Corinthians 6:20), and will pursue them to the gates of hell if necessary (Romans 8:38-39). God loves all His children and wants all to come to the point of accepting the gift of participating in the life He has prepared for them. How He does this is one of those mysteries we wrestle with, but for now we will leave this question hanging.

Suffice here to say, as salvation is only possible “through Christ” and “in Christ” each individual will be given the opportunity of a personal encounter with the living Jesus Christ. And contrary to popular belief, there is no need to fear this encounter as they are meeting with the Lord of grace who delivers the good news that God has already accepted them based on His saving work. All they need to do is accept the gift offered to them. “Saving faith” is that simple. It is the simple act of accepting the saving work Jesus has already performed on their behalf. There is no need for anyone to work themselves up into a lather trying to produce their own faith, or to demonstrate how good they are. No. All that is needed is to simply trust and accept the faith already displayed on our behalf by Jesus Christ as demonstrated by the repentant thief crucified with Jesus on the cross (Luke 23:29-43). Just as Jesus has already been baptised for us, lived for us, died for us, rose from the dead for us, ascended to the Father’s right hand for us, so it is by His faith that we live. ***Galatians 2:20 (KJV) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.***

So when humanity is confronted with this wonderful truth, there is a high probability of success. Even the zealot Pharisee Saul who went around ***“breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples,”*** who later became the apostle Paul, capitulated when He encountered His risen Savior on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-7). No one is ever consigned to hell without their own Damascus Road personal encounter with Jesus Christ. It may not be as dramatic as Saul’s depending on how stubborn we are, but nevertheless it will happen.

All implicated in Jesus’ saving work

But the very fact that Christ has died for all humanity also implicates all in God’s saving work. There is no escaping the fact that God through Christ has extended His love to all. For anyone to now rebuff that love, inconceivable as it may seem, leaves them under the judgment from which, as far as God is concerned, they have already been released. It is only those who reject the gift offered to them personally by Jesus Christ that needs to fear the Judgment. And if they do refuse, it is a judgment they have brought on themselves, in that they have rejected the decision God has already made for them.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we see the emphasis being shifted to incorporating humanity into the new reality created by the atoning work of Jesus Christ. God is creating a holy people for Himself and the primary function of the Holy Spirit is to go and find the lost sheep and to persuade them to accept the precious gift Jesus is offering them.

Chapter 55 – The Holy Spirit – “Game Changer”

With the granting of the Holy Spirit, the emphasis of God’s saving work shifts to preparing a holy people within whom He can come and dwell. Individual humans through the Spirit would be gathered up, embraced and included in the life and love of the Godhead. God is creating a holy people for Himself and the primary function of the Holy Spirit is to go and find the lost sheep and to persuade them to accept the precious gift Jesus is offering them.

One has only to look at the astounding change of behaviour that came over the disciples after the granting of the Holy Spirit to know what a “game changing” event this was for humanity. These were the same men who had slunk off into the darkness at Jesus’ arrest, denied they knew Him, and watched from a distance while He died. Now they fearlessly stood up in front of those who had condemned and crucified Jesus just a few weeks earlier and denounced their actions (Acts 2). This dramatic transformation came about as a result of them having within them a resource previously unavailable to mankind. It was the result of the power of God the Holy Spirit coming to take up residence in individual humans (John 14:23).

With this chapter we want to explore how the coming of God, the Holy Spirit, to humans is going to dramatically transform their lives. Up to the point of Jesus’ crucifixion, mankind has been under evil influences beyond his control, and from which he has been powerless to extricate himself. However, as we have seen, Jesus, through His life, death and resurrection has overcome and defeated the powers that held humanity hostage; sin, man’s fallen human nature, the devil and death. The house has been swept clean of the evil strong man, and was now about to be occupied by God Himself. In contrast to his previous existence, mankind is about to experience a totally different life under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit. In place of sin, he will experience righteousness; in place of sinful human nature, he will develop God’s nature (the fruits of the Holy Spirit); instead of the devil’s evil presence, a holy loving God; and instead of death, eternal life.

So let’s take a closer look at the work of the Holy Spirit as He sets about preparing a holy people for God. We have already spoken about the Holy Spirit being the “embracer,” the one who goes forth to embrace the lost sheep and draw them into fellowship with the Godhead. In order for this process to have any chance of success, a miracle has to take place in the heart of the individual. But before this miracle can occur at the heart level, there are three other important steps leading up to this process.

First, and this is something that everyone experiences, one has to go through a softening up process. In one of our first sessions, we spoke about the carefully created moral environment God has designed for this time of the flesh. While man is in agreement with the natural and spiritual laws God has established, there is a better chance of him avoiding some of the major difficulties of this present life. However, due to man’s decision to reject God’s involvement in the process, and the subsequent weakness of the flesh, we know the sad outcome of what life is like without God.

However, this is all part of the process. It is the softening up process in preparation for the personal encounter all humanity will eventually have with Jesus Christ. This process is dramatically illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24). In reality, this parable is a microcosm of the larger story of the relationship between God and mankind. It is the story of a son who rejects the love and security of his father and goes off in pursuit of his own lifestyle. Very similar to what happened in the Garden of Eden. However, as the wayward son in the story and mankind in general has discovered, life rarely has the happy ending they expected. In fact, in many cases the happy dream has turned into a nightmare. And the key statement we are concerned with in the story is, **“When he came to his senses”** (Luke 15:17).

The point being, this carefully created environment in which we live is designed by God to bring about this exact reaction, to help bring mankind to its senses. We see this same process repeated over and over again with ancient Israel. They only responded to God in the midst of oppression by occupying forces. Paul, too, speaks of this humanity-destroying process in Romans 1.

Romans 1:28-29 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity.

When the love and security of a loving God is rejected, humanity sets himself on a course that eventually ends in depravity and suffering. We descend into a hell of our own making. But we have to recognise this is part of the softening up process God is allowing all humanity to experience in preparation for that personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

The second thing that needs to happen has already been accomplished. That is the reconciling work of Jesus Christ that has restored “peace” between the two parties. The gateway through the veil has been opened for humanity to approach God, and for God to approach humanity through the Holy Spirit. Because of Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice, God can now extend grace to sinful mankind, and because of Christ’s obedient response to the Father on our behalf, reconciliation has been achieved. Prior to this point, it was impossible for the unreconciled and alienated mind of humanity to even understand the things of God, let alone respond to saving grace. But now that Christ has provided reconciliation, the way has been opened for God to pour out His Spirit on mankind and for man to draw near to God.

The third thing that needs to happen is a personal decision made by the Father Himself.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Just for emphasis, Jesus repeats this statement later in v.65 of the same chapter. One of the great mysteries of the salvation process is this question of “election” or “calling” as it is called, this opportunity to experience and respond to God’s overtures of love. Traditional Christianity has maintained one has to respond in this life in order for one to be included in the “elect” and to be saved. If this statement were true, then this would automatically exclude all those who lived prior to Christ, including ancient Israel, and those who have never heard of Christ’s name. In other words, the vast majority of those who have ever lived.

Fortunately, in recent times, this rather narrow view is coming under more scrutiny and for very good reasons. The reason for this scrutiny revolves around the question of the nature of God. Would a God who claims to be love, create billions of children only to consign the majority of them to destruction? Who of us as human parents would chose to consign one of our two children to heaven, and the other to hell? The second question that needs to be asked is, “If we truly believe Jesus has already paid the death penalty for all mankind’s sins, why are they now required to pay the death penalty themselves a second time?” A more loving response is to believe God the Father has made just provision for all men. He loves all His children and has gone to great lengths to secure their salvation and none will be forgotten.

The timing of one’s “Calling” is in the hands of the Father

Back to this verse in John 6:44. Our calling then is one of the mysteries that is under the control of the Father. Earlier experience would indicate preparing a holy people for Himself is similar to what we have previously seen in both the Old and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God started with one man, Abraham, then the two patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, then the twelve tribes, and finally the nation of Israel. In the New Testament we see a similar process with Jesus calling the twelve disciples and the process of expanding and developing His church on the day of Pentecost. In other words, it is a process that is worked out over time. The major difference that

concerns us here in the New Testament is this new nation or church is made up of people from all races and tribes in contrast to the one nation of Israel in the Old Testament.

However, the evidence is, we don't see everyone included in this process during this present age. But as salvation is only possible "through" and "in" Christ through a personal encounter with Him, what are we to do with this conundrum? The short answer is, it remains a mystery, but it is a mystery in the hands of a loving Father who is "**not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**" (2 Peter 3:9).

However, there are a couple of things we can know, besides having a loving heavenly Father who wants to share His eternal existence with each of us. If we go to 1 Corinthians 15, we see Paul addressing the subject of the resurrection of the dead and we see it speaks about a process over a period of time.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. We have spoken about this representative principle before and the implication "**all will be made alive.**" Now notice the next verse concerning timing.

V.23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

This applies to those who answer the Father's call and respond to that call in this life. But this is where it gets frustrating for us, as scripture goes silent as to what happens next. What we do know is all will be resurrected, as we just read, "**all will be made alive,**" and in Acts 24:15 (NKJV), "**there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.**"

The question is, who are the unjust and why are they raised? Is it just to send them off to their destruction again, or could it be, this is their opportunity for redemption seeing the vast majority of them have never even heard the name of Christ let alone had a personal encounter? Even the ignorant have to be included in the description "unjust." The point is, scripture is silent on what exactly God has in store for the unjust at the resurrection, and where scripture is silent we are better off not trying to second guess what God has planned.

Is Grace limited to just this present age?

An important second question also revolves around God's loving nature. We have spoken a lot about the grace God is able to extend to humanity because of Jesus Christ's saving work. But under the scenario where salvation is only available in this present age, this implies God's grace is restricted by a time frame and only to a select group. It's only available for those who live in this 2000 plus year period, then rescinded. More to the point, it's a timeframe imposed on God by fallible human beings. Of course, this is ridiculous. We now live in the time of the new creation whose defining characteristic is "grace" which has been obtained by the cosmos changing sacrifice of the Son of God. There is no going back to the old creation characterised by law. It also implies God is not a God of second chances. Yet we see God, in his dealings with a stubborn and recalcitrant Israel, His mercy being extended time and time again. If we are to anticipate or make an assessment on God's likely behaviour, we are always on safer ground to judge Him on past behaviour than try to predict what He will do in the future. In matters of dispute such as these it is always best for us humans to remain humble, and even silent and leave the salvation of mankind in the hands of our loving Father.

Paul continues the discussion.

V.24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

The best way to destroy all dominion, authority and power is for the unjust of any age to surrender their lives into the loving arms of their Savior. We in faith need to trust the Father who knows the best time and place to call someone to optimise success, that is, when this personal encounter between Jesus Christ and the individual happens. I recently read a book on the history of western civilization. At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in England, (1800-1830), children as young as six, worked 12-16 hour days, six days a week, in the cotton mills and coal mines in order for their families to survive. If they arrived late for work they got the strap. If they nodded off at work they got the strap. Do you know what their life expectancy was? 17. Were these children born just to experience eleven years of drudgery and then cease to exist forever? Personally, I don't think so.

Let me finish with this scripture, as there may be a few surprises for some at judgment time.

Luke 13:29-30 People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. 30 Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

What our loving God has planned for the judgment remains a mystery, but based on past experience, it just may be a happy and joyful time for the vast majority of humanity. We will discuss this further when we get to the subject of the judgment.

Chapter 56 – The Holy Spirit – “Builder”

We have been looking at the work of the Holy Spirit as He sets about preparing a holy people for God. In order for this process to have any chance of success, a miracle has to take place in the heart of the individual. Last chapter we spoke about the Holy Spirit being the “embracer,” the one who goes forth to embrace the lost sheep and draw them into fellowship with the Godhead. In this chapter we are going to look at another title that describes the work of the Holy Spirit and that is, the Holy Spirit as “builder.”

There is an ancient parallel to the day of Pentecost when the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit and that is the story of the Tower of Babel. After the flood, God gave specific instructions to Noah and his sons on what He expected them to do.

Genesis 9:1 Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.”

The first part of this instruction is jokingly referred to as being the only command God has given to mankind he has not had any problem obeying. But it is this second part of the instructions that is our concern here where God tells them to “***fill the earth.***” We pick up the story in Genesis 11.

Genesis 11:4-9 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

What we see here is the first recorded event where the entire community organises themselves in defiance of God’s clear instructions to “***fill the earth.***” It was man’s attempt to re-establish contact with God on their terms rather than on God’s terms. By claiming to make a name for themselves they were in direct opposition to God’s plan of taking on His name and becoming His holy people. There is also a similarity here to the lie the serpent told Adam and Eve, “***You will be like God***” (***Genesis 3:5***) in that this tower was man’s attempt to establish a sacred place with counterfeit priests claiming to be representatives of the true God. The tower would give the impression to the population of the city that the gods could descend and ascend between heaven and earth and dwell in their temple.

As we discussed last time, part of the judgment that God permits rebellious humans to experience is to allow them to become their own gods, choosing for themselves “right” and “wrong” with the ensuing consequences. In order to quell this rebellion, God confused their language so they would scatter and populate the earth as He had instructed.

Genesis 11: 5-9 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 6 The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” 8 So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Building a community of holy people

There are a number of parallels we can draw from this story with what occurred on the day of Pentecost. Both stories centre on a building. One, the Tower of Babel is built to glorify man, while the second, the church is built to glorify God. Both projects centre on constructing a sacred place for God or gods to dwell. In both accounts God uses language to either *divide* a community, the one in rebellion, or in the case of preparing a holy people, to *build* a community.

Acts 2:4-6 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation

under heaven.6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.

Right from the beginning of the church age, the emphasis is on building a community, not one in opposition to God, but one in cooperation with God. Paul describes this community God is building with His Spirit in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.

What we see here are people who in the past were scattered, and at enmity with one another, (Jews and Gentiles) being brought together into one community (Galatians 3:28). But in contrast to the attitude of defiance displayed at Babel, we see a totally different perspective displayed by those involved with the construction of this building.

V.20 ...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Unlike the tyrant (supposedly Nimrod) who organised the people in rebellion against God at Babel, here we see the one directing the building of this new edifice through the Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ Himself. Those involved with the construction of this building will cooperate with the Spirit and take on Christ's name (Christians) as He conforms them into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).

And amazingly, unlike the bricks and mortar used on most construction sites including the Tower of Babel, this building is being constructed with those individuals who willingly commit their lives to Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter refers to these individuals as "living stones."

1 Peter 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Instead of defiance and rebellion, we see "*spiritual sacrifices*" of adoration and obedience. And unlike the Tower of Babel that was built to glorify man, this building is being constructed to glorify God. Notice what this building is called and what its purpose is to be.

Ephesians 2:21-22 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

This building is being constructed "living stone" by "living stone" to be God's dwelling place. Under the New Covenant, God is not interested in living in tabernacles of canvas or temples made of stone. No, His purpose from the beginning is to dwell with, and incredibly, through the Holy Spirit, within us, as Paul goes on to say.

V.22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Notice the last part of this verse. God's purpose remains the same, to build a loving community between God and His people.

God's presence dwelling "in" His people

It is very important to understand exactly what is happening here, as this is one of the most important distinctions between the Old and the New Covenants. God dwelt with Israel in a corporate sense first through the tabernacle and later through the temple. But never was this privilege extended to individuals. The prophecies of both Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:26-27) spoke about a time in the future when God's presence would once again dwell with His people. God withdrew His presence from Israel after their persistent disobedience. Solomon's temple was destroyed and the survivors were marched off into captivity in Babylon.

Jeremiah 31:33 "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

The Mosaic Law was an external law written on tables of stone (2 Corinthians 3:7). As such, there was a vast gulf between what the law required, holiness, and the people's ability to attain the

holiness it required. This deficiency had to be addressed and God's answer under the New Covenant is to actually come and dwell with them internally.

This fact creates a whole new way of identifying God's people. In the past under the Mosaic Covenant the people of God were identified by their relationship to the Torah or the law. The law spelled out in minute detail every aspect of their lives from their worship to their eating habits, etc. Even today, it's easy to identify a Jew by the day on which they worship, what they eat, and what they wear, etc. But the purpose of the law was not just so outsiders could identify Israelites by external means. The primary purpose of the law was to make them holy as God is holy (Leviticus 19:2). First and foremost, the intent of the law and the commands of God both Old and New Covenant, are a reflection of God's holy nature of love. They were given to Israel in a very elementary form in order for them to strive to become a holy people reflecting God's holy nature (Leviticus 19:2).

Emphasis is on internal change

But becoming holy is more about internal change than external change. As Jesus' many arguments with the Pharisees exposed, the Jews had become experts obeying the externals, but had neglected the real change that needs to happen on the inside.

Matthew 23:23 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

The Jews had become masters of the externals, but in order to become God's holy people, change was required on the inside and this was the failing of the Mosaic Covenant.

Hebrews 8:7-8 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. 8 But God found fault with the people and said: "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah."

The problem was not with the law. The problem was with the people's inability to live up to its righteous requirements even in its most elementary form expressed in the Mosaic Covenant. This explains the disciple's astonishment when Jesus comes along and claims, "... ***unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven***" (Matthew 5:20). The good news is our righteousness does indeed exceed that of the Pharisees because it is Christ's righteousness that is attributed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is the righteousness associated with our salvation, which justifies us in God's sight.

But there is a second righteousness that the Holy Spirit is to develop in God's people, righteousness that is a reflection of God's holy nature of love. This is the righteousness Jesus expressed through His teaching and exemplified in the life He lived. His life and teachings show us what true holiness looks like. But in response to the failing of the Mosaic Covenant to bring about this transformation, God's response with the New Covenant is for God to come and literally live in us (Jeremiah 31:33). It is the presence of the Holy Spirit living in us that brings about a transformation on the inside. And rather than being recognised by externals like circumcision, days and diet (Romans 14:17), our godly behaviour inspired by the Holy Spirit living in us is what now identifies God's holy people.

2 Corinthians 3:2-3 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. 3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

God's people are now identified by the degree by which they allow the Holy Spirit to reflect God's divine nature in them. These individual saints or living stones come together and rise into a holy community called the church.

Prior to Jesus' resurrection, the Jews on Pentecost would celebrate the giving of the law to Israel, laws that were written on tables of stone. After the New Testament Pentecost, Christians, both Jews and Gentiles celebrate God writing his holy nature on the hearts of believers through His Holy Spirit. The New Covenant under the guidance of Jesus Christ, through the Spirit "builder" is the framework on which this holy temple is being built. The necessary factors for the preparation of a holy people are now in place. Now we need to look at other roles of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 57 – The Holy Spirit – Heart Surgeon

We have been looking at the work of the Holy Spirit as He sets about preparing a holy people for God. We have spoken about the Holy Spirit being the “embracer,” the one who goes forth to embrace the lost sheep and draw them into fellowship with the Godhead. Then we looked at the work of the Holy Spirit as “builder.” He is constructing a holy community using “living stones” to be God’s dwelling place amongst His holy people.

Now we need to look at the role of the Holy Spirit as “heart surgeon.” As we have emphasised throughout this series, God’s purpose from the beginning is to make man in His image. That raises the question, what is this man in God’s image supposed to be like? Well we get an indication of this from what God expected of ancient Israel.

Leviticus 19:2 “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.’”

His expectation in now dealing with the church remains the same.

1 Peter 1:15-16 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

And if that wasn’t enough, Jesus’ instruction in the Sermon on the Mount is, ***“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48).***

Now with all this talk of holiness and perfection, one could be forgiven for feeling a little inadequate in meeting God’s high expectation of fallible humans. But as we have seen with previous examples where we humans fall short of God’s expectations, He steps in and provides the means to achieve the impossible. Don’t also make the mistake of thinking that being in God’s image is just a matter of us achieving a better record when it comes to obedience to God’s law. Perfection and holiness in God’s eyes is much more than simply perfect obedience. Sadly, this limited perspective has been perpetuated over the centuries by the church itself with its overemphasis on obedience to the law. God’s expectation in us becoming holy and perfect goes back to God’s mission statement, of making us in HIS image. God does not want children who are obedient simply out of duty; He wants children who willingly choose to reflect all the divine characteristics of His loving nature.

Holiness is much more than dutiful obedience

As mentioned earlier, the teaching of both the Old and New Testaments including the law or Torah are a reflection of God’s divine nature. Jesus criticised the Pharisees for their mistake in limiting God’s requirement for “holiness” to mean dutiful obedience to the law. They went as far as tithing on their herbs, all the while neglecting ***“the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23).*** While righteousness is a very important aspect of God’s divine nature, so are ***“justice, mercy and faithfulness.”*** The truth of the matter is Israel would never have survived as long as they did if it weren’t for God’s justice, mercy and faithfulness to them over 1200 years. They even missed this connection when Jesus stood before them and told them stories like the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son and when the woman caught in adultery was brought before Him. The irony of it all was they failed to recognise this is precisely how a faithful, merciful God had related to them over the centuries.

The point is, when we speak of God’s holiness and perfection, we have to recognise we are talking about much more than righteousness. We are talking about all the many facets of God’s divine nature of love. Over the centuries, many adjectives have been used to try to help finite humans to understand an infinite God. Yet each of these will be shown to be totally inadequate when we finally meet God face to face as He is transcendent, and at this present time we simply lack the capacity to comprehend a God who is infinite.

Now just so we don't misunderstand, when we talk about being in the image of God, we have to recognise we will not be God, we will simply be in His image. We will not have those qualities of God that make Him uniquely God, such as His being eternal, omnipotent, omniscience, omnipresent, sovereign, creator, etc. However, what we will inherit as His children is God's divine nature of love. This is the miraculous benefit the Holy Spirit brings with Him when He takes up residence in God's people.

It is God living in us which now allows humans to bridge this gulf between what holiness requires and humanity's inability to live up to those demanding requirements.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

Again we see how all humanity has been implicated in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Now notice the miraculous change of nature that comes over a person once the Holy Spirit takes up residence in their lives.

V.12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

Despite the evil influences that surround a Christian in this present age, they are now given the capacity to overcome evil in all its forms.

V.13 ...while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

There is a process God's people are being taken through to purify them as His holy people. But notice the dramatic change in a person's attitude regarding good and evil, "eager to do what is good."

Humanity needs a heart transplant

This takes us back again to what motivates us *internally*. In the past, prior to our conversion, the apostle Paul tells us, we lived a life motivated by what he calls "the flesh." A caution here about this term, "the flesh." The flesh of and by itself is not the problem. After all, at creation God pronounced it "very good." The problem lies with the use to which the "flesh" is put and this goes back to motivation. In Romans 8 Paul contrasts the effects of a mind motivated by the flesh as opposed to a mind motivated by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:5-7 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

Living according to the "flesh" is the unfortunate state mankind brought on itself when they rebelled against their Creator. God honoured their selfish desire to be their own gods by allowing them to experience a life motivated by selfishness. This is why humans in their fallen state are selfish by nature. We are self-centred, self-serving, self-absorbed and egotistical. The results of this self-centred approach leads to the following problems.

Galatians 5:19-20 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

However, it is in the midst of our selfish, depraved behaviour, that God comes to our rescue. He forgives us through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and then if we are responsive to the grace He extends us, He promises to replace this heart of stone motivated by selfishness with the heart of God motivated by love. This turns our motivation from one of selfishness to one of selflessness, the same kind of selflessness that inspired Jesus to present Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the

world. And if we want a role model for what it means to be a man in God's image, we will ultimately be directed back to the self-sacrificing example of Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

It is through Jesus that we are truly introduced to God's divine nature as He is the perfect reflection of that nature (Hebrews 1:3). And in the same way Jesus allowed Himself to be directed by the Holy Spirit during His earthly life, this divine help is also available to those who willingly submit to His leading. In contrast to the acts of the flesh mentioned earlier, we are now introduced to the acts or fruits of the Spirit by the apostle Paul.

Galatians 5:22-24 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The goal of the Holy Spirit as our heart surgeon is to inspire us to allow Him to come and live in us so that we develop the divine nature of God reflected by these virtues. In the past the law or Torah was to be the vehicle to teach holiness. Now it is the Lawgiver living inside of us.

Hebrews 8:10 This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

The law in this context is meant to be a reflection of God's divine nature of love. It is only natural if God is living in us that there will be a change in our nature. When Jesus promised the disciples He would send the Holy Spirit to be in them (John 14:17), He was not limiting the indwelling to just the Holy Spirit; the whole Trinity was going to show up.

John 14:23 Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father, will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Believe me, when the Trinity is invited to take up residence in our hearts, things are going to change. And as this is happening internally rather than externally as it did in the past under the law, the holiness of God is the end result.

There is much more going on here than just achieving individual holiness. Ultimately God living in us is about developing a holy community. Last time we talked about the building made up of living stones being made into a dwelling place for God. Let me ask you this question. Will we learn more about God's nature from a list of external laws or from God actually living in us? God through successive stages is drawing closer and closer to man so that we get to know Him intimately. He first revealed Himself to Israel through the law. He then revealed Himself to humanity through Jesus. Now He reveals Himself to us through the Holy Spirit. We now have three very tangible methods of coming to understand and know God on a personal level.

- 1) We have the teachings of the Old Testament which were expanded on and magnified by the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament writers (Matthew 5:17-30).
- 2) We have the personal example of God in the flesh, Jesus, recorded for us in the New Testament.
- 3) We have the Holy Trinity taking up residence in our lives inspiring our thoughts and actions so that we begin to think and act as God does.

So not only is the Holy Spirit teaching us to conduct ourselves as God's holy people, He is also revealing the Father's divine nature of love to us so we get to know Him on a very personal level. Unfortunately, when Christianity places too much emphasis on the *external* law, it hinders the work of the Holy Spirit who is working *internally* to reveal and create in us God's divine nature of love in all its facets. Next time we will look at more aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 58 – The Holy Spirit – “Truth Bringer”

We have been looking at the various roles of the Holy Spirit. This chapter will discuss the role of the Holy Spirit as He instructs us on the subject of “truth.” The Spirit is well qualified for this role as “truth bringer” as Jesus said, **“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” (John 16:13).**

This is critical to the process of transforming the humans who have gone off seeking their own version of the “truth” to now teaching them the one and only true version of the truth.

Regardless of which culture we live in today, all are built to one degree or another on deception and falsehood. It is not just “fake” news; it is “fake” promises, “fake” attitudes, “fake” agreements, “fake” deals, etc. The Holy Spirit’s role as truth bringer is to develop the culture of the kingdom of God built on “truth.” It helps to have a teacher who is uniquely qualified to dispense truth that comes directly from the Godhead itself. And standing behind the Spirit directing events is the one who claims to be **“the way and the truth and the life.” (John 14:6).**

John 16:14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.

We are in very capable hands as the Spirit sets about the task of “conforming” God’s people to the “image of the Son” (Romans 8:29). We have Jesus, the one we are to emulate, directing events, and we have the Spirit giving us the capacity to replicate the selfless example of Jesus Christ as He demonstrated what a life “living by the Spirit” is all about.

Coming to Spiritual Understanding, or Conversion

We have already mentioned the Spirit’s role as the “embracer,” the one who goes out to embrace the lost sheep and draw them into fellowship with the Triune God. There is a mystery associated with this as the reality is, not everyone is afforded this opportunity to respond to God’s calling in this age, although as mentioned earlier, everyone has been implicated in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. As we learned in the case of suffering and evil, we have to recognise God uses aspects of this age as part of His higher purpose of making us in His image. We have to recognise, first, there must be a specific reason why not everyone is “called” at this time, and secondarily, God must have a specific purpose for those who are given this privilege in this age. More of that in a later section. For now we are concerned with the process whereby one is “called” in this age.

The key to moving one from living a life “according to the flesh” to one of living a life “according to the Spirit” is the Holy Spirit.

John 16:8 (NJKV) And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

The Spirit is going to do something that humanity in its fallen state has a difficult, if not impossible task, of doing and that is, to “fess up” to their deceptive and sinful ways. Peter echoed this role of the Spirit in his speech on the day of Pentecost – **“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;” (Acts 2:17).** We talked earlier about the “God-shaped hole” in everyone’s heart that mankind is desperately trying to fill. Unfortunately, he tries to fill it with all the wrong things (Jeremiah 2:13), power, fame, wealth, drugs, sex, etc. But we have been carefully designed and created so only one thing can fill this God-shaped hole, and that is a relationship with God Himself. However, this all changed when the veil opening the way to the Father was rent asunder by Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. This opened the way for God to pour out His healing Spirit on mankind and for man through the same Spirit to draw near to God. The Holy Spirit is sent forth to reveal the risen Christ to those the Father has determined to be part of the church age (John 6:44).

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the

Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is the word, “firstfruits” again, which implies additional fruits sometime in the future. And notice again who is the one doing the choosing? God the Father (John 6:44). However, what we are concerned with here is the role the Spirit plays in the conversion process. Salvation is made possible through these three steps outlined in this verse: 1) ***the sanctifying works of the Spirit***; 2) ***through belief in the truth***; and 3) ***through our gospel***. We will look at these in reverse order as that is the process the Spirit leads us through

Through our Gospel

Our new life in the Spirit begins with the hearing of the gospel.

Romans 10:14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

The process begins with someone sharing the gospel message with them. We have to recognise there are two powers at work here. First of all, the gospel of Jesus Christ has a power all its own as it is the very word of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, (the hearing) you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

We shouldn't feel the need to dress up the gospel as sometimes happens, especially in this age of entertainment, as being the very word of God, it has a power all its own. It is this power that removes the veil whom ***“the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:4).*** The healing power of the gospel opens the minds of unbelievers and gives them the spiritual insight they need to understand the spiritual gift of grace being offered to them.

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

The second power at work is the Holy Spirit “convicting” us ***“of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”(John 16:8)***

1 Thessalonians 1:4-6 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.

Now in addition to God choosing us, and hearing the powerful words of the gospel, the Holy Spirit moves to convict us of our need for a Savior. These two powers, the gospel and the Spirit working together bring us to the second point, ***“belief in the truth.”***

Belief in the truth

This is a believer's response to hearing the “truth.” The Spirit does two things. First, it lifts the obscuring veil of ignorance that hides the truth, and illuminates the mind to the good news of the saving grace of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:14-16). It strips away the false image we have of God and reveals Him as the God of love He truly is (John 3:16-17). The second thing the Spirit does with the lifting of this veil is a little more personal and disturbing. For the first time we see ourselves for who we truly are, exposing us as selfish, sinful creatures who have rebelled against their Creator and Father and gone off to live a life dictated by the desires of ***“the flesh.”*** We see this miracle of conviction taking place on the day of Pentecost when Peter stood up and addressed the crowd in Jerusalem.

Acts 2:37-38 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit initiates both of these steps. First, revealing a loving God to us, and second, exposing our true sinful nature. Both are extremely important if we are to have a healthy perspective of our calling and our future relationship with our God. A failure to recognise God's true nature will lead to a distorted view of Him similar to what Jesus experienced with the Pharisees and the Sadducees who viewed Him through the legalistic prism of the law, while a failure to recognise our true sinful nature leads to "cheap grace" and the resulting licentiousness Paul experienced with the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4:14-21). Living by the Spirit means allowing the Spirit to reveal the Father's true nature to us, and to allow Him to disciple us so that we do become God's holy people. It is at this point we move to the third aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in the conversion process.

The sanctifying work of the Spirit

The crowd at Jerusalem had heard (1) Peter preach the gospel, (2) the Holy Spirit convicted them and following Peter's instruction to, "***Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,***" the Holy Spirit took up permanent residence in their lives and began His sanctifying work. This is not to say the Spirit has not been at work in a person's life prior to His taking up permanent residence in a new believer's life. The "embracer" has been active through the whole process, slowly awakening spiritual understanding in the person's life.

Before we move into this third aspect of the sanctifying work of the Spirit, we should say a few words about the various ways the Holy Spirit moves to bring someone to conversion. One of the more interesting questions you can ask a believer is how they came to Christ? It truly is amazing to hear of all the various ways one is brought to salvation. It seems each of us, like Saul (Paul), the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius and the Gentiles who came to Peter after his dream of the sheet full of unclean animals, have our own personal story as to how we were brought to conversion (Act 9:1-19; Acts 8:26-38; Acts 10).

Sometimes as in these examples, it was through dramatic means such as the case with Paul when he was struck down on the road to Damascus, and sometimes it was the quiet voice of Philip as he explained salvation to the eunuch from the book of Isaiah. The circumstances surrounding conversion has nothing to do with its authenticity. Conversion is all about coming to that point of expressing faith in Jesus Christ and accepting the gift of salvation offered to us. I mention this as in some circles today the external circumstances surrounding one's conversion have overshadowed the miracle of conversion that has taken place internally in a person's life. While external circumstances surrounding conversion may have played a more important role in the establishment of the early church in order to attract believers, it never was and never will be a requirement for genuine conversion. Following generations of believers would mostly come from within the church community as they adopted the faith of their parents. To imply someone (especially second generation Christians) have not received the Spirit because their conversion was not accompanied by some sort of dramatic experience is to miss the point of conversion. Whether it is by dramatic means or by a quiet voice, the point is, if we follow Peter's instructions to the crowd on the day of Pentecost, all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in full measure. It is not our place to second-guess how the Spirit chooses to move in a person's life.

Next time we will continue with this third aspect of the conversion process, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 59 – The Holy Spirit – “Life Bringer”

With this chapter we continue to discuss the role of the Holy Spirit as He instructs us on what it means to become God’s “holy people” as we live our new life “according to the Spirit.”

Last chapter we looked at the role the Spirit plays in the conversion process based on the account in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Salvation is made possible through these three steps outlined in this verse: 1) the sanctifying works of the Spirit; 2) through belief in the truth; and 3) through our gospel. We looked at the first two steps of these three steps in reverse order as that is the process the Spirit leads us through. We now move to the third aspect of the Holy Spirit in the conversion process.

The sanctifying work of the Spirit.

The crowd at Jerusalem had heard, (1) Peter preach the gospel, (2) the Holy Spirit convicted them and following Peter’s instruction to, ***“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,”*** the Holy Spirit took up permanent residence in their lives and began His sanctifying work. There are two aspects to the sanctifying work of the Spirit. We will look at the first aspect in this chapter and the second, next chapter.

The first aspect has to do with our calling, that special privilege of being called in this age and being set apart for God’s holy purposes. In the same way items in the tabernacle or temple of old were sanctified or set apart for God’s holy purpose, so now as part of the New Covenant, the living stones that will make up this new temple in which God will dwell are set apart for His holy purpose. The ceremony of the “laying on of hands” at baptism is to signify this special status of being set apart as one of God’s holy people (Acts 8:14-18). Unfortunately, the full spiritual impact of what occurs at this point of our coming to faith in Jesus Christ seems to be less appreciated here on earth than it does in heaven.

Jesus in Luke 15 devotes a whole chapter to the heavenly ramifications of when a sinner comes to repentance. He begins with the parable of the lost sheep, which ends with this statement.

Luke 15:6-7 *Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

Then he tells the story of the lost coin and ends with this statement.

Luke 15:9-10 *And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

It’s party time in heaven when a sinner repents. The reason they are celebrating is because of the spiritual ramifications of the event. Jesus goes on in Luke 15 to spell out the reason for the heavenly celebrations with the parable of the prodigal son. Again we see the process the son has been led through in order to bring him home to His loving Father. At this point in his journey he is a little more circumspect about life after having experienced a life separated from His Father and living a life according to the “flesh.” The key statement being, ***“When he came to his senses” (Luke 15:17)***. But helping to bring him to this point was the “embracer” sent out on behalf of the “good shepherd” to bring home the lost sheep.

But like many today, with their harsh assessment of what God is like, he totally misjudged what His Father's reaction would be to his homecoming. Although humanly speaking, he would be considered lucky to be treated as a lowly servant after his blatant contempt for His Father; instead we see the true nature of the Father revealed in the way He responds to the son's return.

Luke 15:20-21 *So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

Not exactly a response one would expect from a human father after being treated the way he was. This is the divine response about which Jesus spoke when He said, **"for God so loved the world" (John 3:16)**. As mentioned earlier, this parable of the prodigal son is really the larger story of a rebellious mankind who thumbed their noses at their Creator.

But notice a couple of events, both initiated by the father, which allowed Him to respond to His wayward son this way. First, Jesus as we have learned through His life, death, and resurrection has cleared the way for the parties to be reconciled. He had paid the death penalty for the son's disobedience, and He had responded faithfully to the Father on behalf of the son. Of course Jesus opened up the path of reconciliation while we, and the son, were ignorant and still in our sins (Romans 5:8). Second, and again the Holy Spirit is instrumental in the process as He had convicted the son **"of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:" (John 16:8)**. Notice the change of attitude that had come over the son when we contrast his words now with what he had originally said to his father.

Luke 15:21 *The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

A recognition of one's sin as a personal affront to God and an acknowledgement of God's mercy provided by Jesus' sacrifice is essential to genuine reconciliation.

Restored to sonship

I mentioned we, here on earth, don't seem to appreciate the full impact of what spiritually transpires when a sinner comes to saving faith. Well here on earth we might underestimate the significance of what has just happened, but in Luke 15 we witness the response in heaven.

Luke 15:22-24 *"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.*

Notice a little sidebar here. The father was so excited about the event, He brushed aside the son's carefully prepared speech and moved straight to the celebrations. Like the rest of the salvation process, Jesus Christ has already accomplished each step in the process on our behalf. He lived for us, He died for us, He rose for us, and it is no different with saving faith. He even provided us with His gift of saving faith already expressed to the father on our behalf. That is why the father brushes aside the son's carefully prepared speech and moves straight on to the son's new reality.

This new reality is the reason why there is such a celebration in the heavenly realm. A new son of God has been born into God's spiritual family. The birth of this new son is the culmination of the combined work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit over many millennia to fulfil their purpose of "making man in their image." That's why there is such a celebration in heaven over "one sinner who repents." The items given to the son, the robe, the ring and the sandals, signify the son has been restored to sonship once again by His father. But notice he is a totally different son to the one that demanded his inheritance. This son had experienced both a death and a new birth on his way to reinstatement, **"For this son of mine was dead and is alive again."**

Again it is the Holy Spirit that has brought about this radical transformation. It is the Spirit that has gone out, embraced and drawn the son back to His Father, and it is the Spirit that has provided him with “new life.”

John 3:5-6 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

We mentioned before how the Holy Spirit is associated with new beginnings. Well it is no different at this pivotal point in one’s salvation story. It is the Spirit who gives us “new life” so that we are now incorporated into the very life of the Trinity, as adopted sons.

Romans 8:15-17 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba Father.”

But notice too what Paul says here about “fear.” Under the law, the Israelites constantly worried if they were good enough to escape punishment. Unfortunately, many church people today suffer this same fear. But now under the benefits of grace provided by Jesus Christ, acceptance is no longer dependent on our “works” but on Christ’s “works.” This effectively reinstates that wonderful sentiment of “assurance” we forfeited at the Garden of Eden when we sinned. We are God’s beloved children no matter what (Romans 8:31-39). But notice something else about this gracious God of ours. Not only is all forgiven and the son restored to full sonship, but with his restored status as a son, this renegade who had previously squandered his inheritance, is now considered what? An heir once again.

V.16-17 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

We humans are slow learners, but in the end we get there, not because of any great effort on our part, but because we serve a gracious and loving God who has poured out one spiritual blessing on top of another so that we arrive where we belong.

I mentioned at the beginning there are two parts to the “sanctifying work of the Spirit.”

This *first* aspect has to do with our calling, that special privilege of being called in this age and being set apart for God’s holy purposes. Next chapter we will move on to the second aspect, that of “sanctification.”

Chapter 60 – The Holy Spirit – “Spiritual Guide”

We have been looking at the role of the Holy Spirit as we live our new life according to the Spirit. Last chapter we looked at the role the Spirit plays in the beginning of the sanctification process. We saw that the first aspect has to do with our calling, that special privilege of being called in this age and being set apart for God’s holy purposes. In the same way items in the tabernacle or temple of old were sanctified or set apart for God’s Holy purpose, so now as part of the New Covenant, the living stones that will make up this new temple in which God will dwell are set apart for His holy purpose.

We move onto the second aspect of the sanctifying work of the Spirit, teaching the newly adopted child to live their new life according to the Spirit. A recap of what has transpired in the life of a new believer should give us an indication of what this process of sanctification is all about.

- ◆ The new believer has been personally chosen to be a firstfruit by God the Father, embraced by the Holy Spirit to become a living stone in God’s temple (1 Peter 2:4-5).
- ◆ He has repented and repudiated his old life lived according to the dictates of the “flesh” (Acts 2:37-38; Romans 8:5).
- ◆ He has been justified and made righteous through His acceptance of Jesus as His personal Savior.
- ◆ He has been forgiven and adopted into God’s spiritual family as a son of God (Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:4-7).
- ◆ He is a new creation born of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- ◆ The Holy Spirit along with the Father and the Son have come and made their home in him (John 14:23).

All of these together confirm his salvation is a reality. All this has come about without any contribution on our part. Our salvation has come about purely by the grace of God.

Having been through this redeeming process, what would you expect the mindset of this new son of God to be? After experiencing the liberating grace of God, would it be appropriate to immediately drop back into his old sinful lifestyle or would he rather be motivated to adopt the lifestyle of his new reality? Think back for a moment to the parable of the prodigal son. After being astounded by the loving reaction of his father, does the son now turn around and commit the same mistakes all over again? It would be a callous and heartless way for the son to act after having experienced such forgiving love from his father. No, this time around, chastened by the bitter events of his past life and now having experienced the embracing love of his father, one would imagine he would try to be a better son and try his best to emulate the loving nature of his father. “I want to be part of my father’s loving community!”

This is precisely the position God wants us to be in where we have made this decision not based on fear or coercion, but purely in response to the grace and love God has extended to us. The grace of God is a powerful force and has the ability to change one’s nature.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

Now notice the miraculous change of nature brought about by “the grace of God.”

V.12 It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

It was the power of the father’s grace in the story of the prodigal son that brought about the son’s transformation.

V.13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

A Christian's response to our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ***"who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness,"*** is to cooperate with this process of purification. We should be ***"eager to do what is good."*** Although we are God's children already considered holy and righteous by our inclusion with Christ, God's intention is to develop His divine nature of love within us.

It is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us that brings about this transformation.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

God is about more than just offering salvation. He is creating a community of people, His holy people who reflect his divine nature and character within whom He can dwell. It is the nature already at work in the community that is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God has His being in community, and the glue that binds this holy family together is the love that God is. His purpose from the beginning has been to share and extend this loving community with His creation, inviting them to be living stones in which He plans to live and share His divine life (1 Peter 2:5). But we have to understand this aspect of sanctification is a process the Holy Spirit leads us through as the last part of this verse confirms.

The ideal beginning point in moving us into this holy relationship, as we have learned with the parable of the prodigal, is to experience the grace of God in a tangible way.

1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

Unfortunately this is not where everyone begins. Too often in the history of Christianity the beginning point is not "love" but "fear"! Fear of going to hell; fear of not being good enough; fear of not being one of those predestined for salvation; fear of not being raptured and so on it goes. Hopefully, even if this has been our experience, somewhere along the journey we mature to the point where we do respond in kind to the grace and love God has shown us and we do begin to ***"love because he first loved us."*** And if we are sincere in our walk this will happen. Because unlike temples erected by human hands, this temple is being assembled of living stones constructed by God's own hands. The Father has entrusted the construction of this temple into the capable hands of Jesus and the Holy Spirit (John 5:22; John 16:13-15). They will ensure a holy people who reflect the life of the Trinity are presented to the Father as a dwelling place in which He can dwell (Revelation 21:3).

To go back to God's purpose outlined in Leviticus 26:12, the emphasis now with this aspect of the sanctification process shifts to the second part of the verse, ***"I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people."*** Sanctification is the work of God moving us from a life living "according to the flesh" to one of now living "according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-8). He is in effect teaching us as His adopted sons to live as God's children.

Let's now talk about how the Spirit goes about teaching us to take on God's nature and live as God's holy children. The major life-changing event that has happened to us is the coming of God in the form of the Holy Spirit to live in us. We may look the same on the outside, but inside is where the major transformation has taken place. It is important to understand this as children of the New Covenant.

1) It is the Spirit that has given us our new life in Christ.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

2) With our new life as part of the new creation comes a new nature.

2 Corinthians 3:3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

3) This new nature is what allows us to now walk by and to be led by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-18 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The failing of the Old Covenant was Israel's inability to live up to the righteousness of the law because of the weakness of the flesh. The Spirit living in us addresses this deficiency.

4) The Spirit brings us spiritual understanding as He gives us the "mind of Christ."

1 Corinthians 2:15-16 The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, 16 for, ...we have the mind of Christ.

These internal changes brought about by the gift of the Spirit are to be our guide in spiritual matters under the New Covenant now that it has superseded the Old Covenant. It is important to understand the primary source of change in this sanctifying process is the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not leave His disciples without spiritual guidance when He ascended to heaven. After all, it was Jesus who said, "**But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.**" (John 16:13).

So the role of the Spirit is crucial to our new walk in Christ. The Holy Spirit takes over Jesus' role in preparing disciples who are allowing God to purify them as His holy people. It's important to understand this point as the external guiding factor in the formation of holiness in Israel, the Torah, has been replaced by the Spirit who develops God's internal holiness on our hearts. Next time, we will examine what it means to have the "mind of Christ."

Chapter 61 – The Holy Spirit – The Mind of Christ

Last chapter we finished up by talking about the transformation that has taken place in our lives as a result of our being “born of the Spirit.” The major life-changing event that has happened to us is the coming of God in the form of the Holy Spirit to live in us. He not only gives us a new life, but also a new nature, one that wants to cooperate with the Spirit as He moulds us into God’s holy people.

And crucially, in this process of sanctification, this new nature is governed by the “mind of Christ.” **1 Corinthians 2:15-16** *The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, 16 for, ...we have the mind of Christ.*

Just what does it mean to have the “mind of Christ”? As we begin to look at this very important subject, I need to make a disclaimer. I don’t pretend to know the perfect mind of Christ. Like Paul, we have to admit we only see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12). Plus, it would be the height of arrogance to pretend to know how Christ would act in each circumstance. After all, it was precisely His unexpected reactions to the various situations He faced during His incarnation that so baffled his listeners. One had to smile not so many years ago when the wristband, WWJD (What Would Jesus Do), was scooped up by well-intentioned young people claiming to know how Jesus would act in any given situation. Fortunately, children of God have been given better resources than wristbands so we can mature and **be conformed to the image of His son (Romans 8:29).**

What exactly are those resources God has provided for us so we can come to know the mind of Christ?

Well as we have already discovered, although we don’t have the physical Jesus here to instruct us personally, having returned to heaven, He has not left us spiritual orphans as He has sent the Spirit to instruct us in the ways of God.

John 14:18 *I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.*

Notice, it is through the Spirit that Jesus returns to us to carry on the work He began while physically amongst us. In Galatians 4 the Holy Spirit is called the “**Spirit of Christ**” showing the unity of mind that exists within the Trinity.

Galatians 4: 4-6 *But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”*

Not only does the Spirit bring us the mind of Christ but another important resource as well, a changed heart. It is the Spirit taking up residence in our hearts that entitles us to be adopted as God’s children and gives us the right, along with Jesus, to call the Father “Abba.”

It’s interesting two of the descriptions used of the Holy Spirit parallel these two attributes of Jesus. He is described as the “Spirit of Truth” (mind) and the “Comforter” (heart) (John 16:13; John 14:16). God has made this wonderful resource, the “Spirit of Christ” to develop within us the mind and heart of Christ. Our responsibility in the process is to submit to and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us as He imparts godly thoughts and attitudes to us. The apostle Paul in chastening the wayward Galatians admonishes them in Galatians 5 and 6 to, “**walk by the Spirit**” (Galatians 5:16), to “**live by the Spirit**” and to “**keep in step with the Spirit**” (Galatians 5:25), and to “**sow to the Spirit**”(Galatians 6:8). These two chapters are a reminder to the Galatians of their new reality in Christ. They are to renounce their old way of living according to the “flesh” and live the new life of the “Spirit.” The first resource we have available to us to help us develop the mind of Christ is the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit.

The second resource we have available to us in developing the mind of Christ is the living example of Jesus recorded for us in Scripture. If we want to know what a Spirit-filled person looks like, we have the living example of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

What set Jesus apart from other human beings was His utter and complete trust and faith in His heavenly Father. As He went about His daily life it was His submission to the divine leading of the Holy Spirit that allowed Him to complete the Father's mission of saving the world from sin. By studying the life and teachings of Jesus we are given a window into the very mind of God (Luke 10:21-22). Jesus reveals the true nature and character of God and the ideals of the kingdom of God.

The other New Testament writers supplement the teachings of Jesus especially as they expound the dramatic change that has come about now that the New Covenant of grace has replaced the Old Covenant of law. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ's atonement alone—there can be no legalistic or behavioral additions to grace—it can only be received, never earned. Christianity is a relationship, not a transaction.

It is at this point that we now need to address that vexing question of what is to guide a new babe in Christ if we are no longer under the law (Romans 6:14). And the answer to this question revolves around this remarkable resource God has made available to us, the "mind of Christ."

2 Corinthians 3:3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

No longer are God's people identified by externals such as circumcision, holy days and dietary laws but by their righteous behaviour (***You are a letter from Christ***), as a result of the Spirit of the living God taking up residence in their hearts. As mentioned earlier, it is the Spirit that is the game changer in this whole process. It is the "living Spirit" that replaces the "dead tablets of stone." The failure of the Old Covenant law was its inability to empower the people to live up to its holy requirements.

Hebrews 8:7-8 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. 8 But God found fault with the people.

As we saw with the Pharisees, the law makes people "religious", but failed to produce the righteousness of God. But this deficiency is addressed with the establishment of the New Covenant.

V.10 This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

In contrast to the dutiful observances required by the external laws of the Old Covenant, righteousness under the New Covenant now blossoms internally from an obedient and thankful heart motivated by the Spirit.

Romans 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For many Christians, including many pastors, any talk of the doing away with the law now that we are under grace is to invite anarchy and lawlessness into the church. Paul asked the same question, "***Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?***" (***Romans 6:1***).

The concern that anarchy will result is to misunderstand our new status in Christ. We are now sons of God, part of the new spiritual creation with a new nature directed by the Spirit that provides us with the mind of Christ.

Romans 6:11-13 Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body.... Offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Notice that just because Torah has been done away with, it is not the end of righteousness. The righteousness the Spirit provides is the real deal, the righteousness of God Himself. In contrast to the Israelites who only had an external set of laws to reflect God's righteousness, sons of God are given the "mind of Christ" to lead them in the ways of God.

With the shedding of His blood, Christ instituted the New Covenant. This replaced the Old Covenant characterised by the "flesh" and the "law" and replaced it with the New Covenant of grace characterised by the "Spirit" and the "mind of Christ."

Romans 8:3-4 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

As Paul goes on to explain in Romans 8:5-8, we are no longer people of the "flesh" nor subject to the "law" which condemns us. Christ has set us free from both of these characteristics that described our life prior to our conversion.

Romans 8:5-8 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Paul contrasts the two ways of life, one, a life prior to our conversion governed by the "flesh," and two, a life after our conversion governed by the "Spirit."

V.6-8 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

Hopefully this answers that vexing question as to what should guide a new babe in Christ if we are no longer under the law? (Romans 6:14). God is not an irresponsible parent who leaves His newly adopted children as orphans with no spiritual guidance to become His holy people. Instead He provides the necessary resources so Christ, through the Holy Spirit, takes up residence in our hearts and gives us the "mind of Christ." Hopefully this gives us a better understanding of the divine resource God has made available to His children so they can develop the nature and characteristics of God Himself. The "mind of Christ" Himself guiding and motivating us is so much more effective in developing the holiness of God than the Old Covenant law.

So the question comes down to this. What would we rather trust to develop the characteristics of our holy God in us? The external code written on stone or the mind of Christ in us? Having said that, it doesn't mean we can't learn very important spiritual lessons from the Mosaic Law and the rest of the Old Testament, which we will address. However, by far the major change in developing holiness in God's people comes from receiving from God the "mind of Christ." When we have the mind of Christ, then our thoughts and actions will flow from whom we are, children of God led by the Spirit of God. What an amazing blessing God has given His people.

We have spent a lot of time today discussing the subject of the law. Next time we will back up a bit and look at the purpose of the law.

Chapter 62 – The Purpose of the Law

Last chapter we looked at the amazing resource God has made available to His newly adopted children so they can develop the same holy nature and characteristics of God Himself. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ comes to us and gives us His mind, the “mind of Christ.”

This chapter we are going to take a closer look at the subject of the purpose of the law. To understand this whole question of the law in relation to humanity, we need to go back to God Himself. As mentioned earlier, we need to understand the law or commands of God are a reflection of God’s holy nature and character. He is a God of love, full of righteousness, justice, grace and mercy. Before the fall, there was no need for a law as Adam and Eve could witness for themselves this God of love. The two parties could relate to each other, face to face, purely on the basis of a loving relationship. This intimate relationship between Creator and created was shattered when Adam and Eve sinned. Man’s sin, because of its affront to the holiness of God, necessitated a change in the way God and mankind were to relate to one another. Sin had distorted their humanity; consequently fellowship with God was no longer possible. This distorted humanity is also the reason humans have had such a difficult time relating to one another ever since.

This rift did not in any way lessen God’s love for His creation, but it was now impossible for a holy God to relate personally to sinful mankind, as they would simply be consumed by His divine majesty. So if God was to continue to relate to mankind without consuming them, the relationship had to be established on a totally different basis. This new relationship had to take into account the vast difference between the nature of a holy God and the nature of sinful man. But it also had to provide the means by which the two parties could be reconciled to again relate personally face to face.

The divine solution to resolve this problem was the introduction of “the law.” The law not only revealed the vast gulf between a holy God and sinful mankind, but it also provided the means by which the parties would eventually be reconciled. But until then, the relationship between the parties would have to be conducted purely on a legal basis. It is under this legal system that all fallen mankind stands accountable and under which we all are judged and condemned because it points out the vast difference between God’s holiness and mankind’s sinfulness.

Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

And this legal arrangement came into existence the moment Adam and Eve sinned, long before any written code was given to anyone. So when we speak of the “law” we need to regard it in a more encompassing way than just a set of regulations such as the Ten Commandments. We need to regard it as more of a system or structure God instituted to govern the relationship between a holy God and a sinful humanity. We will see this more clearly shortly when we contrast this legal age of the “law” with the age of “faith.”

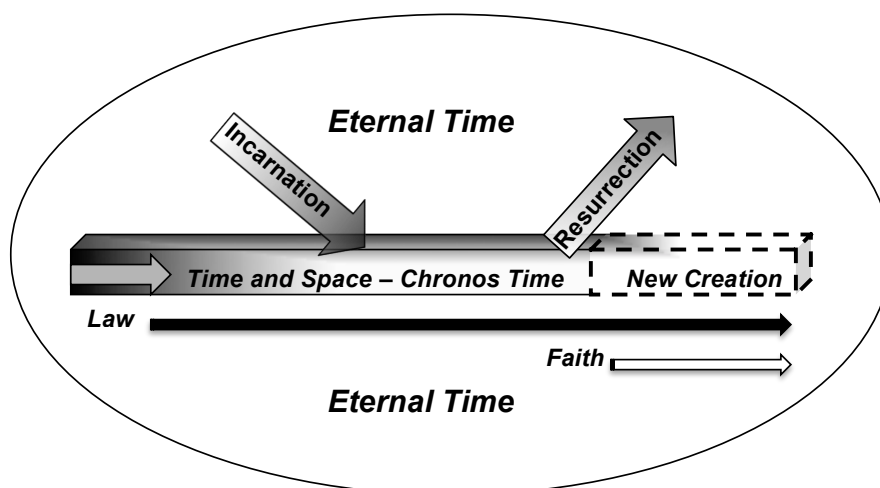
In His love and wisdom, this is the system God introduced in order to govern the broken relationship with His rebellious children. However, there was both an upside and a downside to this system, mostly a downside. The upside was it held lawlessness in check. Just imagine what our societies would be like without laws to govern anti-social behavior. Throughout history beginning with the account of Noah’s flood we have witnessed the rise of anarchy when there is no restraint placed on human behavior. So in this regard, the law was a blessing to societies willing to base their cultures on law.

A far more important upside was, in a way, a backhanded blessing as it was both a curse and a blessing.

Galatians 3:23 (NKJ) But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

What we see here is Paul dividing salvation history into two parts, a time of “law” and a time of “faith.” Luke also makes this same distinction.

Luke 16:16 The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Law and Faith. (See figure below).



Again we see an overlap of the “already but not yet” situation. Just as we have the new creation overlapping with the old creation, so we see the overlapping of the age of the law and the age of faith. As mentioned, the law was a blessing in that it was a guard against lawlessness in society, but it was a curse in that society was made up of individuals like you and me who found it impossible to live up to its righteous demands.

Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

However, this inability to live up to its demands (a curse) had a positive effect in that it exposed us as the pitiful sinners we are and pointed to our need for a Savior (a blessing). This is why Paul writes **“The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”** When we recognise our inability to obey the demanding requirements of the law, we are left with no alternative but to throw ourselves on God’s mercy.

But it is while we are in this dire predicament of being sinners, unable to extricate ourselves, condemned to spiritual oblivion by the law, that God comes to our rescue through Jesus Christ.

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Now we get to see what brings about this division of history into these two parts.

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

Like all good legal systems, God’s law contained penalties for crimes committed and it was uncompromising when it came to sin.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death.

Again we see with the death of an animal after the sin of Adam and Eve and their own eventual physical death, the relationship with God was on a completely new basis. The law demanded justice. However, this was not the complete story. The Lord used the skins of the sacrificed animals to cover Adam and Eve’s nakedness symbolising God’s future provision of mercy to cover the sin of those willing to throw themselves on God’s mercy (Genesis 3:21; Galatians 3:27). It was

a result of God's great love for us that Jesus came and willingly accepted **"The curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."** This legal system as displayed with the sacrifice of an animal in the garden, and the subsequent sacrificial system under the Law of Moses contained the means of redemption that relied entirely on the mercy of God.

Romans 6:23 ...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The curse of the law is nullified when we, in faith, accept the gift of God made possible by Christ's atoning sacrifice. We stand justified and forgiven before God as the death penalty demanded of the law has been paid, and Christ's righteousness has been attributed to us (Romans 4:23-24; 2 Corinthians 5:21). The law has been satisfied; consequently this legal system has lost its power over us. The fact we need to be "justified" establishes the existence of this legal system **"so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God."** (Romans 3:19).

Now we need to go back to the book of Galatians where it contrasts law and faith. In this particular setting, Paul is addressing the Galatians on their foolish adoption of the Law of Moses in addition to their faith in Christ. But we have to see the higher spiritual ramifications of Christ's sacrifice on this whole subject of the law in how God and humanity relate to one another. No longer does the relationship need to be on the legal basis governed by the law. Now through faith in Jesus' saving work, full adoption to sonship is once again possible.

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. The intimate personal relationship humanity had with God prior to sin has been re-established. It was precisely this gracious act by Jesus on our behalf that has freed us from the curse of the law and has enabled the restoration of personal relationship with our God *for those who choose it*. This is why there is an overlap in this period between Jesus' atoning sacrifice and His promised return. The law has lost its power to condemn those who are "in Christ."

To go back to the session we had on reconciliation, true reconciliation requires a response from both parties in order for it to be genuine. Christ's sacrifice has freed all humanity from the curse of the law in a general or universal sense.

Romans 5:10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

However, in order for it to become personal in an individual's life, this wonderful gift has to be accepted. And as all mankind has been implicated in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, each individual in God's good time will be given the opportunity to accept this gift. To reject it though, negates what Christ has done on our behalf and the curse of the law is reinstated. This is where saving faith comes in. It is the simple acceptance of what Christ has done on our behalf that sets us free from the curse of the law (Romans 10:13).

When the New Testament talks about "freedom" this is what it's talking about: freedom from the legal system that has enslaved and condemned us before faith set us free.

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Paul is saying to the Galatians, "After being set free from the system that condemns you through faith in Jesus, why would you want to put yourselves back under the curse of the law?" He calls it "a yoke of slavery." Notice that the law with its consequences is still a valid option for those who refuse the gift of grace or those who want to add anything to it.

Galatians 5:2-4 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4 You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

The full weight of the law with its uncompromising demands is the default option for those who refuse to accept the gift of freedom bought with the blood of Jesus Christ.

However, this freedom is not a license to do whatever we like as Paul goes on to explain in the rest of this chapter where he contrasts the two ways of life of either walking by the “flesh” or by the “Spirit.”

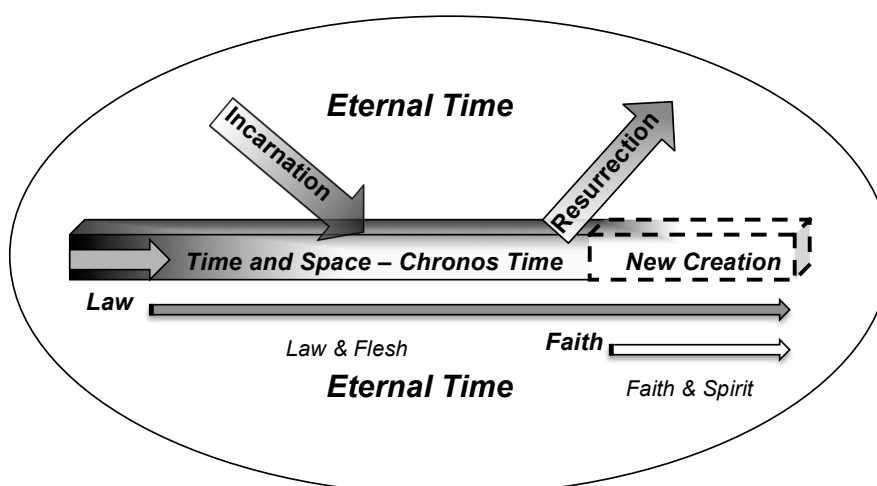
Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Just because we are no longer under the “curse” of the law but under the “freedom” of faith, doesn’t mean newly adopted sons of God continue to act like they are still children of the “flesh.”

Galatians 5:17 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

What Paul is saying is, as new sons of God led by the Spirit of God, our new lifestyle needs to reflect the nature of our heavenly Father. Obedience is an overflow of the love relationship, not a contract. The “age of the law” goes hand in hand with the “age of the flesh,” while the “age of faith” goes hand in hand with the “age of the Spirit.”

Law and Flesh and Faith and Spirit. (See figure below).



The take away points from all this are these:

- ◆ When we talk about the law, we need to come to regard it in its larger sense, a system instituted by God to govern the relationship between a holy God and fallen humanity.
- ◆ The law loses its power over us when we express faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ and we become part of the new creation.
- ◆ Newly adopted sons of God leave behind the “age of the law and flesh” as they now belong to the “age of faith and the Spirit.”
- ◆ As such, they are given the means to reflect the nature of their heavenly Father. We have already discussed how God has given us a new nature by giving us the mind of Christ to lead us so that we can learn to reflect the nature of our heavenly Father.

Today we looked at the purpose of the law as it governed the relationship between a holy God and His rebellious children. Next time we will get more specific and look at the purpose of the Law of Moses.

Chapter 63 – Purpose of the Mosaic Law

Last chapter we looked at the purpose of the law in its broader sense. Because man's sin was an affront to the holiness of God, it necessitated a change in the way God and mankind were to relate to one another. If God was to continue to relate to mankind without consuming them, the relationship had to be established on a totally different basis. The divine solution to resolve this problem was the introduction of "the law." The law not only revealed the vast gulf between a holy God and sinful mankind, but it also provided the means by which the parties would eventually be reconciled. But until then, the relationship between the parties would have to be conducted purely on a legal basis. So when we speak of the "law" we need to regard it as this legal system or structure God introduced to govern the relationship between a holy God and His rebellious children.

With this chapter we are going to focus on the purpose of the Mosaic Law. God began His plan of salvation and reconciliation with the father of the faithful, Abraham. We will come back to Abraham and this subject of faith later. But for now we are going to jump past Abraham and look at God's dealing with the Israelite nation who had descended from Abraham but were now in slavery to the powerful nation of Egypt. It was to Abraham that God had made the promise, "**All peoples on earth will be blessed through you**" (**Gen 12:3**) speaking of the redeeming work the future Messiah would perform on behalf of all people. However, much was to transpire before that blessing would be fulfilled.

After a series of mighty miracles including the passing over of the death angel where all the Egyptian firstborn were killed, while the Israelites were spared if they sacrificed a lamb and spread its shed blood over their doorways, God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian captivity. Moses, God's appointed leader, led them off into the wilderness on their 40-year trek to the Promised Land. Moses was instructed by God to ensure many of the events surrounding the Israelite's deliverance from Egypt would be adopted into their culture. Words like exodus, Egypt, unleavened bread, Passover lamb, etc. It was a pattern that was further reinforced when God delivered the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. This law not only contained the Ten Commandments but a host of other worship, sacrificial, civil and ceremonial laws that were to govern the nation of Israel under God. It was a covenant relationship solely between God and the nation of Israel, no one else. God delivered the law or Torah to Israel with the hope the people would respond positively and comply with His mission of creating a holy people for His name (Leviticus 26:12).

The Mosaic Covenant could not create God's Holy people

Much of the emphasis placed on the Mosaic Law tends to focus on the Ten Commandments, but this overemphasis would miss other vital aspects of the Mosaic Law. While the Ten Commandments were to govern the ethical behaviour of the Israelites, it, of and by itself, would not create God's holy people. We have over 1000 years of recorded Israelite history that testify to this fact ending with the confrontation Jesus had with the religious leaders. This was not the fault of the law; the problem was there simply was not a heart in the people to obey (Deuteronomy 5:29; Hebrews 8:7-8).

This is why the Mosaic Law also contained aspects that pointed forward to future events from whence true deliverance would come and from this deliverance would arise a holy people who did have a heart to obey. The sacrificial laws in the Torah pointed not only to a merciful God who was willing to forgive their sins but also to the sacrifice the future Lamb of God would pay for the sins of the whole world fulfilling the promise made to Abraham. The annual worship calendar contained names that incredibly would be applied to Jesus over 1000 years later, when He came and "tabernacled" with us as our Passover lamb, our unleavened bread, our atonement and our

Sabbath rest. We should not underestimate the powerful dynamics needed to bring about the fulfilment of this prophecy. It would be like William the Conqueror predicting who would be sitting on the throne of England in our time. The laws governing the foods the Israelites were allowed to eat and the fabrics of the clothes they were allowed to wear, were designed to remind them as they pulled on their clothes each morning and sat down to their daily meals they were God's holy people separate from the pagan nations around them. Even today, Jews are recognised by these customs. However, this too pointed to the future when there would be no need for a daily reminder as God would come and actually live "in" us.

The Mosaic Law was conditional on obedience

However, besides these aspects of the Mosaic Law, there was another sobering aspect: it was a legal contract between God and the nation of Israel. Under the agreement each party had responsibilities in order for the covenant to be binding. God spelled out the contract to Moses who then took it to the people for their approval.

Exodus 24:7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey."

As recorded here, the contract the Israelites agreed to was conditional on their obedience. They had to perform to the standard God had set out for them in order for them to be His holy people (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). This was a tall order for fallible human beings even with this carrot and stick (blessing and cursing) approach. Theoretically, obedience was possible, but as subsequent events would demonstrate, it was an unobtainable goal for humans in their fallen state. Even at this relatively low standard of obedience (Jesus brought an even higher standard, Matthew 5:20-29) the subsequent history of Israel is of one sad failure after another.

The Purpose of the Mosaic Law

But this is precisely what the introduction of the Mosaic Law was supposed to do. It was to demonstrate for all time and for all humanity our inability to measure up to God's standard of perfection under our own strength. The apostle Paul with the benefit of hindsight reveals the purpose of the Mosaic Law.

Romans 5:20 The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase.

Did you get that...***the trespass might increase!*** This is the irony brought about with the introduction of the law. Instead of helping matters, all it did was open up whole new avenues of sinning. This is the dilemma and frustration Paul expresses about living under the law in Romans 7. We won't take the time to read all of it now, but just a couple of verses to illustrate the point.

Romans 7:7-8 What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting.

It's like telling a child not to touch the hot stove, or in the case of Adam and Eve, not to touch the fruit of the tree of knowledge. All of a sudden there is a fascination with what is prohibited. The Mosaic Law was added to increase transgressions to prove once and for all humanity's inability to measure up to God's standard of perfection.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Even the Ten Commandments held in such high regard by Christianity tells us more about fallen man's evil nature than it does about God's holy nature. God knew His rebellious children would not worship Him, set any time aside for Him, would be disrespectful to their parents, kill, lie, and cheat on their fellowman, so He had to put in place prohibitions to police their behaviour.

As mentioned in an earlier session, there are two ways to obtain eternal life - through perfect obedience to the Law as Jesus answered the expert in the law (Luke 10:25-28), or through faith in Jesus Christ as Paul told the Galatians (Galatians 2:16). It comes down to whose "works" we are going to rely on in order to gain eternal life. We can rely on our own "works," i.e. our ability to

keep the commandments perfectly, or Jesus' ability to keep the commandments perfectly on our behalf. This was the message Jesus reinforced with His ego shattering teachings to the religious leaders such as His sermon on the mount, and the parables of the Good Samaritan and the prodigal son. It was to contrast their hypocritical and pathetic efforts of obedience to the Mosaic Law with the perfection demanded by a holy God. None of us can be the Good Samaritan, the prodigal father, forgive our brother 70 times seven, or live up to the demands of the sermon on the mount perfectly every time. It was to burst the self-righteous bubble of the scribes and Pharisees who thought, through their system of "do's" and "don'ts" they were fulfilling the law. Jesus raised the bar and confronted them with the true requirements of God's law. Only Jesus can fulfil these perfect requirements every time because they are a reflection of the nature and character of a holy God. But in the same way as Jesus' teachings exposed the sham of the religious life of the scribes and Pharisees back then so they would throw themselves on God's mercy, that same message is just as applicable today. God never intended salvation to be achieved through the law. Sinful human beings by their very nature could never solve the problem of sin. That would be like asking criminals to solve society's crime problems. A solution could only come from a holy God Himself.

Romans 8:3-4 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

The New Covenant achieves what the Mosaic Covenant could not

We saw the law was introduced to expose the vast gulf between a holy God and fallen sinful humanity. But it also contained the means by which justification and reconciliation were to be achieved. Here we see our merciful God stepping in to achieve what sinful mankind, weakened by the flesh is unable to do.

Romans 8:3-4 ...And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Jesus not only lived up to the "***righteous requirements of the law***" on our behalf, but He also paid the death penalty the law demanded for our sin by becoming a "***sin offering.***" Just as the Mosaic Covenant was instituted with the shedding of blood, so now we see the introduction of the New Covenant with the shedding of Christ's blood.

But with the introduction of the New Covenant, the conditions for acceptance also changed. No longer was obedience on the part of the people required which was the weakness of the Mosaic Covenant. Acceptance is no longer based on our "works" but on the saving "works" of Jesus on our behalf.

Romans 10:1-4 Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 3 Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

When we, in faith, accept the gift of grace Christ's sacrifice has made possible on our behalf, the penalty for our sin is removed, we are forgiven, given God's Holy Spirit and we are adopted as His children. The law has lost its power and control over us.

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If Christ has already paid the price demanded of the law, there is no way we can be held accountable to it. That is why there is "***no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***" It would be a terrible injustice to require the penalty be paid a second time and the Father is not going to dishonour the awful price His beloved Son has paid to set us free from sin. The problem of sin has been taken care of by the obedience and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And as it has been achieved through "faith" the glory goes to the one who has made it possible, not to religious people believing it has been achieved by their own efforts (1 Corinthians 1:29-31).

But there is more good news for those who are “in Christ.” The law that condemns us is replaced with the law of the New Covenant.

Romans 8:2 Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

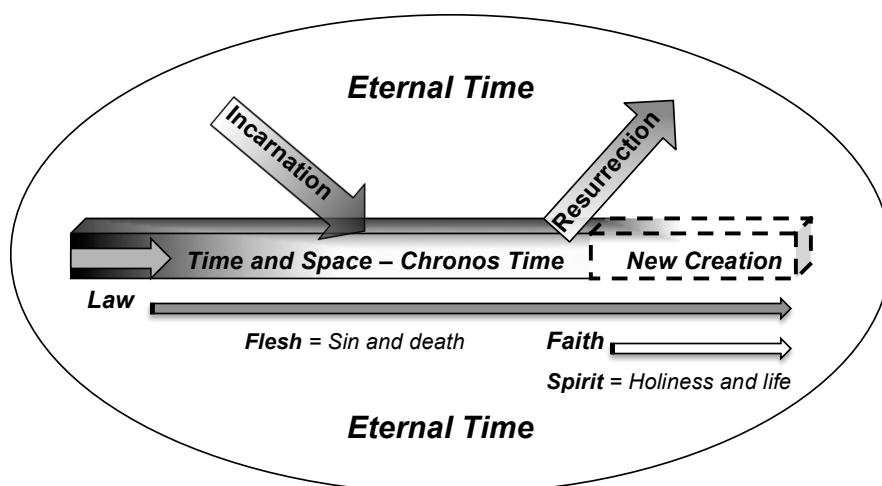
If the law of sin and death has been removed, then we have access once again to the eternal, life-giving power of the Spirit, pictured by the tree of life in the garden. Through Christ’s efforts, we have been forgiven, born again to a new life with a new nature, adopted as sons of God and restored to full relationship with the Father.

Our response to this gracious gift is to now live our new reality as Paul says in Romans 8:4.

Romans 8:4 ...in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The law of sin and death apply to the age of the “flesh,” but now we are to live in the age of the “Spirit” which leads to holiness and life.

Flesh - Sin and Death; Spirit - Holiness and Life (See figure below)



Romans 8:12-13 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

The Spirit gives us the resources to forsake the old life dictated by the flesh and to live the new life of the Spirit. Finally, through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, and through the granting of the Holy Spirit who is able to achieve the true righteousness the law was unable to achieve, God is creating “***a holy people for His name***”

Next time we will look at the role this new “law of the Spirit” plays in this process of preparing a holy people for God.

Chapter 64 – The Law and God’s Holy People

The last couple of chapters we have spent quite a bit of time looking at the subject of the law, both in a general sense and then in a specific sense with the Law of Moses.

1) We have seen that the law is holy, just and good as it is a reflection of God’s very nature and character (Romans 7:12).

2) We saw how God was required to introduce the law as a new way of relating to sinful mankind after Adam and Eve’s sin if they were not to be consumed by His divine holiness.

3) We also saw “The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase” (Romans 5:20) and reveal the vast gulf between a holy God and sinful mankind.

4) And finally it provided the means by which the two parties would eventually be reconciled (Romans 8:3-4).

When we look at each one of these four points regarding the law, we see each one is positive from humanity’s point of view. So it’s important to recognise the crucial role the law has played in God’s plan of salvation. And even though the age of the law has come to an end, as it has been replaced by the age of faith and grace as a result of Christ’s saving work, the question is, is there a role for the law to play in the development of maturity in God’s holy people? (Luke 16:16; Romans 3:20-22). This is the subject we are going to begin to explore with this chapter.

Law in the age of the New Covenant

Controversy surrounding the role of the law in the age of the New Covenant is nothing new. Change always brings controversy and after living with the Mosaic Law for over 1200 years, this was bound to happen, as most of the early converts to Christianity were law-abiding Jews (Acts 2:41). But as Gentile converts were added who had no experience with the Mosaic Law and were correctly instructed that salvation was only possible through faith in Jesus Christ, the potential for controversy over the role of the law grew. This is the underlying dynamic with which we should view the books of the New Testament canon that addresses the development of the early church, especially the writings of Paul. More than any of the other apostles, he, as the apostle to the Gentiles, was the one who had to juggle this dynamic as most of his churches had both Jew and Gentile converts. Not only that, but he faced a determined faction of Jews who insisted new Gentile converts adopt the teaching of the Law of Moses into their new Christian practice (Galatians 2; Galatians 5:7-12; Titus 3:9).

To further confuse the issue, there are times when Paul himself speaks positively about the law and times when he speaks negatively about it.

On the negative side, to be under the law was, to be in slavery (Romans 7:22-23; Galatians 4:21-31), brought death and condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7-9), is powerless to save us (Romans 8:3), those that promote the law are the enemies of Christ (Galatians 5:12), it came to an end with the introduction of the New Covenant (Romans 10:4; Galatians 5:18), and it produced self-righteousness rather than godly righteousness (Romans 10:3).

On the positive side, Paul calls the law “holy, righteous and good” (Romans 7:12), faith does not nullify the law but upholds it (Romans 3:31) and although circumcision is out, keeping the commandments of God is not (1 Corinthians 7:19).

How then are we to reconcile these two points of view? The answer lies in Romans 8:1-2.

Romans 8:1-2 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Notice two laws are mentioned; one that leads to life, and one that leads to death. As we saw last time, the reason there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus is because, 1) Jesus, through His righteous life has produced on our behalf the righteous requirements demanded by

the law. In other words, we are accepted in faith, based on His righteous “works” not ours (Romans 8:4). And, 2) Jesus has paid the death penalty demanded by the law for mankind’s sins. So the law has lost its deadly power over us. It can no longer condemn us or punish us as it says here in Romans 8:2. We have been set **“free from the law of sin and death.”** What this section of scripture is saying is, the law that God instituted as a way to govern the relationship between a holy God and His rebellious children (one that led to sin and death) has now been replaced by a new law, **“the law of the Spirit”** to govern the relationship between a holy God and His holy people (one that leads to holiness and eternal life). This is simply the fulfilment of the promise recorded by the prophet Jeremiah added to God’s original statement in Leviticus 26:12.

Jeremiah 31:33 “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

As we saw, the Old Covenant failed in that it did not produce the spiritual maturity required for the Israelites to be God’s holy people. Besides the other positive benefits just mentioned, the New Covenant included the means to address this failure. And this is the remarkable aspect of the New Covenant.

The responsibility of living up to God’s righteous requirements in order for them to be His holy people is transferred from the people to God Himself, Jesus. Through His righteous life, His death and resurrection, Christ has fulfilled this aspect of God’s plan to redeem humanity so they can become His holy people.

Genuine holiness is produced by Grace

But this is only the first step. In order for what Christ has achieved on our behalf to become a reality in our lives, the Holy Spirit by taking up residence in our hearts and mind is the means by which God now produces His holy nature and character in our lives. We have been justified and reconciled through Christ’s saving work, now the task is to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ so that we think and act as He would (Romans 8:29). This is how the New Covenant produces the genuine righteousness the old law failed to do in God’s holy people. Think of it this way, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and took of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the law of sin and death had to be introduced to govern the relationship between God and sinful mankind. But once we are brought to repentance by that law (our tutor, Galatians 3:24-25) to recognise our sinfulness and rebellion against our Creator, that legal relationship came to an end and a new relationship based on grace is instituted. This in effect takes us back to the situation in the garden prior to sin where mankind enjoyed a personal face-to-face relationship with their God with one major exception. We are now given access to the very Spirit of God represented by the tree of life. This is why Paul calls this new way of God relating to mankind based on grace the **“law of the Spirit who gives life” (Romans 8:2)**. Again it helps if we go back to Romans 8:1-2 and substitute the word “covenant” in place of the word, “law” so we understand we are talking about two ways of God relating to mankind.

Romans 8:1-2 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law (Covenant) of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law (Covenant) of sin and death.

The sad truth is, Adam and Eve were never forbidden access to the tree of life. They chose instead to exercise their freewill that led to the introduction of **“the law of sin and death.”** But as it says here in Romans 8:2, the New Covenant of **“life”** is introduced by Jesus Christ to set us **“free from the law of sin and death.”** Under the New Covenant, we are welcomed back into God’s “presence” (remember that word) in a personal relationship where the main influence for change in our lives is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. As mentioned, the Spirit brings with Him the very nature and character of God as He is God Himself. So the New Covenant has instituted and set in motion all of the ingredients needed to fulfil God’s plan to create a genuine holy people for His name “in his image.”

So with that background, let's now summarise how the New Covenant of grace is so much better at producing a holy people for God than the Old Covenant of law.

1) With our conversion we are given a new nature that wants to please God.

For believers, the fallen nature of Adam that we are born with has been wrestled to the ground and destroyed by Jesus Christ. The old nature governed by the "flesh" died along with the "old man." Baptism is the sacrament used to symbolise the death of the old man and the birth of the new man (Romans 6:1-7). With the birth of the new man comes a brand new nature, a nature no longer a slave to sin, but a slave to righteousness.

Romans 6:6-7 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Romans 6:18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

This new nature is the fulfilment of Jeremiah 31:33 where God says, "***I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.***" This new nature is none other than the Holy Spirit taking up residence in our lives imparting to us the very nature and character of God Himself. Notice the dramatic change in orientation that comes about as a result of this new nature.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

We are no longer slaves to the selfish orientation that drove us while we were ruled by the old nature. The new nature is oriented outwardly to serve others following the example of Jesus Christ. This change of heart is a massive transformation from the past and should not be underestimated.

2) We have been set free from the condemnation of the law as the demanding righteous requirements of the law have been fulfilled in us by Christ (Romans 8:3-4).

This simply allows grace to be grace.

Romans 6:14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

It's unfortunate that the word "law" has so much negative baggage associated with it as people misunderstand its role in the redemption process and mistakenly apply the "works" mentality of the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, people were judged on how well they performed in regard to the law. Acceptance was conditional on their "works." But amazingly, under the New Covenant we are accepted on the grace made possible by Christ's "works."

Romans 4:5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

The beauty of grace is we are accepted and continue to be accepted regardless of how far we fall short of the perfection demanded by the law.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

This is the Father's gift to us – acceptance based on Christ's "works" rather than our "works."

Christians need to enjoy their new status

This ought to be very liberating for us. We no longer need to win God's favour; we have God's favour. We are accepted, we are His sons and daughters, nothing shall separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). This new status is something to celebrate. We can enjoy our new status and the reassuring grace of God in which we reside. The pressure to be perfect is gone. It was impossible to begin with and even in our new status with God's help we will never achieve perfection this side of the resurrection. God knows this and this is why He does not put unrealistic expectations on us now that we live under His grace (Matthew 11:28-30). Christians, far too often, continue to place themselves under the uncompromising demands of the law when there is no need to. Instead we should revel in our new status. Our eternal destiny is no longer in our hands, but in our Saviour's very capable hands. We need to be humble as this scripture implies and

accept God's remedy for sin. It has been achieved by Christ's finished work on the cross and nothing needs to be added to it. All the honour and glory needs to go to the one who has made it all possible, Jesus Christ.

Next time we will continue this subject to explore if there is a role for the law in the development of maturity in God's holy people.

Chapter 65 – From Law to Relationship

Last chapter we looked at the first two reasons why the New Covenant of grace instituted with Christ's blood is so much more effective in producing the character and nature of God in His people than the Mosaic Covenant or Torah. To summarise, these two points are as follows.

1) With our conversion we are given a new nature that wants to please God.

This new nature is the fulfilment of Jeremiah 31:33 where God says, ***"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts."***

This new nature is none other than the Holy Spirit taking up residence in our lives imparting to us the very nature and character of God Himself. This change of heart is a massive transformation from the past and should not be underestimated.

2) We have been set free from the condemnation of the law as the demanding righteous requirements of the law have been fulfilled in us by Christ (Romans 8:3-4).

This simply allows grace to be grace. The beauty of grace is we are accepted and *continue to be accepted* regardless of how far we fall short of the perfection demanded of the law. God knows this and this is why He does not put unrealistic expectations on us now we live under His grace. Christians, far too often, continue to place themselves under the uncompromising demands of the law when there is no need to.

We now continue with more reasons why the New Covenant is so much more effective in producing the character and nature of God in His people than the Mosaic Covenant or Torah.

3) The law that condemns and brings death only applies to the old sinful nature of Adam, not the new nature

1 Timothy 1:9-10 We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, 10 for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.

As mentioned earlier, the Ten Commandments reveal more about humanity's fallen sinful nature than it does about God's holy nature. But this is precisely what it was designed to do. The law, as a tutor (Galatians 3:24-25), has done its job in bringing sinners to repentance, but once it has completed its job, it no longer applies to believers who are now under grace and are now ***"slaves to righteousness."*** under the direction of the Holy Spirit who now works with our new nature to develop spiritual maturity in God's holy people. So when we try to control believers through the old rules and regulations of the law, we are not taking into consideration the reality of the Holy Spirit and our new nature. The new nature is under the control and direction of God's Holy Spirit who gives us the "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). The other unfortunate consequence of living with the old sinful nature under the law is the proclivity to divert attention from oneself and apply the demanding requirements of the law to others.

Luke 6:42 How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

The old nature wants to divert attention from its own failings and point the finger at others (Genesis 3:12-13). This results in the unfortunate practice of judgmentalism. Believers, after experiencing the amazing grace of God and the price paid for their redemption should be humble enough to acknowledge their own failings and concentrate on overcoming the planks in their own eyes rather than concentrating on the failings of others. A proper understanding of grace, and an understanding that the law only applies to non-believers, would prevent much of the judgmental attitude that still pervades Christianity.

4) The motivation for achieving holiness under the Old Covenant was "fear," while the motivation for being holy under the New Covenant is "gratitude."

This too is a remarkable transition. Under the old legal way of operating, a sinner received condemnation and death for his disobedience. The motivation for being good under this old system was “fear.” And it was a genuine fear as the law demanded “perfection.” But now under the New Covenant instituted with Christ’s blood, we not only receive mercy and forgiveness, but also the promise of eternal life through the life-giving Spirit.

Romans 8:15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

And this is granted to us simply because we “believe” or trust what Jesus has done on our behalf.

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Now when we grasp the magnitude of what has transpired here, one can only fall down in deep gratitude and worship in recognition of the grace God has extended to us. In addition to gratitude, new sons of God choose to live up to their new reality, as they want to imitate their heavenly brother, Jesus Christ. This then becomes our motivation for pursuing holiness under the New Covenant.

5) As we have been welcomed back into the “presence” of God, the New Covenant is again based on a relationship rather than a long list of “do’s” and “don’ts.”

Adam and Eve enjoyed a remarkable relationship with God prior to their disobedience. They enjoyed God’s “presence” as they walked and talked with God in the cool of the evening. They were the recipients of God’s personal love, assurance and security. There were no long lists of do’s and don’ts, no sacred times or locations, no buildings, no sacrifices, just a loving relationship. However, this all came to an end when they failed to obey the one simple command God gave them to test their faith in Him. And what did they do? They hid from God and mankind has been hiding ever since (Genesis 3:8-10). And one of the ways we continue to hide from God is to substitute the law into the position that rightfully belongs to God.

Sin is much more damaging than simply breaking the law. It is much more than just an affront to our holy God as it threatens the whole concept of what God stands for, intimate relationships based on His love. Ultimately, this is why He is so opposed to sin and He wants us to understand this as well. Sin destroys relationships. The Torah was an interim step in this direction, but as we have seen it was limited in its effectiveness by the fallen nature. However, under the New Covenant, God wants us to join him in opposing sin not only because it is contrary to the law, but because we now understand its destructive power in shattering relationships. Opposing sin because it breaks the law, is replaced by the Spirit inspired knowledge sin threatens the very concept of the godhead itself, intimate loving relationships.

Unfortunately, all too often God is regarded as a policeman or a sheriff of the law rather than a merciful loving Father who wants an intimate relationship with us. Those preoccupied with living under the law only magnify this false concept of God as a sheriff. Its true God is a God of justice, but that justice is governed by love and a desire to root out anything that threatens relationships. However, in our fallen dehumanised state, the last thing we want to do is to face up to our guilt and would rather hide behind the law as we assume it is less confronting than having to acknowledge our sin before a relationship-oriented holy God. The Israelites did the same thing at the foot of Mt. Sinai when they asked Moses to speak to God on their behalf (Exodus 20:18-19).

As mentioned above, we also try to hide from God by self-righteously diverting attention from ourselves to others whose sins may be more obvious than ours (John 8:3-11). Remarkably, it is this same God we want to hide from, who wants to, and provides the means for our redemption. The point being, as in the time of Christ, humanity, like the Israelites and the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ time, would rather hide behind the law rather than acknowledge their need for a Messiah.

John 5:39-40 You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

What were the scriptures they were diligently searching? The Torah. As we have learned, one of the main purposes of the Mosaic Law was to point the Jews to the promised Messiah (Luke 24:44). The Jews, by focusing too much on the Law, missed the lawgiver, the Messiah, who has the genuine power to give eternal life.

Under the New Covenant, Jesus has restored our humanity and has paved the way for us to come out of hiding to once again enter into the very presence of God where we experience the love; security and assurance only a holy God can give.

John 4:23-24 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

Notice it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ who is now directing our worship. The Spirit includes us in the circle of love that is the Godhead where there are no long lists of do's and don'ts, no sacred times or locations, no buildings, no sacrifices, just a loving relationship. God does not want to relate to us through the legal paradigm of the law; He wants to relate to us via the godly relationship that is love. God does not want this covenant relationship to be like a loveless marriage where two parties get together simply to fulfil selfish motives. He wants us to relate to Him as a loving Father rather than a sheriff enforcing a list of "do's and don'ts."

Through the New Covenant of grace, He has set in motion the means to achieve this as the Holy Spirit is the master of relationships (2 Corinthians 13:14). God is holding out the ultimate form of relationship to us, the gift of sharing in the same fellowship that exists within the very godhead itself.

1 John 1:3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

As we read in John 4:23-24, the Father is seeking those who want to join Him willingly and participate in the fellowship which is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Chapter 66 – Instructions in Holiness

We have been looking at the subject of the law in relation to the development of spiritual maturity in God's holy people. The last two chapters have focused on five reasons why the New Covenant instituted with Christ's blood is so much more effective in producing the character and nature of God in His people than the Mosaic Covenant or Torah. The main reason for bringing about this dramatic change is the coming of the Holy Spirit who takes up residence in God's holy people. In order for what Christ has achieved on our behalf to become a reality in our lives, the Holy Spirit by taking up residence in our hearts and mind is the means by which God now produces His holy nature and character in our lives.

We begin by summarising the five points we have covered so far on why the New Covenant of grace is so much better at producing a holy people for God than the Old Covenant of law.

1) With our conversion we are given a new nature that wants to please God.

2) We have been set free from the condemnation of the law as the demanding righteous requirements of the law have been fulfilled in us by Christ (Romans 8:3-4).

3) The law that condemns and brings death only applies to the old sinful nature of Adam, not the new nature.

4) The motivation for achieving holiness under the Old Covenant was "fear," while the motivation for being holy under the New Covenant is "gratitude."

5) As we have been welcomed back into the "presence" of God, the New Covenant is again based on a relationship rather than a list of "do's" and "don'ts."

Instructions in holiness

We have purposely spent a great deal of time talking about the superiority of the New Covenant over the Mosaic Covenant in bringing about spiritual maturity in God's holy people before moving to this final point. The reason we have done so is to make sure we have the right perspective on what we are about to cover now as we are going to make a very important distinction between "law" and "instruction." This is not a subtle attempt to sneak the law in via the back door, where the emphasis for salvation was based on one's works or obedience to the law rather than Christ's works. Instead, these "instructions in holiness" are a means to aid God's people to develop the holiness that reflects their heavenly Father.

6) Believers are no longer under the law, but that does not mean we are not given what I am going to term "instructions in holiness" for the purpose of developing spiritual maturity.

In an earlier session we talked about the confusion and conflict regarding the law in the age of the New Covenant. This confusion was magnified in those areas where there was a mixture of both Jew and Gentile converts in the congregation. The apostle Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, was the one who had to manage the transition from the Old to the New Covenant. However, as mentioned earlier, there are times where Paul himself speaks positively about the law and times when he speaks negatively about it.

On the negative side, to be under the law was to be in slavery (Romans 7:22-23; Galatians 4:21-31); it brought death and condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7-9); it is powerless to save us (Romans 8:3); those that promote the law are the enemies of Christ (Galatians 5:12); it came to an end with the introduction of the New Covenant (Romans 10:4; Galatians 5:18); and it produced self-righteousness rather than godly righteousness (Romans 10:3).

On the positive side, Paul calls the law "holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12); faith does not nullify the law but upholds it (Romans 3:31); and although circumcision is out, keeping the commandments of God is not (1 Corinthians 7:19).

We now need to address these seeming conflicts. We saw back in point three the law only applies to unbelievers with the old nature, while believers with their new nature are no longer under the law but under grace. However, God's ultimate goal of salvation is to make us in His image and conform us to the likeness of Jesus Christ (Genesis 1:26; Romans 8:29). We have seen through this series how God has taken the initiative in redeeming us from our sins. First of all, God sent His Son to do for us what we could not achieve for ourselves under the law. His righteousness has been imputed to us, and He has paid the death penalty we deserved for our sins. Second, Jesus sends the Spirit to do what the law could not do in regard to developing holiness in His people. The coming of the Holy Spirit is God's answer to addressing the question of developing holiness in God's people now that the law has been terminated and replaced by the New Covenant. We have already seen how the Holy Spirit dwelling in a believer has replaced the law as the new way of identifying God's holy people (Romans 8:9,14). We have also learned how God, as part of the new creation, has given us a new nature under the direction of the Holy Spirit who gives us the mind of Christ. Our first five points leading up to this sixth point is to show the superiority of the role the Holy Spirit plays in developing spiritual maturity in God's holy people over the ineffectiveness of the law written on tables of stone.

However, to these wonderful gifts, under the New Covenant we are given another wonderful gift and this is what we will term "instructions in holiness." Back in Romans 8:1-2 we learned that ***through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.*** This new law or covenant of the Spirit who gives life also includes within it, "instructions in holiness." But we need to make a very important distinction between these "instructions in holiness" of the New Covenant and the "laws of sin and death" of the Mosaic Covenant. As mentioned, the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant were designed and applied to those still ruled by the fallen nature of sin with the intention of bringing them to repentance and providing a certain amount of stability in a fallen world. In contrast, the "instructions in holiness" of the New Covenant are designed for believers with the new nature to aid them in developing the holy nature and character of God. Because of a lack of understanding of the inherent power of the New Covenant, many Christians tenaciously hang onto the laws of the Old Covenant, especially the Ten Commandments, either because they somehow believe we have to obey them in order to be saved, or there will be anarchy if they are rejected. Hopefully, we have already shown we are already accepted based on Christ's works, not ours; and our new nature is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who gives us the mind of Christ. Those genuinely guided by the Holy Spirit who have the mind of Christ will not allow their lives to descend into anarchy. So both of these fears are unwarranted.

But the goal is to conform us to the likeness of Jesus Christ, and again this is a process, a process the Holy Spirit will lead us through.

Colossians 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives. (Also Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 1:17).

The Holy Spirit has already started this process of leading us to spiritual maturity when He inspired the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The promise Jesus made to His disciples was He would send the same Holy Spirit that guided Him as a human to His followers (John 14:16-18). So by studying the life and teachings of Jesus Christ primarily in the four gospels we get a very clear picture into the mind of God, a picture that is so much more revealing than the Old Mosaic Covenant.

Remember, all the Jews had was the law to point them to God. In contrast, the New Covenant reveals the lawgiver, Jesus Christ (John 5:39-40). Jesus as both the mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6) and the one commissioned to reveal the Father to us (John 1:18; John 14:9) is the perfect example for believers to imitate as the Holy Spirit leads us in the process of making us in God's image and conforming us to the likeness of Jesus Christ. In addition to the life and teaching

of Jesus, the early New Testament writers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit have left us a rich resource that further reveals the mind of God. Foremost of these is the apostle Paul who understood this transition from the Old Covenant to the New better than anyone as he was reluctantly forced to make this painful transition by God's own hand (Galatians 1:13-16).

So when we read Paul's seemingly conflicting views about commandments and the law, we need to bear the following points in mind. We will pick this up next time.

Chapter 67 – Paul and the Law

The last three sessions have focused on six reasons why the New Covenant instituted with Christ's blood is so much more effective in producing the character and nature of God in His people than the Mosaic Covenant or Torah. The last of these six points introduced the concept of "instructions in holiness" to distinguish them from the Torah. These six points were to address the seeming confusion and conflict regarding the law in the age of the New Covenant. This confusion was magnified in those areas where there was a mixture of both Jew and Gentile converts in the congregation. The apostle Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, was the one who had to manage the transition from the Old to the New Covenant. However, there are times where Paul himself speaks positively about the law and times when he speaks negatively about it.

So when we read Paul's seemingly conflicting views about commandments and the law, we need to bear the following two points in mind. We will cover the first point in this chapter.

1) When Paul speaks about the commandments of God, he is not trying to slide the old law in through the back door.

Rather he is focusing on the need for believers to develop those characteristics that reflect the nature and character of their heavenly Father. To understand this principle better, we need to go back to the Torah. To start with, as we have mentioned before, we need to make an important distinction between the various aspects of the law that make up the Torah. There were the sacrificial and worship laws associated with the tabernacle. There were identity rituals like circumcision and food laws. And there were laws to guide the ethical and moral behaviour of the people like the Ten Commandments. As we saw earlier, many of the aspects of the Mosaic Covenant were future oriented as they pointed forward to the coming Messiah. So when the Messiah arrived, many of the aspects of the old law became redundant simply because they were fulfilled by Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:44). For instance, the sacrifices were no longer necessary as they were replaced by the one sacrifice that really mattered, the sacrifice of the Lamb of God (Hebrews 10:1-18).

Like the sacrifices, temple worship was transferred from a physical location to Jesus Christ.

John 2:19-21 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. 20 They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

The Aaronic priesthood was replaced by the high priesthood after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:11-28). The weekly, annual and festival celebrations too were made redundant when Christ came and *Tabernacled* with us, became our *Passover Lamb*, our *Unleavened Bread*, our *Atonement* and our spiritual *Sabbath Rest*.

Colossians 2:16-17 These aspects of the Law were simply shadows and pointed to the reality, Jesus Christ. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

The focus shifted from worshipping the shadows, sacrifices, rituals, holy days, to worshipping the reality, Jesus Christ. As we learned earlier, those aspects of the law, such as those relating to rituals such as circumcision, dietary and clothing laws that were to identify God's people were replaced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9,14).

So it's not as though the intent behind these laws are done away with, instead the spotlight and the object of our worship is shifted so that they rightly focus on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for their saving work. To use the Sabbath as an example, the focus has shifted from a physical day of rest (the shadow) to Jesus (the reality) who provides us with spiritual rest. New Covenant believers are still Sabbath worshipers in that they now focus on Jesus Christ rather than a 24-hour "shadow"

which as we just read was to point to the One who would give us true spiritual rest. New Covenant believers no longer needed a weekly reminder as to the source of their salvation as they would be reminded daily by the indwelling Holy Spirit of Jesus' saving work. Hard-hearted Israelites did not have this divine luxury; they only had a "shadow," a weekly reminder and didn't even know of Jesus Christ. The emphasis has moved from being Sabbath "keepers" to Sabbath "worshippers" as we worship the One who has provided us with spiritual rest, and this is something we should do every day. Emphasis is moved from "Remember the Sabbath day," to "Do this in remembrance of ME." It's important to emphasise the central aspect of Christianity is the worship of Jesus Christ, not the law.

However, there were also aspects of the Mosaic Covenant that were a reflection of the nature and character of God. Of course these characteristics of God are eternal and to render them obsolete would be sacrilegious. So when we consider the Mosaic Covenant, we need to make a distinction between those laws that were futuristic and ritualistic and those that are eternal and reflect the nature and character of God. It is this distinction we need to take into consideration when we read Paul's statements regarding the law such as 1 Corinthians 7:19.

1 Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.

Notice the distinction Paul makes between rituals and those commands that reflect the nature and character of God. External rituals like circumcision, dietary rules, holy locations, sacrifices and worship days served their intended purpose to constantly remind the Israelites with a fallen nature they were God's holy people. However, now with the introduction of the New Covenant where God literally inhabits His people through the Holy Spirit, these external rituals are no longer necessary ("**worship in spirit and in truth**" John 4:21-24). However, the commands revolving around God's nature and character that are eternal in nature remain. Paul's support of those aspects of the law which reflect the nature and character of God is unwavering as reflected in the second part of his statement in 1 Corinthians 7:19.

However, it's a totally different matter when it comes to the ritualistic aspects of the Mosaic Covenant in the age of the New Covenant. There is no question where he stands on these matters as reflected in the book of Galatians, where he openly condemns the apostle Peter for separating himself from the Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14), and wishing those Jews who insist on circumcising the Gentiles that they go ahead and emasculate themselves (Galatians 5:12). What we see here is a clear distinction between those aspects of the law where there is a continuation, and those that are discontinued in the age of the New Covenant. It is simply those matters that relate to the nature and character of God which are continued while the rest are discontinued.

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

This chapter in Romans clearly distinguishes between those matters which are "essential" (matters that relate to God's eternal nature and character, "**righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**") and those that are "nonessential," ("**eating and drinking**") rituals and temporal laws that pointed to the futuristic aspects of the New Covenant. To go back to 1 Corinthians 7:9 where Paul says, "**Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing**", you can continue to practice circumcision if you want, but don't attach any religious significance to it, nor try to impose it on others. It's the same principle with other Old Covenant rituals including the Sabbath day. You can observe it if you like, but don't attach any religious significance to it, nor try to impose it on others.

With the coming of the New Covenant, God through the works of both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit has instituted a method that is so much more effective in developing the nature and character of God in His people than what went before.

Hebrews 7:18-19 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless 19 (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

Christians need to trust this new system, which God, at great price to Himself has instituted, more than the ineffective Old Covenant. As mentioned, we have the Holy Spirit, the mind of Christ and the writings and teaching of the New Testament to guide us so that we too can begin to reflect the nature and character of our holy God. This is not to negate the important lessons and instructions on God's holiness we can learn from the examples recorded for us in the Old Testament as the New Covenant is a continuation of the old in that it is the womb for the birth of the New Covenant and helps reveal God's plan of salvation for all mankind. Paul says as much in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

A couple of things to notice here. First, the scriptures Paul was referring to were the Old Testament scriptures as the New Testament church only had a handful of letters mostly from Paul at this stage in its development. Second thing to notice is Paul's use of the term, "**instructions in righteousness**" or as we have termed it, "instructions in holiness." And what is the purpose of this "instruction"?

V.17 That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

As mentioned before, the development of spiritual maturity is not an option for believers; we are to develop the nature and character of our heavenly Father if we are to be effective in representing Him.

For those worried about the trashing of the Ten Commandments, we need to remember the instructions of the New Covenant upholds the same values that lay behind the Ten Commandment, that is, love for God and love for neighbour (Luke 10:25-27). Remember sin is much more damaging than simply breaking the law. It is much more than just an affront to our holy God as it threatens the whole concept of what God stands for, intimate relationships based on His love. Jesus does the same thing in His sermon on the mount. But notice He also goes much further and expands on those values because they reflect the nature and character of our holy God.

Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

Also, New Covenant Jews with an Old Covenant background had a distinct advantage in matters of holiness as is evident from Paul's message to the predominantly Gentile Corinthian church. Paul, as a converted Jew had a better handle on these matters of holiness than the pagan Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were.

A Jew under the Mosaic Covenant would have known about these issues as they are addressed in the Ten Commandments even though he may not have lived up to them very well because of his fallen nature. Mind you, the Jews had their own problems with the New Covenant, which Paul also had to address, namely issues such as "faith" and "grace."

So with the replacement of the Mosaic Covenant by the New Covenant we are not left without a structure or form to teach us the ways of God. Our new freedom in Christ is not license to live a life of self-indulgence. Central to this new structure is the source of life itself, the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

And as prophesied in Ezekiel 36:26, this new source of ethics is one that arises not from without, that is, the law, but from within, the heart of the individual under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And as Paul goes on to suggest in this section of Galatians, we are to renounce those anti-social behaviours of the flesh (Galatians 5:13-21) and instead replace them with the fruits of the Spirit which not only reveal the holy nature of God, but are community-building qualities (Galatians 5:22-25). And finally Paul goes on to suggest that the One we are to imitate under this new structure is the One who loved us, Jesus Christ.

Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

As far as our salvation is concerned, the Old Covenant law, mercifully, has been replaced by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:10-14), and the development of holiness in our lives is in the hands of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:4).

It's important to understand that when Paul speaks about the commandments of God, he is not trying to slide the old law in through the back door. Rather he is focusing on the need for believers to develop those characteristics that reflect the nature and character of their heavenly Father. And frankly when we think about it, the list of the fruits of the spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22 are a much better reflection of the nature and character of God than the Ten Commandments. One reveals sinful human behaviour while the other reveals divine characteristics. And as we learned, one is directed at the sinful nature, the other at the new godly nature.

To summarise this *first* point, when we consider Paul's statements regarding the law or commandments, we need to make a distinction between those laws that were futuristic and ritualistic and those that are eternal and reflect the nature and character of God. Whereas in the past, the focus of worship centred on shadows such as sacrifices, locations, days, foods, etc., now the emphasis is rightly focused on the One these rituals and laws pointed to, Jesus Christ. In addition, a New Covenant believer will strive to emulate the nature and character of their holy God and use those sections of scripture in both the Old and New Testaments which do this as their guide to develop God's holiness in their own lives.

Next time we look at the second consideration we need to understand when we read Paul's seemingly contradictory statements on the law.

Chapter 68 – An Appeal to the New Nature

Last time we focused on the first of two points we need to bear in mind when Paul speaks about commandments and the law in the age of the New Covenant. These points are to address the seeming confusion and conflict regarding the law in the age of the New Covenant. To summarize what we covered last time, when we consider Paul's statements regarding the law or commandments, we need to make a distinction between those laws that were futuristic and ritualistic and those that are eternal and reflect the nature and character of God. Whereas in the past, the focus of worship centered on shadows such as sacrifices, locations, days, foods etc., now the emphasis is rightly focused on the One these rituals and laws pointed to, Jesus Christ. In addition, a New Covenant believer will strive to emulate the nature and character of their holy God and use those sections of scripture in both the Old and New Testaments which do this as their guide to develop God's holiness in their own lives. Now we look at the second point we need to bear in mind when we read Paul's comments on the law.

2) The instructions of holiness of the New Covenant are directed at those led by the Spirit, endowed with the new nature and have the mind of Christ.

We saw back in 1 Timothy 1:9-10 how the old law was directed at those with the fallen nature.

1 Timothy 1:9-10 We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, 10 for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.

You will remember the law was introduced to reveal and magnify the vast contrast between a holy God and sinful mankind with the aim of bringing us to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:20). In contrast to the Torah, what we see with the New Covenant is what we have termed "instructions in holiness" that are directed at those with the new nature to guide them into the good works God has prepared for them (Ephesians 2:10). The death and resurrection of Jesus along with the coming of the Holy Spirit has brought about a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) with a brand new nature under the control of the "Spirit" rather than the "flesh" (Romans 8:5-17).

As mentioned earlier, the motivation to think and act as God's holy people with the new nature comes from a deep gratitude for what God has done for us rather than one of dutiful obedience. Instead of "fear" to motivate us, now through the Holy Spirit, the "love of Christ" compels us.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

But notice the dramatic change of orientation in the nature that takes place in a new creation believer who has crucified the flesh.

V.15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

No longer are we to live individualistic, self-centered lives according to the "flesh." Instead we are being transformed so we no longer live for ourselves, but for the One who died and rose for us.

From "Thou shalt not" to an "Appeal to the new nature"

Under the New Covenant we are dealing with Spirit-oriented believers with a totally new nature. As such, there is a dramatic shift in the way the "instructions in holiness" of the New Covenant are presented in contrast with the way the "commands of Torah" are presented. There is a decided shift in both the tone and language, and the expectations. No longer are the commands presented in the negative, "Thou shalt not" tone designed for the fallen nature, but rather as an appeal to the new nature to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We touched on this briefly last time when we asked the question, "Do the Ten Commandments or the list of the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5 better represent the nature and character of God?" We saw the Ten Commandments

reveal sinful human behavior while the fruits of the spirit reveal God's divine characteristics. The same characteristics God wants His new children to learn via the Holy Spirit. This change of tone is clearly evident in both the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the authors of the New Testament. Jesus' sermon on the mount is a good example of this change as Jesus outlines godly qualities that would soon be available to those led by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 5:1-11). We should take note of the change in tone and language in comparison to the Ten Commandments.

His parables on the Good Samaritan and the prodigal son are prime examples in which He contrasts the response of those living under the Torah and how one living with the mind of Christ would respond. In the case of the Samaritan, the priest and Levite put the temple regulations of the law ahead of human need. In the story of the prodigal, the older brother was more concerned with his entitlements than the redemption of his brother. Jesus' response to the handling of the woman caught in adultery contrasts the response of those living under the "law" who wanted to "condemn" and "stone" her with one living under "grace" and "forgiveness." In effect He is saying, "You are reflecting my nature when you act like the Good Samaritan, the prodigal father, when you forgive others, when you are poor in spirit, when you mourn, when you're meek, when you're merciful, etc." These are blessed events because they are divine qualities. It is only God living in us that can bring about such a dramatic change in our lives.

Community considerations before individual rights

Another change we notice with the New Covenant "instructions in holiness" is the consideration of one's individual actions on the greater church community and the world. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of love, fellowship and community, which means He is in the business of bringing people together. Emphasis once again is on preserving relationships. And just as Jesus became a sacrifice for us in order to restore the relationship between a holy God and sinful mankind, so at times He will ask those who are more spiritually mature to "bear with those who are weak" for the purpose of promoting unity in the community. Notice this example from 1 Corinthians 8 where Paul is addressing the subject of meat offered to idols.

1 Corinthians 8:9-11 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? 11 So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

Certain behaviors may be lawful under the New Covenant, but if it has a negative impact on the greater community the loving thing to do may be to sacrifice your individual right, eating meat offered to idols, for the greater good of not offending the weaker brother in the community. In other words, as in this case, unity of the body is more important than exercising one's individual freedom. Again we see those issues related to the nature and character of God, in this case not putting a stumbling block in the way of a believing brother are "essential" under the New Covenant.

Development of holiness is the expectation

Not only is there a change in the tone and language, but also in *the expectation* of the development of spiritual maturity in God's holy people. The expectation of the development of God's holiness in His people is not left to one's discretion (1 Corinthians 7:19). Paul said that the aim of his ministry was to bring about the "obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 1:5; Romans 16:26). The apostle John too, speaks about the need for believers to grow in spiritual maturity.

1 John 2:3-6 We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. 4 Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that

person. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

The expectation of both Jesus and the New Testament authors is for believers to develop spiritual maturity and to replicate the qualities of their heavenly Father in their lives.

The whole purpose of the New Covenant is to produce a holy people within whom God can come and dwell. And God has provided us with the means to achieve this goal. Christ through His incarnation and atonement has made us His holy people, but the granting of the Holy Spirit produces in His people the holiness Torah could not. These internal changes brought about by the gift of the Spirit are to be our guide in spiritual matters under the New Covenant now that it has superseded the Old Covenant. The life-giving Spirit applies the redemptive work of Christ to us as well as transforms us from within so that our actions now match who we are in Christ.

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. 12 It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

Something remarkable happens to our old way of thinking when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts and mind. It’s interesting to compare the expectations of those living under Torah with those living under the New Covenant. The best one could achieve under Torah and the fallen nature according to the book of Proverbs was “human wisdom.” By trial and error, by observation, and the dubious reliance on human discipline, one might possibly avoid some of the painful pitfalls of this life. But now under the New Covenant, with the new nature under the guidance of Christ, whom Paul calls, “**the power of God and the wisdom of God**” (1 Corinthians 1:24) we see wonderful new possibilities not available under the Old, namely the characteristics of God Himself.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

This is also why the “faith, hope and love” of 1 Corinthians 13 is presented as part of the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit as God, brings to our lives the very nature and character of the Godhead. God does not need a law to direct His actions. His actions flow from His being. It is this same nature in us through the Holy Spirit that now directs our thoughts and actions.

This is why Jesus in addressing His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion gives us His new commandment to go along with the introduction of the New Covenant.

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

We will look at this new command next time.

Chapter 69 – A New Command

We have been looking at two points to bear in mind when we read Paul's seemingly conflicting views about commandments and the law.

1) When Paul speaks about the commandments of God, he is not trying to slide the old law in through the back door.

Rather he is focusing on the need for believers to develop those characteristics that reflect the nature and character of their heavenly Father.

2) The instructions of holiness of the New Covenant are directed at those led by the Spirit, endowed with the new nature and have the mind of Christ.

Something remarkable happens to our old way of thinking when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts and mind. Now under the New Covenant, with the new nature under the guidance of Christ, whom Paul calls, *the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Corinthians 1:24) we see wonderful new possibilities not available under the Old, namely the characteristics of God Himself. ***Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.***

The Holy Spirit as God, brings to our lives the very nature and character of the Godhead. God does not need a law to direct His actions. His actions flow from His being. It is this same nature in us through the Holy Spirit that now directs our thoughts and actions.

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John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

This new commandment of Jesus was to reflect the dramatic change in mankind's circumstances brought about by Christ's saving work and the coming of the Holy Spirit. What was new about this command is that it went further than the two great commandments of the Torah, love for God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and love for neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). Love is still at the center of the command, but the degree of the depth of that love is what has changed. Whereas the old was to "love your neighbor as yourself," a somewhat limited and selfish motive, under this new command we are to love "as I have loved you." It is in effect saying, we move from a limited "self" love that comes from the human heart to a "divine" love that comes from the heart of God. Now to try to live up to the old command was bad enough, but to give this new command to one still governed by the fleshly fallen nature was to condemn them to a life of sheer hopelessness and despair.

The question is, "Are we Christians with the new nature going to be any more successful than them in fulfilling this new command?" And the obvious answer to this question is "no" as no one is going to match the vast love Jesus has for His children. However, it is also in Jesus that we are able to obey this impossible command. Remember, it is Jesus who has died for us (Romans 5:8); it is Jesus' living a perfect life so His righteousness could be attributed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21); we no longer live, but Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20); it is by His faith that we live (Galatians 2:20); who sits at the Father's right hand and intercedes for us as our heavenly representative (Romans 8:34). Just as our imperfect faith, prayers, worship go through the interceding hands of Jesus before they are presented to the Father, so does our imperfect obedience where they are wrapped in Jesus' perfect obedience. This is the blessing of living under the "grace" of the New Covenant.

Jesus didn't return to heaven because He needed a break after the ordeal of the cross. He is actively interceding for us. Mustard seed faith is okay! Moaning, unintelligible prayers are okay! Out of tune worship is okay! Imperfect obedience to this new command is okay! Muddling along is

okay. Jesus will, and already has, taken care of it! This is the reason the law of sin and death has lost its power to condemn us.

Romans 8:34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

We don't have to worry and beat ourselves up unnecessarily when we fall short or are condemned by others or by the "accuser of the brethren" (Revelation 12:10). The power to accuse or condemn has been taken away because we now live under grace rather than the law. *Unlike the law, which required perfection, no quantitative measure of perfection is placed on a Christian as Jesus has already achieved perfection on our behalf.* That frees us from the pressure to be perfect.

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

That "yoke of slavery" was the uncompromising demands of the law.

Having said that, we should not underestimate what we can achieve and has been achieved down through the centuries by Christians with the new nature willing to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. We may not be an Augustine, a Martin Luther, a John Calvin, a Billy Graham or Mother Teresa, but we can and should do something. These servants of God were successful not because they necessarily prayed or studied more than we do, but because they received incredible spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit and yielded to His leading. Under the empowering guidance of the Holy Spirit all sorts of wonderful opportunities become possible. These internal changes brought about by the gift of the Spirit are to be our guide in spiritual matters under the New Covenant now that it has superseded the Old Covenant law. But this guiding of the Spirit needs to work hand in hand with the other guiding aspect of the gospel, the Word. The Word of course is Jesus Christ, which takes us back to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, or as we have labeled them, "instructions in holiness." The Holy Spirit and the Word are the two guiding arms of the gospel. As these two arms are always in agreement it guards against the selfish tendency to mistake the leading of our own interests with that of the Holy Spirit. We grow in spiritual maturity by studying God's Word and listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is what leads to the development of a holy conscience in God's people (Hebrews 9:14).

However, with all this talk about instructions in holiness, don't for a moment think this contributes in any way to our salvation. Our salvation has been achieved solely on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, not on any contribution on our part, before or after our conversion (Galatians 2:15-16). So a Christian is free from the law as a way of securing our salvation (Romans 6:14; 7:4,6; 1 Corinthians 9:20). However, after the Spirit has brought us to conversion, there is an expectation on believers of leaving behind the crutch of the law and to submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit so that we begin to imitate the spiritual maturity of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

The law of Christ is none other than the eternal characteristics of God Himself. Paul distinguishes the difference between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ in 2 Corinthians 3. In fact, Paul refers to the Mosaic Law as a hindrance to the work of the Spirit as He reveals Jesus to us.

2 Corinthians 3:15-18 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Martin Luther had an interesting way of distinguishing between life under the law and life under the Spirit. He said, the law focuses on "our" works, while the Spirit focuses on the core of the gospel, "Christ's" works. The New Covenant especially in Paul's teachings, contrasts "the law and the works of the law" with the "grace of Christ and the gospel of salvation." These in turn lead either to "freedom in the Spirit" or "bondage under the law" (Galatians 4:24-26). It is this freedom in Christ that allows us to approach God in the joy and grace of the New Covenant in contrast to

the subservience of the Old Covenant. This is why the symbol of the Old Covenant, “Torah,” is replaced with the New Covenant symbol of “Christ.” As this verse indicates, the veil of Moses that covers our hearts, like the veil in the temple, needs to be rent asunder so we can experience the saving grace of Jesus Christ. What we also need to understand is, in those rare moments when we do imitate our Savior, it is not a result of our human efforts that has brought about this result, but rather the Spirit’s empowering work as He lives in us. We are simply weak human vessels through whom God manifests His grace and power. So again, the credit and glory goes to God.

Summarising Paul’s statements about the Law

Hopefully through all of this we have addressed some of the conflicting statements especially by Paul concerning the role of the law in the age of the New Covenant.

To summarise, when we consider Paul’s statements regarding the law or commandments, we need to make a distinction between those laws that were futuristic and ritualistic and those that are eternal and reflect the nature and character of God. It is simply those matters, which relate to the nature and character of God that are continued while the rest are discontinued. We also need to understand that under the covenant of grace we should regard those aspects of the New Testament usually labeled “commands,” rather as, “instructions in holiness” given to believers with a new nature in developing the holiness of their Savior rather than “laws” designed to condemn unbelievers with the fallen nature. When Jesus said ***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17)*** we can now see the full implication of what He meant.

First, He fulfilled the law in the sense He was the One, the Messiah, to whom those futuristic aspects of the law pointed, our Passover Lamb, our Atonement, our High Priest, etc.

Second, He fulfilled them in the sense He obeyed them perfectly so His righteousness could be imputed to all mankind (Romans 4:3-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Third, with His revolutionary teachings and parables He identified the true intent of the law which in reality was to see past the law to the nature and character of the One behind the law, the One who describes Himself as “love.”

The law only revealed a limited picture of God. It was not until Jesus joined us in our humanity that we got to see God face to face. God’s purpose in making us in His image is not simply to make us obedient to the law. Paul says he was “faultless” in obedience to the law, yet he went around persecuting the church (Philippians 3:4-6). So we can be obedient for very selfish motives, like securing God’s blessings or avoiding a curse (Deuteronomy 28).

God’s ultimate purpose is to teach us to love “as I have loved you” and to “live love willingly.” ***Romans 13:8-10 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.***

Each one of these commands mentioned here goes back to preserving relationships; ***“Love does no harm to a neighbor.”*** Allowing the Holy Spirit to develop the loving characteristics of God in us is the goal and purpose of our salvation. Through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit, God has paved the way for us to love and share in the life and love of the Godhead itself.

Chapter 70 – The Church – Faith

We have spent quite a bit of time looking at the role of the Holy Spirit in both bringing sinners to Christ and then developing God's holy nature in those believers so that they form the holy temple within which God can dwell. Now it is time to turn our focus on the role of the church.

Much has been written on the role and function of the church. The approach I would like to take as we look at the role of the body of Christ is through the five virtues of faith, hope, love, worship and service. When one becomes a believer, one does not glow in the dark, nor to our disappointment does "divine perfection" set in. However, with the coming of the Spirit the living God sets up home in our lives and imparts to us "divine infection." It is the role of the individual members of the church then to infect the world with divine life. This is a good disease to have. So the church as the body of Christ needs to be people of faith, people of hope, people of love, people of worship, and people of service.

The first sin was a lack of faith

This chapter looks at the subject of faith. Faith is something that goes back to the early creation event itself. The first sin was so much more than a lack of obedience to a simple command of God. In its ultimate sense, it was a lack of faith. We saw in our earlier sessions on the creation of man that God in creating Adam and Eve exercised two exclusive and comprehensive claims on them as their Creator and Father (Ephesians 3:15). But remarkably, as God's purpose was to create "man in His image" (humans who would think and act only as God would by their own volition), He created them with the ability to reason, to question and to choose, which opened the possibility of them disagreeing with, or worse, disobeying their Creator and Father. In other words, they were given the prerogative to decide for themselves whether they could *trust* their Creator and Father on how they should think and act as His children, or they could *trust* themselves and be their own gods. As we saw this independence also opened the door to the possibility of them creating "evil." This was a prerogative God granted them as key to His purpose in creating mankind was to have them share in the very relationship which already existed in the Godhead itself, a love shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But the decision was for them to make, it would not be forced on them, as then it would not be of "love."

Well, we know what happened. Instead of putting their faith and trust in their Creator and Father, they exercised their God-given prerogative and chose instead to trust themselves. Jesus, in later telling the parable of the prodigal son, knew from firsthand experience what it meant to be told, "Stay out of my life and give me the inheritance which I deserve" (Luke 15:11-13). It's interesting while rejecting his father's claim on him, the prodigal was happy to accept that claim when it came to his inheritance. Modern society does much the same thing when they happily push God out of their lives but then blame Him when disaster strikes.

What we witness here on the part of Adam and Eve, is more than a moral failure, it's really a rebellion against the One who had a comprehensive claim on their lives. It was the wilful refusal to acknowledge the Creator's claim on them as both their Maker and Father. This sadly is the mindset of humanity ever since and the one Paul categorizes in Romans 1:18-3:20.

Romans 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

And as the root of the human tree called Adam has been poisoned by cutting itself off from the source of true life, humans in their rebellion became dehumanised and perpetuated this lie that we are free agents (our own gods) and answerable only to ourselves (Romans 5:12). All of us are born into this predicament of sin and ultimately shaped by society with no way of extricating ourselves (Romans 8:7-8).

Jesus, our faithful response to the Father

Fortunately, humanity has a God who does not abandon His comprehensive claims on us despite our rebellion. Our Creator does not give up on His creation. Our Father does not give up on His children. We may disown Him, but He does not disown us (Luke 15:11-32; Romans 8:31-39). This is testimony to God's faithfulness to us in contrast to our lack of faith in Him. So what does He do? He sets in motion His plan to add another comprehensive claim on His rebellious children, this time as their Savior. You see, faith is more than just belief; it's a living response of trust, obedience and loyalty to the Creator who has a claim upon one's existence. In addition, there has to be a willingness on the part of the individual to respond to that claim. As fallen humanity was now both unwilling and unable to put their trust, obedience and loyalty in their Maker and Father because of sin, then He would do it for them. And He would do it, not from the safety and security of heaven, rather He would descend and enter into the fallen and rebellious stronghold of His wayward children and do it for them from within their very ranks (Philippians 2:6-8). This of course is the miracle of the incarnation, where Jesus takes on our humanity in order to respond faithfully on behalf of sinful mankind to His Father's claim on them.

We need to view the whole life and activity of Jesus from the cradle to the grave as constituting our vicarious human response to the love of God. His whole life is our response to God. His crucifixion becomes our crucifixion; His resurrection becomes our resurrection; His baptism becomes our baptism, His faith becomes our faith, His prayers become our prayers, His worship becomes our worship. That's why He was born human, why he was baptized, why He was born of the Spirit, why He was crucified and why he rose from the dead – in other words He lived the perfect life you and I could not live on our behalf. He became our perfect response to God's love. We are not accepted by the Father on the life we live, but on the perfect life Jesus lived. Jesus absorbs yours and my imperfect life into his own perfect life.

Romans 6:3-6 (NKJV) 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

And as we have seen through this series, Jesus, on behalf of all humanity, responds faithfully through His trust, obedience and loyalty to the claim God has on His creation. Jesus is the true person of faith. By doing so, He reveals what our humanity should look like and on what basis we are accepted back into relationship with God. We are not accepted back on our legal performance to the law, but rather on the childlike obedience of Jesus Christ. Our obedience to the Word of God is simply our response from moving from a condition of distrust to one of trust. We now accept that God as our Creator, Father and Savior knows what's best for us, and therefore will respond in a positive manner in obedience to His Word.

So in a corporate or general sense as with Jesus' sacrifice for all mankind's sins, all humanity benefits from Jesus' faithful response to God on their behalf. But again, like Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, one has to acknowledge what Christ has achieved on our behalf. This is where faith moves from the corporate or general sense and becomes subjective or personal. It is also where saving faith comes in. It's a simple acknowledgement of what Christ has achieved on our behalf not only in paying the death penalty for our sins on the cross, but also acknowledging His faithful response to the Father's claim on His children. Believers now live their lives not on their feeble faithfulness or obedience, but rather on the faithful trust, obedience and loyalty of Jesus Christ. He takes our weak faith and transforms it into real faith.

Relying on Jesus' strong grasp of our hands

So what does all this mean in practical terms for faith? When we face the problems and difficulties of this life do we really think our faith is going to move mountains? No, that kind of achievement is only accomplished by the faith of Jesus Christ – only divinity can move mountains. A number of years ago when I was pastoring in the southern part of Australia, we had a church bonfire party. We had acreage and ran a few cows on our hobby farm. We also leased the property next door that had a stream running through it with willow trees lining the stream. I was slowly clearing the property of the fallen willow branches and amassed five huge bonfires each about twelve feet high. We invited the congregation over for “Sloppy Joes” and a bonfire night.

We all know kids love fires and so it was with a great deal of anticipation that we lit the first fire. Fires, as they usually do start slowly, but eventually they roar into life. The flames started leaping about thirty feet into the air and as they did so the kids started moving further backwards out of respect for the flames and with probably a little bit of apprehension. As the fire roared into life, one of the younger girls, Joanna, worked her way over to me and took me by the hand. As the flames leaped higher and higher she quietly said to me, “Gary, do you think we ought to call the fire department?” It was one of those special moments in life you cherish. I reassured her everything was all right and gripped her hand a little tighter.

The question is, “Was Joanna relying on her feeble grasp of my hand or my strong grasp of her hand for reassurance?” Of course she was relying on my strong grasp for reassurance. This is the picture of faithfulness God wants us to adopt in our lives. In matters of faith, our task is to take the hand of Jesus Christ like Joanna took my hand. Just as Joanna looked to me for reassurance, so we look to Jesus' faithfulness for our reassurance. It is not our human attempts to conjure up enough faith that is going to move mountains. It is Jesus taking those feeble attempts in his hand, wrapping them in his perfect faithfulness and presenting them to the Father on our behalf.

The prayer of faith

This knowledge should take enormous pressure off us as believers. I feel so sorry for Christian parents who are erroneously told that their terminally ill child would have lived if only they would have exercised more faith. If only they would have been told it is not their faith they are relying on, but rather Jesus Christ's faith. Our job is to take our feeble petitions and place them in Christ's perfect hands of faith. Jesus steps in to the actual situations where we are asked to have faith in God and He acts from within the depths of our unfaithfulness and provides us with His faithfulness. The apostle Peter is a good example of this. Peter arrogantly and foolishly assured Jesus he would never deny Him. Jesus responded by informing Peter he would deny Him three times. But Jesus added, ***“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:32)***. Now of course it did fail because Peter was relying on self. But through that fearful failure his faith was restored and strengthened through the unswerving faithfulness of Jesus Christ and Peter went on to become the leader of the New Testament church.

And like Peter, we too may let God down, but He won't let go of our hands. That's His promise. ***John 10:27-30 (NKJV) 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”***

Jesus takes our weak and faltering faith and holds it securely in His hand. And sooner or later we recognize it is not our feeble grasp of Jesus' hand that matters but his strong grasp of our hand. Faith is placing our petitions in Christ's hands who then wraps them in His perfect faithfulness before presenting them to the Father.

And this is the hard part, just as it was for Jesus in the garden, leaving the outcome in the Father's capable hands. Part of faith trusts our Creator, Father, and Savior with the outcome. We know God can move mountains, we know God can heal a terminally ill child, but we also know He does not always give us the answer we want, just as He did not give Jesus the answer He asked for in the garden. Therefore, we have to conclude as we learned earlier in the case of Job; He has more important reasons for not giving us the answers we want. Why? Because sometimes our spiritual well-being and development is more important to God than our physical well-being. *"Keep praying, but be thankful that God's answers are wiser than your prayers!"* -- William Culbertson. What for instance, would have been the consequences of God the Father saying "yes" to Jesus' human request in the garden?

Mark 14:35-36 (NKJV) 35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him.

Notice the four steps of Jesus' prayer of faith.

1) He takes the Father's hand like Joanna took my hand.

V.36 And He said, "Abba, Father."

"Dad, I need some reassurance."

2) He acknowledged God could move mountains.

"all things are possible for You."

3) He then lets God know what His petition is.

"Take this cup away from Me."

"We want our terminally ill child to live."

4) He leaves the outcome in the Father's capable hands.

"nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."

Jesus bent His human self-will into alignment with the Father's will and went on to face the ordeal of the cross.

Faith for a Christian is not this big complicated subject we seem to have made it. It is a simple matter of taking the reassuring hand of Jesus Christ and asking Him to wrap our feeble petitions in His perfect faithfulness and present them to the Father. Then trusting God with the answer He gives us. This is why the KJV is perhaps the only translation which correctly translates Galatians 2:20.

Galatians 2:20 (KJV) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, (i.e., the faithfulness of the Son of God) **who loved me, and gave himself for me.**

Nearly all other translations, translate it, and this is from the NIV, **"The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God."** This implies we are living by *our* faith, rather than Christ's faith on our behalf.

It is Jesus' faithful response to God which puts people in right relationship with God, not a Christian's faith in Jesus. This is also why our mustard seed faith can be so powerful as it is really Christ's faith (Matthew 17:20). It also provides us with a right perspective on unanswered prayer. It is not because of a lack of faith on our part when our prayers are not answered the way we would like, as we are not living by our faith but that of Jesus Christ. Therefore there has to be a higher spiritual reason why God does not always answer our prayers, as we would hope. This is why we can join with the father of the boy brought to Jesus when he said, **"I do believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).** It is not our imperfect faith we live by, but rather on Jesus' perfect faithful response to the Father.

God's three comprehensive claims on His Creation

We now see how all mankind has been implicated in not only the righteous life Christ has lived for us, and the sacrificial death He has died for us, but now we also see we live by His faithful response to the Father on our behalf. Now to God's other comprehensive claims on us of being our Creator and Father, He can now add another title, that of Savior. And this is where faith and repentance go

hand in hand because repentance is an acknowledgement of our defiant rejection of the claims our God has on us. Even though the “sinner’s prayer” is a very important part of repentance, it also involves an acknowledgement of our rejection of God’s claim on us and a commitment on our part to now live, to the best of our ability with the help of the Holy Spirit, to allow Christ to express His faith through us so that we now become the faithful, obedient and loyal children of our Maker, our Father and our Savior. It is recognition of these three claims on our lives that a believer falls down in worship and acknowledges God is “Lord of all.”

There will come a time when all humanity will acknowledge this truth.

Romans 14:11 It is written: “As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.”

We enter into this new life in Christ through the rite of baptism. This is the believer’s response and acknowledgement of the prior work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in bringing them back into a faithful relationship. Baptism, with its rich metaphors of death and resurrection, re-enacts for the believer the deep association we have with Christ as we have died with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him to live by the faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20; Galatians 3:27).

From Law to Faith

But we now need to go back to Galatians 2:16 as we need to understand another important change involving faith under the terms of the New Covenant. In an earlier session we learned because of Adam and Eve’s sin, God’s relationship with humanity would now have to be conducted purely on a legal basis, hence the introduction of the law. It is under this legal system that all fallen mankind stands accountable and under which we all are judged and condemned because it points out the vast difference between God’s holiness and mankind’s sinfulness. But now, because of Christ’s faithfulness, loyalty and obedience on humanity’s behalf, this legal arrangement has been abolished. This whole new basis in restoring a right relationship with God is revealed by Paul in Galatians 2:16. Remember the context here; there were those who wanted the Galatians to be initiated into Judaism by becoming circumcised, under the old legal arrangement.

Galatians 2:16 (KJV) Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we (Jews) have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

It is Jesus’ faith in God that puts people in right relationship with God, not the works of the law. Again, we have to view this from the perspective of Paul moving his churches from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Under the Mosaic Covenant, righteousness was to be achieved through perfect obedience to the law. We saw how successful this was for the fallen human race. Paul’s argument here goes back to what we just talked about, the repentant believer acknowledging his sin, renouncing his rebellion and faithlessness in God and accepting the faith and righteousness offered by His risen Savior.

Faith is the defining characteristic that unites all Christians

Paul’s question to the Galatians was, “Are you going to put your trust in perfect obedience to the law to establish a right relationship with God or in the perfect faith of Jesus Christ?” And to prove to the Galatians the superiority of “faith” over the “works of the law,” Paul goes right back past Moses (representing the law) and uses the example of Abraham (representing faith).

Genesis 15:6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Remember, faith is more than just belief; it’s a living response of trust, obedience and loyalty to the Creator who has a claim upon one’s existence and a willingness to respond to that claim. Trust is the fundamental issue at stake, not dutiful obedience. Abraham was accepted into a right relationship with God through faith as this was prior to his circumcision and prior to the introduction of the law through Moses. God declared Abraham righteous while he was still a Gentile. Abraham only became a Jew once he was circumcised (Circumcision is the initiating rite

into Judaism). The lineage of faith therefore is not traced back through Moses and the law but through Abraham. This is why Abraham is called the father of the faithful both of the Jews and the Gentiles. This is Paul's argument in Romans 4.

Romans 4:16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

God does not show favouritism, which is what He would be doing if righteousness were only available through the law as the law was given only to the Jews (Romans 2:11). The law was introduced as a temporary measure and a schoolmarm until the true source of life became available (Galatians 3:23-25).

What we see through the New Covenant is the expansion of God's gift of salvation to all people, Jew and Gentile alike based on faith. And as acceptance is now based on faith alone, all humans have the potential of being included.

Romans 3:21-23 (KJV) But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

And just to reinforce whose faith it is by which we are accepted and made right with God, it is ***“by faith of Jesus Christ.”*** But we need to understand the impact Christ's faithfulness has had in relation to God's relationship with humanity. No longer is it conducted on the legal basis of the law, but rather through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

In relation to the church, the faith of Jesus Christ is the defining characteristic that unites all Christians in the body of Christ. It was the law that united Israel, but the uniting characteristic of the New Covenant people that is available to both Jew and Gentile is the faith of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:26-29 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

All humans have the potential to respond to God and be included on the basis of faith. When the Apostles Creed declares the church to be the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church we begin to see the one characteristic that binds every Christian together, the saving faith of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NKJV) ...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It is His faith that makes us acceptable to the Father, it is His righteousness which makes us holy, and as we will go on to show, it is Christ working through the Holy Spirit that makes the church catholic as it goes out to all peoples. Next time we look at the subject of “hope” in relation to the role of the church.

Chapter 71 – The Church –Hope

Our focus is on the role and function of the church. We are looking at the role of the church through five virtues, faith, hope and love as expressed in 1 Corinthians 13, and worship and service. Last chapter we looked at the subject of faith. This time our focus is on the subject of hope.

The Culmination of God's Plan

I want you for the moment to imagine a world where there is no death, funeral homes, or cemeteries. A world where there is no sickness, disease or mental illness, and therefore no healthcare facilities. A world where there is no crime, accidents, or acts of nature to threaten our lives. A world where there is no sin, wickedness or evil of any kind. A world where each individual has everything he needs to live comfortably and has a purpose for his existence. In fact, there doesn't seem to be anything to worry or stress about at all. In addition, loved ones surround him, even the ones who were hard to live with in the past, except now they seem to have improved remarkably, and are even a joy to be around. Everyone has a radiance and joy about them and a boundless energy which is just as well as there is no night-time here to rest and recuperate.

All this is great, but the most remarkable thing about this world is the relationship each person has with the One who has made this world possible. People are naturally drawn to Him and He mingles effortlessly with all and has a remarkable way of putting everyone at ease. Yet there is something special and unique about Him even though He is human just like us. In truth, He is Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, the God who became human so we could become like Him. Becoming like Him means we are no longer susceptible to temptation or sin. Our new nature ensures all our thoughts and motives are holy and pure and a divine boundless love embraces all living creatures. The highlight of each "day" is when Jesus is joined by the heavenly host along with its new additions, in worship of the Father. Time is suspended and spirits soar to unimaginable heights as the heavenly chorus bursts forth in worship of the Father.

This world we have just imagined is the culmination of God's plan to make us in His image. After many millennia of sin, pain, suffering and death, He is at last sharing the life and love that exists in the Godhead itself with a forgiven and newly created humanity. This is the reason for which we were created, to share intimate communion with God and one another. Yet we are told by scripture that even the most fertile human imagination cannot come close to conceiving what God has in store for those who will inhabit the heavenly realm of the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV) "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

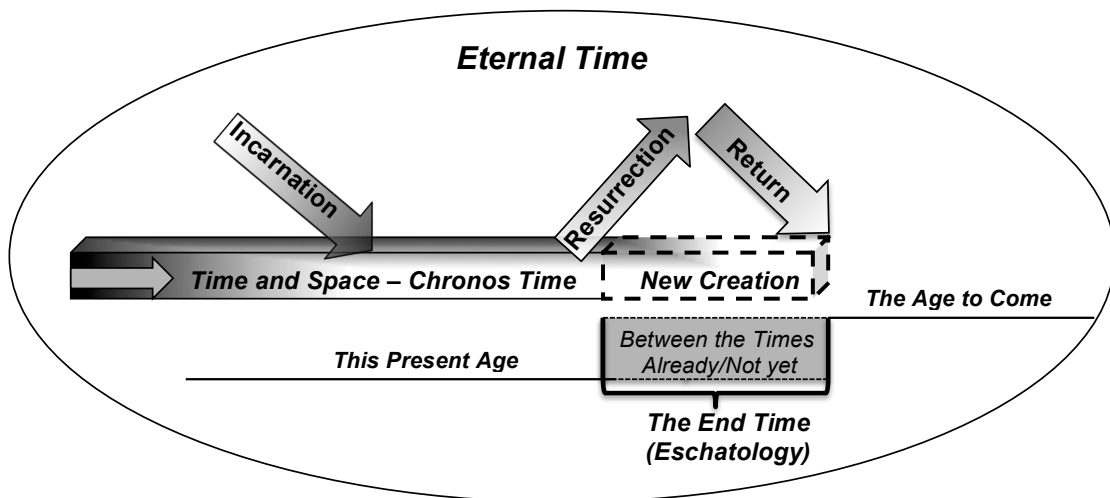
This is the future reality Christians hope for, long for and pray for. Hope is also a quality that separates Christians from non-Christians, as they know that despite how desperate world conditions become, a better world is coming for all humanity.

"Hope" is closely related to "faith" as we read in Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

We express hope in this future we just described even though it is not something tangible we can comprehend with our seven senses. Rather, "hope" is something we comprehend through our new spiritual sense of "faith." What is remarkable about both faith and hope is, both will pass away when this future is realised, as there will no longer be a need for either of them. What will persevere for all eternity is "love," humans communing with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and with one another. Which means for the present discussion, "hope" belongs to this present age. By this present age, we mean the time between Jesus' resurrection and His promised return or as

scripture classifies it, “the end time” or as it has come to be known in theological circles, “eschatology,” the study of final things. If we go back to our figure, it looks something like this. **The End Time. (See figure below).**



This whole period is classified as the “end time.” Like faith, hope is a quality Christians are to display during this period between the resurrection and the promised return of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit heralded the beginning of the age of the New Creation which would culminate with the second coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the saints to glory. But it also heralded the beginning of the end of the present age and as the graphic shows, there is this overlapping period of time between this present age and the age to come that has been labelled “between the times.” This is the church age where believers live in this “between the times” period where the future kingdom had “already” begun, but has “not yet” been fully realised.

A defeated but still active enemy

This overlapping period creates a tension because on the one hand, we have scriptures that take very seriously Christ’s victory over sin, death and evil, yet other scriptures that predict the powers of sin, death and evil will be with us until the world ends such as the following verses.

Matthew 24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.

Matthew 24: 22 “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

On the other hand we have scriptures that indeed confirm Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords and did triumph over sin and evil when He rose from the grave.

Ephesians 1:21-22 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

Colossians 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

So how are we to reconcile Christ’s lordship over the “***powers and authorities***” with what we see on the evening news each night? Well the reality is, both positions are correct. Christ has indeed achieved victory over His enemies through His life, death and resurrection. Yet it is also obvious sin, suffering, evil and death is still part of this present world’s existence.

The solution is best explained by an example from WWII. The decisive battle of WWII was the Allies’ landing at Normandy on D-day. This was the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany despite their stubborn resistance for another year. The Allies had no option but to battle on until the final victory was won. In the same way, the decisive battle of the ages was won when Jesus rose from

the dead after defeating and overcoming the combined evil powers of both the spiritual and physical realms. Yet despite the best intentions of men of goodwill down through the ages, evil is so powerful that only Christ at the end of history will finally subdue it. This “between the times” period is like a twilight zone where the light of Christ still battles against the powers of darkness. Yet despite the evil we see in the world around us, “hope” is believing this twilight period is the dawn before the new day when light overcomes darkness rather than the twilight at the end of the day when the darkness overcomes the light. This is not a futile hope, rather it is based on the historical fact Christ has already triumphed over evil. Therefore the final victory is guaranteed although it will not occur until Christ’s second coming in power and glory. Meanwhile living with this tension between light and darkness need not be negative as believers can enjoy Christ’s “shalom peace” within the turmoil.

Meanwhile, like the Allies after D-day, Christians are called to be the light of Christ in this dark world (Matthew 5:14-16). Of course Christ has the power to end evil anytime He chooses, but just as He opposed evil in His lifetime as a despised, rejected and crucified Lord rather than an all-conquering victorious Lord, there is purpose in allowing evil to continue until His final all-conquering return.

Matthew 13:27-30 *“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’28 “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’29 “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest.*

Any farmer knows it is bad advice to allow the weeds to grow unchecked among their crops. So there has to be a reason for Jesus to give this advice. And part of the reason has to do with the critical role the church is to play during this “between the times” period. Paul spells out this role in 2 Corinthians 5.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

However, as they are part of this new creation together with the accompanying knowledge of the kingdom of God, Christians are to be Christ’s representatives of the age to come in this already/not yet time frame. This is important to understand, as the future that we hope for has to be projected back into this present dying age.

V.18-20 *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

Christians are enlisted into God’s work of “reconciling the world to himself in Christ.”

Hope is both for Believers and Unbelievers

This vision of the future kingdom of heaven should not only produce *hope* for believers, but also *hope* for unbelievers. They need to be shown there is an alternative to the evil, dying, and sinful world they experience around them. Contrast for a moment an atheist’s view of the world with that of a Christian’s perspective of hope. From an atheist’s point of view, there is no higher purpose to this life; any chance of an improved future for humanity is in the hands of fallible human beings, and he is frustrated by his lack of ability to do anything about it. No wonder depression and frustration is on the rise in an increasing godless world. In contrast, a Christian whose hope is based on God’s ability to guarantee humanity’s future, can remain positive regardless of how desperate conditions look. A Christian’s hope is not a passive hope that only looks to the future. It is an active hope that impacts this world in this “between the times” period. We can’t sit around wringing our hands in despair at the evil we see in the world passively waiting for God to do something about it. Jesus expects us to embrace His task of “**reconciling the world to himself**” and to go forth and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). The world needs to hear the

message that since that resurrection morning, the forces of evil are fighting a losing battle as the decisive battle of the ages has already been won and as such they have been implicated in the good news of the gospel. The church then, is an end-time community whose members live in the present as those stamped with eternity.

Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, our Hope

The church as Christ's ambassadors has a responsibility to share the same knowledge on which our own hope for the future is based. This hope is not based on some flimsy superstitious fable dreamed up by mere men. It all goes back to those momentous events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. These are the factors on which both our faith and hope rest. This was the decisive turning point of the ages when the kingdom of God invaded the old age of time and space. It was here on the cross that the final judgment of mankind telescoped itself into the present and defeated the strangulating hold the powers of evil and darkness exercised over humanity.

Colossians 2:14-16 having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

The legal charges confirming our guilt were born by our Savior on the cross. His sacrifice on our behalf justified us so we could be forgiven and reconciled to God. We are guaranteed the hope that we are no longer under condemnation and are accepted on the basis of Christ's sacrifice and His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). Three days later that final enemy death too was defeated when God raised Jesus from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:20-22 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

We are guaranteed the hope that just as Jesus was raised from the dead to eternal life, so we too will be given eternal life. Our hope is firmly based on the One who is our hope, Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.

And just in case we needed further proof to guarantee what Christ had already achieved on our behalf, God sent the Holy Spirit to confirm these truths on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit brought the power of the new age to the church so it could live the life of the future in this present age. But it also provided the church with the assurance of the final consummation to future glory as it lives in this already/not yet period. Notice the already/not yet language used in these verses.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

We see the "***Spirit in our hearts***" confirming what has been achieved on our behalf by Jesus Christ in two ways. *First*, we see Him confirming our adoption as sons and heirs by placing God's seal of ownership on us (Ephesians 1:4-6). *Second*, this deposit or down payment of the Spirit is our guarantee that we will receive the promised inheritance that has been achieved on our behalf in Christ. So God's Holy Spirit seals us as God's children, and is the deposit guaranteeing our future inheritance.

But the Spirit's presence also guarantees our resurrection to glory.

Romans 8:23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

Through the Spirit of Christ, the firstfruit (1 Corinthians 15:20) living in us, we will share in His resurrection to glory. Jesus was the sheaf of grain waved before the Father on that Easter morning

which guarantees our future harvest pictured by the day of Pentecost (Leviticus 23:9-16). When we look at these two aspects together, first Christ's saving work on our behalf, and second, the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit within us, our future is guaranteed.

Even though we live in this twilight before the dawn period, we have tasted of the life to come and have been stamped with eternity. As Paul tells the Romans, this future hope needs to "overflow" to those living without hope in a dark and dying world.

Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We can therefore be confident this dark, evil, twilight period before the dawn will be banished forever by the dazzling light of the returning glorified Jesus Christ.

Chapter 72 – The Church – Love

Our focus is on the role and function of the church. We are looking at the role of the church through five virtues, faith, hope and love as expressed in 1 Corinthians 13, and worship and service. Last session we looked at the subject of hope. This time our focus is on the subject of love.

There is the old expression, “Love makes the world go round.” Just imagine what the world would be like without the emotion of love in its various forms. No budding romances for young lovers, no parents cuddling their offspring, no grandparents bragging about their grandchildren, etc. But love doesn’t just make the world go round; it is the very lifeblood of the Triune God.

1 John 4:7-8 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Notice the source and origin of love is God. We see this process in the Godhead itself as the Holy Spirit that is the divine love of the Father and the Son flowing from the Father to the Son and is returned in the Son’s adoration of the Father.

And astoundingly, way back before time existed, this God whose very nature of love is so generous and overflowing, decided to lavish the very existence that permeates the Trinity on others. As we learned at the beginning of this series, this amazing four-dimensional world in which we live has been carefully created to bring about God’s purpose of sharing with humanity that one most important characteristic which makes God, God, and that is divine love. I have used the word “divine love” purposely so as to distinguish it from the distorted meaning the word love conjures up in today’s world. The secular world has distorted the meaning of the word love to revolve around the narrow dimension of one’s feelings towards another; usually it is in relation to one’s own self-gratification or benefit. Not only do we see the media’s distorted image of love presented each night on TV, but also the daily diet of horrendous news stories about humanity’s total lack of love and disregard for human life. It used to be car accidents and house fires that made the news. Now it is domestic violence, predator priests, mass shootings, beheadings, car bombs, etc. Jesus predicted a time when our societies would become so self-centred and self-absorbed we would become callous to the needs of others.

Matthew 24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.

So it’s important for believers to guard against this growing tendency in our societies.

When we look at the subject of “love,” we need to view it from the perspective of the One who is the source of divine love and describes Himself as such. It was God the Father who initiated His purpose of creating a community of people, His children, who would share in the life and love of the Godhead. The Father also provided the means by which there was a direct connection between the Trinity and humanity so we could share in the love of the Godhead. When scripture, in Matthew 1:20, says Jesus “***was conceived by the Holy Spirit,***” what it is saying is this same self-emptying love that is the lifeblood of the Trinity now flows into humanity through the incarnate Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ becomes the pathway through which the eternal life of God becomes available to humans. The apostle John expressed the magnitude of this honour the Lord God Almighty in His love has lavished on mere men.

1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

So let’s step back for a moment and look at the tangible ways God has lavished His divine love on us. We do this with the intention of learning to imitate the love of God. Hopefully one of the things we have learned through this series is the ends to which our loving God has gone to “make

us children in His image” so we can join Him in sharing His divine love. The supreme act of divine love towards humanity is God’s gift, His only Son, Jesus Christ.

1 John 4:9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

If we want to know what divine love is like, we need to examine God’s gift to us, Jesus Christ. It is quite remarkable when we address what Christ’s work has done in respect to saving mankind from his fallen condition. As we have seen through this series, Jesus through His Incarnation and Atonement has achieved the following:

- ◆ He has *redeemed* us from our enslavement to sin.
- ◆ He has *justified* us in relation to God’s holy law.
- ◆ He has established peace through *reconciliation* by moving us from being God’s enemies to God’s children.
- ◆ He has *birthed us from above* and adopted us as His children.
- ◆ And one day He will *glorify* us with a new spiritual body.

And He achieved all of this not from the safety and security of heaven, but from within the midst of His hateful and rebellious children. What we see revealed in Jesus Christ is an uninhibited display of the divine love of God, it’s as though God is opening up His heart to us revealing His innermost longing to be in relationship with us.

God’s use of Power

As we have spent quite a bit of time already in this series focusing on these issues, I would like to focus on another very important aspect of godly love that is crucial to understanding the love that emanates from the Trinity. What gives the love that proceeds from the Trinity such powerful influence is the way they wield their power. One of God’s descriptions is, Lord God Almighty because ultimate power rests with Him. And although this is true, how God exercises His awesome power is totally contrary to the way we humans view and use the concept. Understanding this difference in the use of and the type of power used is crucial if we are to become loving citizens of the kingdom of God. Power in human terms is something to be exercised over others usually to the benefit of the one exercising the power. We see it used in every aspect of daily life to control, to manipulate, and to dominate and subdue others.

Matthew 20:25 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.”

Human nature has not changed with the passing of time. Men and women still strive to become president, prime minister, dictator, the boss, etc., because of the power and prestige associated with the role. Yet when we look into the brokenness of this world, much of it is the result of this misguided, perverted use of power.

Sometimes we as Christians can also be caught up in this corrupt use of power. Jesus had to chastise His disciples when they wanted to “call fire down from heaven” to destroy a village simply because they didn’t provide an appropriate welcome to Jesus (Luke 9:53-55). We modern Christians read the book of Revelation from the vantage point of being the “good guys” who eventually see the wicked finally getting their much-deserved comeuppance. Yet if we are to define the use of God’s power through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we may have to re-evaluate our thinking.

Matthew 20:26-28 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Contrary to the conquering Messiah the Jews expected, what we see instead is the self-surrender of Almighty God to a baying rabble under the control of the evil principalities and powers of the cosmos. Instead of exercising His legitimate right to use His power to retaliate against these evil

forces, we see at work a different type of power, a willingness to suffer injustice for the sake of another, in this case the future of the whole human race. The apostle Paul highlights how the world would regard this “crazy” use of power when speaking to the Corinthian church about Christ’s crucifixion.

1 Corinthians 1:22-23 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

The Jews were looking for an all-conquering Messiah who would use overwhelming miraculous force to set them free from Roman oppression. The Greeks on the other hand prided themselves on their supposedly superior human wisdom and logic to persuade their opponents of their superior culture. We see Paul’s response to these two claims in v.25.

1 Corinthians 1:25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

It is this attitude of sacrifice by Jesus that gives force to God’s all-conquering power of love. As the crowd walked away from that fateful scene, one has to wonder how many others besides the centurion and the repentant thief on the cross, recognised they had witnessed something otherworldly in the crucifixion of this man Jesus. Why had this man who had healed the sick and raised the dead not called on the legions of angels He had at His disposal to end this terrible injustice? (Matthew 26:53). But it is precisely this unique demonstration of the powerful love of God that causes even the most recalcitrant sinner reason to pause. Without Jesus, the self emptying, other-centred God, lovingly putting His own life on the line for the sake of sinful humanity, there would be no John 3:16. A demonstration and use of worldly power would never have achieved this scenario where one is forced to pause and consider what God has done on his behalf. John acknowledges this in the very next verse.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

The unleashing of the world’s concept of brute power on sinful humanity may force every knee to bow. But we serve a God who would prefer they kneel because of the conquering power of love rather than all-conquering brute force. The usual reaction to brute force is to mount your own vicious response. Nor would it cause them to pause in awe of God’s selfless design to sacrifice His own Son on their behalf. Humanity has been set up by the love of God to respond positively to His love. All, whether they want to acknowledge it or not, have been touched by God’s unorthodox love. The onus is now on them to choose how they respond to God’s gracious act of love on their behalf.

Christians are to replicate Christ’s Love

We can’t leave the subject there though, as children of the Kingdom of God are called to emulate their risen King by exercising this same kind of power in this present world.

Ephesians 4:1-2 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

What Paul is urging the Ephesians to do is to be towards one another the way God is towards us. In other words, the community of believers is, through the gifts of the Spirit, to reflect the life and love of God in direct contrast to the dehumanising influences of the secular society around them (Galatians 5:19-26). As mentioned earlier, the secular world has distorted the meaning of the word love to revolve around the narrow dimension of one’s own self-gratifying feelings towards another. In stark contrast, God turns this shallow definition of love to one of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others, the same type of love we have just rehearsed. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 profiles this breathtaking total lack of concern for self.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

This type of divine love is demonstrated in the words Jesus uttered towards the end of His ordeal on the cross when He said, ***“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34).*** For Jesus to be able to look past the hatred, the cruelty, the injustice and the grotesque evil perpetuated against Him, to the condition of the poor wretches under the evil influences of their fallen nature and the spiritual forces arrayed against Him, is witness to the divine love determined to free these same wretches from their pitiful sinful state and turn them into sons of God. This same divine love is now available to His followers through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians are to use this powerful agent of change to fulfil the new commandment Jesus gave to His disciples on that fateful night before His crucifixion to go out into the world and ***“Love one another. As I have loved you.” (John 13:34).*** As mentioned in an earlier session on the law, we have been given the resources of God through the indwelling Holy Spirit to move from the limited self-love generated by the human heart to the godly love that is generated by the heart of God.

Next time we will look at this powerful form of godly love in action when we look at the parable of the prodigal son.

Chapter 73 – The Church – Love in Action

Our focus is on the role and function of the church. We are looking at the role of the church through five virtues, faith, hope and love as expressed in 1 Corinthians 13, and worship and service. Last session we looked at the subject of divine love as God has expressed it to a rebellious humanity. As we saw His supreme expression of love to us was the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. We also spent quite a bit of time on how God exercises His awesome power and it is this factor that makes His love such a powerful force. Understanding this divine use of power in contrast to the world's use of force is crucial if we are to become loving citizens of the kingdom of God.

The divine use of power

To see this divine use of power in a more tangible way, this session we are going to look more closely at Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. This parable is a fascinating revelation of divine love in action but it also highlights this use of God's divine power we have been talking about. In reality this parable tells us more about the father than it does about the prodigal. A better name for the parable would be, "The parable of the loving father." We have mentioned this before but we need to regard this parable in the broader context of the relationship between a loving God and a rebellious humanity. God the Father had created the perfect environment in Eden for mankind to relate to Him in love and communion, yet humanity rejected His overtures of love in much the same way the prodigal does in this story. Yet this same God we rejected provides the means for our reconciliation and then welcomes us back with open arms.

We begin by looking at the preamble to the story in Luke 15 as this sets the scene for what later transpires. The chapter begins with the Pharisees and religious teachers criticizing Jesus for associating with sinners and tax collectors—even eating with them! Right from the beginning of this story we see a powerful demonstration of God's love, His concern for the outcasts and the less desirable in society. Then to add insult to injury, Jesus responds with the parable of the lost sheep, showing the unconditional love God has for the lost. Notice too, it is the good Shepherd who initiates the search for the lost. In fact, He leaves the 99 other good sheep in church while He goes looking for the lost. It's as if the 99 are incidental to the story. Neither does He wait for the lost to become good, law abiding, God fearing, respectable citizens before going after them. Jesus then follows up with the parable of the lost coin. Again, the emphasis is on the lost. The other nine coins are almost incidental. So we need to approach the parable of the prodigal in the same way, with the emphasis on the attitude of the father towards the "lost" son.

The parable begins with the younger son demanding his father give him an early share of his inheritance. He is really saying, "Dad, I wish you were dead, that way I can get on with my life instead of wasting my time in this boring environment." Very similar to what Adam and Eve told God. "We want to experiment a bit ourselves without you constantly looking over our shoulder." And as in the case of Adam and Eve, the father, being the gentleman that he is, and despite the fact he has within his power the right to refuse the son's demand, he honors the son's decision and allows him to go off on his own and learn the difference between good and evil. The father in his wisdom knew arguing with his son at this point was futile, but if reconciliation was to happen down the road, he knew he had to leave the door open for that possibility. But it also highlights the sacrificial nature of love for the sake of the other, reflecting Jesus' new command to His disciples, "Love as I have loved you." Sacrificial love as the name implies is going to cost us something in time, energy or resources. But this is the price of godly relationships. The theme of sacrifice is one of the major themes woven throughout the biblical account. We see this from the beginning when animals were sacrificed to clothe Adam and Eve, the account of God asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, this parable about the father sacrificing his estate, and of course the sacrifice of Jesus on the

cross for the sins of mankind. In each of these accounts what is highlighted is the sacrifice one is willing to make on account of preserving the relationship with the other.

Godly love involves a cost

But the father knew reconciliation with his son would only come at a cost. It had already cost him half his estate, and he knew it would cost his wayward son a lot of pain and heartache in the interim. And it wasn't long before the son found out; life wasn't all it was cracked up to be without the security and involvement of his father. Precisely the message that mankind has learned down through the ages – "life without God is hell!" But that is the point isn't it? Sin is painful. It has been designed this way to help bring us back into a relationship with the father as in this case. The other important factor working behind the scenes to bring about reconciliation is the good Shepherd we just read about in the first part of this chapter is actively pursuing the lost sheep. These two factors working together, the pain of sin and the pursuing love of the good Shepherd brought the wayward son back to his senses and he decided to return home where things weren't quite so boring after all.

Luke 15:18-20 I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man." '20 "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.

Of course the listening Pharisees, would have expected a totally different response from the offended father after being treated with such disrespect earlier. In fact, the father's behavior is totally foreign to human behavior – this again was a divine act. A human reaction would have been more like, "You've got some nerve coming back here after all you've done to bring shame and dishonor on our family."

Again, the power resides with the father, but notice his reaction.

V.21 His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.' 22 "But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger, and sandals for his feet. 23 And kill the calf we have been fattening in the pen. We must celebrate with a feast, 24 for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.

As we saw last time, God wants to win us over with conquering love rather than brute force. Jesus in this parable is revealing the true nature of the Father. He is as gracious, compassionate and kind as Jesus is...in reality they are, and act as One. One of the great heresies of Christianity is to label Jesus Christ as the compassionate "good cop" and the Father as the angry "bad cop," whom Jesus has to placate so He will accept sinners back. The danger of this type of thinking does great damage to the unity of the Trinity.

The truth is, the Father is just as involved in the redemption of mankind as Jesus is.

John 5:19 'The Son can do nothing of Himself, but only what He sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise.'

So instead of a good dressing down and a terse command to be on his way, the father does the unthinkable, he runs to his son and welcomes him back into the family. Jesus is revealing the true nature of the Father's conquering love towards His rebellious children even though they have caused Him grievous pain.

The Party-Pooper

However, lurking in the shadows of this extravagant display of grace is the party pooper. He's been going to church every Sunday, he's faithfully paid his tithes, and he's been the loyal son slaving away around the farm.

Luke 15:25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house...”

Another irony of the story is that everything the prodigal left home for, the music and dancing, feasting and laughter, friendship and happiness, wealth, security was right there at home all along.

V.26 and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the calf we were fattening and has prepared a great feast. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’ 28 “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in.

Notice again who takes the initiative? The father. His father came out and begged him to come in. The father’s love is not just extended to the son whose sin is obvious, but also to the one whose sins may not be quite so apparent. God the Father is concerned with the salvation of all, even these self-righteous Pharisees represented by the elder brother in this story (2 Peter 3:9). In fact the father, like Jesus, is even willing to suffer personal indignity and humiliation if it is going to facilitate reconciliation (Philippians 2:5-8). Here he is begging his son to come join the party, while earlier we saw him running to welcome home his wayward son. Both of these behaviours would have been considered shameful in the cultural norms of the times. So again, we see this demonstration of sacrificial love.

Grace will drive you crazy

Back to the story and, uh, oh, here comes the list of sacrifices I’ve made for you over the years.

V.29 but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve worked hard for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. 30 Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the finest calf we have.’

The obscenity of God’s grace is that it is so unfair. It will drive you crazy if you’re in the game of keeping score. But it is only unfair to those like the older brother and the Pharisees who are playing the game of keeping score. Problem is, it’s not the game God is playing. He is in the game of grace, saving sinners in whatever form they appear. And when he does, He welcomes us back with open arms and throws a big party.

V.31 “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you and I are very close, and everything I have is yours. 32 We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’ ”

The mystery is, we don’t know how the elder brother responded to the father’s invitation. Did he stay outside sulking or did he come inside and join the party? The reality is, all of God’s children need saving from sin and it’s a mistake to think our long list of sacrifices in some way contributes to the process. This type of thinking is delusional on two fronts. First, it underestimates the extent of God’s love and grace towards sinners. Second, not only does it demonstrate a mistaken concept of God and His grace, but it also devalues the magnitude of Christ’s sacrifice. To think we somehow contribute to our own salvation is really saying Christ’s horrifying sacrifice on the cross is not enough to free me from my sins.

So what are some of the takeaways about God’s love we can learn from this parable? God, both Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their grace, are concerned with the salvation of all peoples, whether they be the undesirables Jesus ate with, the prodigal son or the judgmental brother (John 12:32; 2 Peter 3:9). Grace is God’s love in action. God, because love involves choice, honours our freedom to choose our own path, as in the case of Adam and Eve, the prodigal, and the older brother who was faced with the decision as to whether or not he would join the party. Even though He honours our decision, He will do all in His power including the sacrifice of His own beloved Son, the good Shepherd, to bring us back into the fold (John 3:16). Even though He has absolute power to bring all to their knees, He chooses instead to win them over with all-conquering sacrificial love (Romans 5:8). God’s goal is to win us over with persuasion, not coercion (Irenaeus). The final thing we learn about this God who is love is that He likes to party, especially when one of His wayward children comes back home (Luke 15:7, 10, 22-24).

Chapter 74 – The Church – Worship

Our focus is on the role and function of the church. Last session we looked at the subject of love, this time our focus is on the subject of worship.

The first question we need to ask is, “Why worship God?” It seems about the only thing that is worshiped these days is “money.” It seems everyone is willing to bow down to the god of avarice. Even movies tell us, “Greed is good!” Running a close second to greed is celebrity worship. We have reality show stars, rock stars, movie stars and American Idol stars. Much of the change we have experienced in our western societies over the last couple of centuries is the shift that has occurred with the introduction of the enlightenment and secular humanism. Although there have been many positive aspects associated with these developments, there has been one major negative and that is, as the term humanism implies, the emphasis has shifted from worship of God to worship of humans. This is not a new development in human history as the apostle Paul spoke about this trend in Romans 1.

Romans 1:25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Instead of humanity striving to grow into the image of God, we now strive to make God in our image. God of course warned against this trend by making this His first and second, “Thou shalt nots!” (Exodus 20:3-6). In this session we are going to look at the first of three questions regarding worship and that is, “Why should we worship God?”

The first thing we need to acknowledge is, God is vastly different from us, hence the use of the word “transcendent” in relation to God. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman, God is spirit, meaning He is outside the four dimensional restrictions of time and space and transcends both dimensions (John 4:24). While God is infinite and transcendent, humans are finite and inferior. Not only is He vastly superior to us and worthy of worship, but also it is He alone who can handle the adulation associated with worship unlike the human celebrities we just mentioned (gossip magazines existence depend on celebrities’ failings).

God’s claims on His created beings

In contrast, God is deserving of worship because of the following reasons.

Revelation 4:11 “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

In our earlier session on “faith” we talked about three comprehensive claims God has on human beings. He is our Creator or Maker, He is our Father, and now after Jesus Christ’s saving work on the cross, He is our Savior. These three titles reveal why God is worthy of praise and worship. Before chronos time and space existed, God decided to share his existence with others and so began this amazing process of creating human beings with the potential of sharing in the life and love of God Himself. The gift of life from God should not be underestimated, as science to its consternation, is unable to create the life that exists in the smallest seed. The title of “Creator” or “Maker” denotes ownership, and as God is the one who has given us life, He deserves the glory, honour and power this verse implies. The title “Father” follows on from the title Creator in that He is not only the one who bought us into existence, but it goes further in that this title implies relationship. This relationship is not to be confused with all of the self-interest complications of fallible human relationships. Humanity was created to be drawn into the divine relationship that is the Trinity. And as we saw with the last two sessions on love, this divine relationship is characterised by the self-sacrificing love exhibited by Jesus Christ and the all-conquering love the father demonstrated in welcoming back the prodigal son.

It is through this display of divine love that our status of slaves to sin cut off from God has been transformed to now being welcomed back as His forgiven adopted children.

Galatians 4:4-7 *But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7 So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.*

This verse confirms this relationship status we now enjoy with the Father.

But it also confirms the relationship status we enjoy with that other comprehensive claim God has on us as our "Savior." God sent His Son to redeem us from the curse of sin. In Revelation 7:14-15 one of the heavenly elders explains to the writer of Revelation that the vast multitude in white robes worshiping God is made up of persons who, "**...have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**" For this reason they join with the heavenly host before the throne of God, and worship him day and night. So we see our worship then is rooted in our creaturely existence, in our relationship as sons of the Father and with our redemption through Jesus Christ. These are all wonderful spiritual blessings poured out on us, all of which have originated from our transcendent God.

More than gratitude

But our worship of God needs to go deeper than just being thankful for what God has done for us. As in any developing relationship one has to spend time with the other party to find out who they really are. There is no substitute for spending time in God's "presence" (There's that word again). It's simply not possible to worship an unknown person, let alone an unknown God. Our relationship with God may begin with gratitude and thanksgiving, remembering all that God has done for us. But while gratitude is a fine quality, as our relationship with God grows deeper, we need to move past thanking God for all He has done *for us* to thanking Him *for who He is*.

It is at this point that our focus shifts from thanksgiving for what God has done *for us* to true adoration where the focus is rightly on the makeup and character of the One who has provided these blessings. God wants to be regarded as more than a useful convenience to have around to forgive us, to hand out blessings, fight our battles, and heal our diseases. This unfortunately is the mistaken concept of the "prosperity" gospel whose focus is on what God can provide *for us* like some kind of cosmic ATM machine, rather than on *who He is*. That is like getting married to have someone around to do the housework, the shopping, cook the meals, and raise the kids. Just like a wife who wants more than to be considered as a useful convenience to have around or to be a trophy wife, God desires more from the relationship. The primary reason for getting married is for the sake of love, love for another, for intimate communion with another, and for sharing the joys and sorrows of life together. So when it comes to our worship of God, it should be for the sake of love, a response to the holy love of God demonstrated to us through Jesus Christ. God wants us to love Him for who He is, not only for what He can do for us.

An emphasis on "Who God is" rather than "What He can do for us" also dramatically changes our whole approach to our personal worship. Rather than thinking, "I had better say my prayers and study my Bible this morning, otherwise God won't bless my day," instead He wants us to spend time with Him because we enjoy His presence and want to deepen our relationship with Him. The nation of Israel came in for severe criticism because they made this same mistake of thinking their sacrifices would somehow manipulate God into blessing them.

Amos 5 :21-22 *"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. 22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them."*

God does not want to be the subject of manipulation. He wants a relationship with us. He wants us to love Him for who He is, not what we think He can do for us.

Amos 5:4 This is what the Lord says to Israel: “Seek me and live;”

This too is what God wants from His bride, the church. When we seek God for who He is rather than what He can do for us, our whole focus in regard to worship changes. We begin to regard our prayer and Bible study as an opportunity to have quality personal time with our gracious heavenly Father, our Abba, so as to get to know Him better (presence). It’s the same with going to church. Rather than being a chore, “Well I had better go, otherwise I won’t be blessed,” we regard it as an opportunity to come together as God’s community to worship our gracious heavenly Father. And of course we can extrapolate this principle to apply to our other spiritual worship opportunities (a word I prefer rather than “disciplines”) giving of our time and resources in service to this dying world. The emphasis of our Christianity shifts from being one of “duty” to one of “love” and that is when religion turns into Christianity.

The grace of God is another example of how our focus can mistakenly fall on ourselves rather than our graceful God. Usually when we think of the term grace it is in relation to what it means *to us*, undeserved favour or pardon. Although this is an important aspect of grace, we should not neglect the merciful and graceful nature of the God who bestows this undeserved blessing on us.

Grace in some ways is very much like the act of breathing. We inhale the generous grace God has showered on us and in response we exhale and give back to the grace-giver our generous worship and adoration. This is why Holy Communion plays such an important role in our worship as it reminds us where our focus should be. The focus of the bread and wine point us to the gracious God who sacrificed His body and blood for us. This emphasis is reflected in Jesus’ words, ***“Do this in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:24-25)***. By all means thank God for His grace to us, but don’t forget to worship and adore the merciful God who extends that grace to us. Jesus came to reveal the true nature of the Father to us, so the more we live out our Christianity, the more we should come to appreciate why we should worship Him.

Chapter 75 – The Church – Our Worship Leader

Our focus is on the role and function of the church. Last session we started looking at the subject of Worship and we asked the first of three questions regarding worship and that was, “Why worship God?” We saw why this transcendent God is worthy of praise and worship because of the three comprehensive claims God has on human beings. He is our Creator or Maker, He is our Father, and now after Jesus Christ’s saving work on the cross, He is our Savior. We also talked about why our worship of God needs to go deeper than just being thankful for what God has done *for us* and move to thanking Him *for who He is*.

We now ask the second question on worship and that is, who is our worship leader? There is a very important reason why we pray in Jesus’ name.

Hebrews 7:24-25 ...but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

As we have learned through this series, Jesus Christ has opened up access to the Holy of Holies vicariously on our behalf. It is in our name He has lived for us, He has suffered for us, He has overcome sin and death for us, and He has offered Himself to the Father on our behalf. Now, as the risen Christ, He now “***lives to intercede***” for us as our high priest in God’s presence.

Christ’s High Priestly Ministry

Again the extraordinary parallels of the duties of the high priest who entered into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement in ancient Israel foreshadowed the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ. Back then the high priest stood before the people as their divine representative, bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. Next he consecrated himself through ritualistic washing and sacrifice so he was acceptable to enter the Holy of Holies. Then he takes the first of the two goats, lays his hands on the head of the animal on which he confesses the sins of the nation.

The second goat is then sacrificed and its blood is taken by the high priest into the Holy of Holies where it is presented before the mercy seat. It is here that the high priest vicariously intercedes on behalf of all Israel asking that God will remember His covenant promises and graciously forgive his people and remember their sins no more. This is symbolised by the first goat on which the sins of the nation were laid being led out into the wilderness to be remembered no more. Finally, the high priest returns to the waiting people and offers God’s blessing of peace.

Numbers 6:24-26 “The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

The liturgy surrounding the Atonement day ritual foreshadowed the high priestly role of Jesus Christ. Jesus, by the Father’s divine appointment, came in the flesh, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh as the true high priest representing all peoples. He consecrated himself by overcoming sin and living a righteous life of obedience and love on our behalf.

John 17:19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Then this true high priest offers himself as the Lamb of God to be sacrificed to take away the sins of the world and to acknowledge God’s just judgment on humanity’s sin. On Easter morning, Jesus, as the wave sheaf offering ascends to the Holy of Holies where He is welcomed by the Father, *who by His acceptance*, acknowledges Christ’s atoning sacrifice on behalf of all humanity (Leviticus 23:9-12).

John 20:17 Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Notice the language acknowledging the vicariousness of Jesus' high priestly ministry on our behalf. It is no longer only "my Father and my God" but now "your Father and your God." Finally, that evening Jesus appears to the disciples in the upper room and imitating the high priestly blessing from the Old Covenant says to them, "**Peace be unto you**" (**John 17:19**). Jesus, our high priest still sits at the Father's right hand representing and interceding for us, leading us in worship of our gracious and loving God. This is why we pray and worship in Christ's name. It is an acknowledgment of Christ's High Priestly ministry on our behalf.

Colossians 3:16-17 *"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"*

John Calvin said, "Christ is the great choirmaster who tunes our hearts to sing God's praise."

"Living Stones" respond with worshipful hearts

This leads us to our third question on worship and that is, what should be the attitude of worshipers? Of all of God's physical creation, it is only man who has been given the capacity to worship God. So in this sense humanity has the responsibility to express on behalf of all God's creatures praises to God. Sadly, humanity failed in this role of glorifying God on behalf of His creation.

Romans 1:20-21 *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.*

Now instead of creation singing songs of praise to God it "groans and travails in pain" waiting for God to deliver it from its corrupted state (Romans 8:22). The nation of Israel too was elected from among the nations to be God's special people to be a witness and a light to the Gentiles of their faithful God (Isaiah 42:6). But they also failed in their mission and following the lead of the pagan nations around them, came to regard their sacrifices as a way to placate an angry God instead of being a reminder of the graceful and faithful God who was willing to forgive their sins (Amos 5:21-24). Even as recently as the Reformation, the protesters rose up against the church's practice of using indulgences and penance in an attempt to manipulate God and by so doing assumed Christ's high priestly role of being the mediator of grace. God can never be manipulated and should always be regarded as the subject of propitiation, never its object. But the good news is, even though humanity has failed in its response to His love, God has not abandoned His creation, He has not abandoned Israel and He has not abandoned His church. Instead He comes to us in Jesus Christ to restore humanity and creation to His original intent, to worship, to praise and to glorify God.

So as the living stones which make up this new temple within which God has chosen to come and dwell, it's important we learn from these failures and respond with worshipful hearts by remembering these two important principles.

First, that our worship is a response to our faithful God who has lavished His grace and love on us through the supreme sacrifice of His Son Jesus.

Romans 12:1 *"I urge you brother, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship."*

Again the emphasis is on God's nature and character of love that is to be the main reason for our worship, not on what He can do for us. We worship God for God's sake. As stated earlier, it's impossible to worship an unknown god, so the more we grow closer in our relationship with Him, the more natural it will become to worship Him. As mentioned it becomes much like the act of breathing, we inhale the generous grace God has showered on us and in response we exhale and give back to the grace-giver our generous worship and adoration.

Psalms 42:1-2 *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

Worship, like breathing, is a life-giving relational experience. The Lord's Supper is a reminder of our need to be sustained by God's grace, but also an act of worship on our part in response to our gracious God.

Second, as we approach worship, it's important to understand it is not what we do before God, but recognise we are joining with our high priest on what He has vicariously achieved on our behalf. It's not about us. There would be less theological and worship disputes in our congregations if we remembered this one overriding governing principle. Our theology, our preaching, our music needs to be centered on what Jesus Christ has offered to the Father not on what we bring to God. There is only one true offering acceptable to God and that is the one offered by the true high priest, the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. Notice the inclusive language Paul uses when speaking about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10.

1 Corinthians 10:16 (NLT) When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ?

The body of Christ joins with and participates in the priesthood of Christ. Jesus not only comes to us as God's gift of love to humanity, but God as man to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. God does not accept us because our worship is worthy, but rather on what His beloved Son has achieved on our behalf.

There is only One who comes to God on the behalf of all humanity who can offer worthy worship and this is why we join with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders and fall down in praise of our great high priest Jesus Christ.

Revelation 5:8-10 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb.... 9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God.

A time is coming when those purchased for God by the blood of Jesus from ***every tribe and language and people and nation*** will join the heavenly host in singing this new song in worshipful response to the loving grace of God.

Chapter 76 – The Church - Service

Our focus is on the role and function of the church. We are looking at the role of the church through five virtues, faith, hope and love, worship and service. Last session we looked at the subject of worship, this time our focus is on the subject of service.

The Christian church is a community, a community held together by the bond of love that flows from God. But as we learned on our recent session on love, the love of God is much more than just a warm sentimental feeling, it is also an expression or action which flows outwards towards others *for the sake of the other*. This is the type of love demonstrated by God when He chose to share His existence with humanity, and when He gave us the gift of His Son in order to redeem a rebellious humanity from their sinful ways. God's love flows outwards for the sake of the other.

Both a privilege and a responsibility

As a result of God's generosity to us, we learned in earlier sessions that the church has been chosen to represent Him as His holy people in this "between the times" period as part of His "new creation." This is both a *privilege* and a *responsibility*. It is a *privilege* in that we have specifically been chosen by God to represent Him at this time, but also to experience and participate now in the life and love of the Trinity in this "between the times" period. We get to walk in the light now while the rest of humanity still walks in darkness (Ephesians 5:8). But it also carries a *responsibility* in that we are to represent God and all that He is and stands for to the best of our ability as we participate in His ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

As we do this, we need to guard against the unfortunate attitude some in the Christian community have been accused of and that is of acting in some sort of superior or judgmental attitude towards non-Christians. We need to remember Paul's words to the saints in Corinth, "***such were some of you.***"

1 Corinthians 6:10-11 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Christians should never forget who we were before we experienced God's grace. Like the rest of humanity, we too were God's enemies, rejecting our Creator and hurting others by living according to our own selfish lifestyles. But as this scripture says, we "***were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.***" The church is to be a spiritual hospital where sinners can go for healing. (Mark 2:17). Believers should never forget we too are recovering patients.

The challenge for the church community is to now adopt this same type of love towards others that has been demonstrated to us through Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

A correct understanding of service stems from an appreciation of what Christ has done on our behalf. His was a sacrificial love for the sake of the other. We are to go forth humbly in Christ's name, as living examples of God's sacrificial love towards a rebellious and sinful humanity. Godly love is going to cost us something personally as it did God so we shouldn't be surprised if at times we will be taken advantage of. As the apostle Paul plainly states it, "***I die daily***" (1 Corinthians 15:31). In a certain sense, followers of Christ are to be living martyrs. Nevertheless, the world needs to know God is "for them" and there is an alternative to the sinful lifestyle they are held captive by, and that He can free them from it.

Christ's Ambassadors

So with the right mindset, the church is sent forth as His representatives to redeem a fallen world. ***2 Corinthians 5:18-20 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf.***

How many people out there don't know God doesn't count their sins against them? God has forgiven them because Jesus has already paid the death penalty of sin for them. That penalty will only be reinstated in the sad event they reject the gift of His Son.

But Jesus didn't come just to save people from their sins. He did do that, but as this verse implies, he also expected the recipients of His grace to carry on His mission of reconciliation. Over in Luke 4 we find Jesus outlining His earthly mission to the assembled in the synagogue. As we read this section, we should ask the question, "Is Jesus' mission good news or bad news for the world?" ***Luke 4:16-21 ...He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written. 18 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."***

Christ through His life, death and resurrection did the hard yards and set in motion the ministry of reconciliation. What is important to understand now that Christ has ascended to the Father is that He has committed His mission of completing His reconciling ministry to the church. And in the same way Jesus lived out his life for the "sake of the other," so now the church is to live out its life for the "sake of the other." As Karl Barth said, "The church exists for the sake of the world." In a way, the church is to become God's hands and feet in this world acting like His spiritual ambulances.

But of course this is too important a mission to leave in the hands of mere mortals, so He promised He would equip the church with the divine resources it needed to complete His mission. As He promised the disciples on the evening before His crucifixion he guaranteed to equip the church with the same Spirit that led Him as He completed His earthly ministry (John 14:16-18).

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The Holy Spirit not only brings divine qualities to the individual as we saw in our earlier session on the role of the Holy Spirit, but He also equips the body of Christ with the divine resources it needs to fulfil its mission in carrying out Christ's reconciling ministry. God promises to walk beside us, accompanying us every step of the way, empowering us to do what we could never accomplish alone.

The "Fruits" and "Gifts" of the Spirit

These divine qualities of the Spirit are listed as both "fruits" and "gifts" to differentiate them from human efforts usually characterized in scripture as "works." There should never be a question as to the source of these gifts as the following scripture explains. The power is not something we generate despite our many talents. Rather these gifts have a divine origin, the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, this was the problem with the church at Corinth. Instead of using the gifts of the Spirit for the "common good" of building up the church, they were grandstanding and arguing over which gift was the most important. Paul has to remind them of the source of the gifts and the reason for which they were given.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

It is the Holy Spirit who distributes the gifts and they are to be used for the common good of building up the church not for self-promotion or aggrandisement. Notice too, that no one misses out on receiving a gift, all are included in God's reconciling ministry (v.7).

Before we look at these gifts of service more closely, we need to make one other comment and that has to do with the "fruits of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23) in relation to the "gifts of the Spirit." The "gifts" of the Spirit should always be subordinated to the "fruits" of the Spirit. This was the problem with the Corinthian church. Instead of using their God-given gift for the building up of the community, they allowed personal pride to construct a hierarchy of gifts that caused division in the community. This is why sandwiched between 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 both of which deal with the spiritual gift problem in Corinth is Paul's well-known chapter on "love." Here Paul reminds the Corinthian church there can be no other motive for the use of these gifts other than love, i.e. for the sake of the other and the welfare of the community.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

It is we humans who assign value to these gifts, not God. Some gifts may appear to be more prominent than others, but in God's eyes, all are of equal value because they all come from and promote the love of God. What is of paramount importance is, we use our God-given gifts, and they be used for the building up of the body to God's glory.

A proclamation of "good news" and a proclamation of "relief for the oppressed"

Much has been written on the subject of the spiritual gifts God gives to the church so it is not my intention to go into detail here. However, I would like to go back to Christ's mission spelled out earlier in Luke 4.

Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Here we see the mission broken up into two broad categories. First, a proclamation of good news, and second, a proclamation of relief for the oppressed. And, coincidentally, the list of spiritual gifts made available to the church coincides with these two proclamations. We will just look at the list found in Romans 12, but the other lists found in 1 Corinthians 12-14, and Ephesians 4 basically fall into these two broad categories as well.

Romans 12:6-8 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

We see gifts in the form of speech, such as, teaching, prophecy and encouragement to proclaim the good news, and gifts in the form of practical welfare for the relief of the oppressed. The important point though is the need now for the church to adopt these two aspects of Christ's mission in order to further God's ministry of reconciling the world to Himself. Like Christ, the church needs to adopt the same strategy He used in His earthly ministry by now living for the sake of the other. This is how God's love works; His love flows outwards for the sake of the other.

The church then in fulfilling Christ's mission, *first* needs to proclaim the good news of the gospel.

Matthew 28:19-20 *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

The world needs to hear about the God who loves them (John 3:16), and that He has already paid the penalty for their sins (Romans 5:8), and wants all to share in His eternal life (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9). This is done in the right way of course so as not to make people run in the opposite direction. There is a lot to be said for the approach mentioned in Matthew 5:16.

Matthew 5:16 *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

It always helps to establish some credibility through our actions before dazzling them with our great arguments. Proper evangelism if it is to be successful is predicated on a prior relationship.

The *second* aspect of Christ's mission is, a proclamation of relief for the oppressed. This is where we become Christ's spiritual and physical ambulances. Suffering people should never have to walk alone in their affliction. This is where we no longer live for ourselves, but for the "sake of the other." The story of the Good Samaritan is one of living for the "sake of the other." Mother Teresa recorded this comment from a dying Indian street beggar picked up from a drain, half eaten with worms, and brought to the mission, "I have lived like an animal in the street, but I am going to die like an angel, loved and cared for." He was made to feel like God loved him through a fellow human being. This is what it means to "bind up the broken-hearted" (Isaiah 61:1). Living a life of service is to no longer live for ourselves, but to live for the sake of the other. In other words we are to use these God-given-gifts to express Christ's love for the world. That is Christ's mission for the church.

1 Peter 4:10-11 *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

Working together for the common good

Just one final thought on these spiritual gifts. The exercise of these gifts by each individual member serves to draw us closer together as God's loving community. They remind us we are one community, working together on a common mission, (Christ's reconciling ministry), relying on one another as we don't all share the same gift, and the common component holding it all together and making it work is God's Holy Spirit. In an earlier session we talked about how each of us has been chosen by God to be a living stone making up God's holy temple.

1 Peter 2:4-5 *As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

It is here in this spiritual house, that we as individual stones, need to recognise we are part of something much greater than ourselves, we are part of Christ's reconciling ministry working together for the salvation of the world. As such, each of us as part of the body of Christ needs to reflect on whom we represent.

1 Peter 2:9-10 *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

The best way we can declare our praises of him is when we live as people of faith, people of hope, people of love, people of worship, and people of service.

Chapter 77 – The Book of Revelation

We now approach the end game of God's great project of creating man in His image. The subject of the end times has held the fascination of all Christians ever since Jesus told His disciples He would return some day. Mountains of material have been written about both the timing and the events surrounding Jesus' return and no wonder when the subject matter conjures up foreboding images of Armageddon, four hostile horsemen, terrifying beasts, a great harlot, false prophets, a fiery red dragon, a lake of fire and final judgment.

As we approach this subject I have to admit to a certain amount of trepidation, not so much from the point of view of the terrifying images it conjures up, but rather from the responsibility to present the material in as accurately a way as humanly possible. But mixed with this trepidation, there is also a sense of anticipation. Anticipation because finally after many millennia of enforced separation between God and humanity because of our sin and rebellion, the two parties finally come face to face with one another. And humanity for their part is in for a huge pleasant surprise when they come face to face with His Creator. But that is getting ahead of the story. It's also a time of great anticipation from God's point of view as it at this point that God's great project of creating man in His image becomes a reality with the saying, **"I will be their God, and they will be my holy people."** The subject of the end time has many components, so we will slowly work our way through them in a systematic way.

Allegiance

The story of God's interaction with His creation comes down to one of "allegiance." Let me share a Native American legend with you.

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." He continued, "The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

Like the rest of us, this young Native American faced a choice as he began his own life as to, "Which wolf would he feed?" Right from the very beginning, the created beings God has brought into existence have faced a choice as to where their allegiance would lie. He created us with freewill with the capacity to choose. Sooner or later in the design of things however, our allegiance would be tested. Sometime before humanity came on the scene, the created angelic realm too was faced with a choice as to which they would cast their allegiance.

Revelation 12:3-4 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. 4 Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.

It appears a third of the angelic beings rebelled against God and threw their lot in with this red dragon who later on in this chapter is identified as Satan the devil (Revelation 12:7-9). Moving forward to the creation of Adam and Eve, we see that they too were confronted with a scenario that would question their allegiance where they had to choose between two trees (Genesis 2:16-17). And so it has been down through history. Abraham was called the father of the faithful because of his willingness to show his allegiance to God even in the face of a terrible test, the sacrifice of his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18). The children of Israel had to decide whom they would choose to be their God, the gods of the Egyptians or the God who had delivered them from Egypt (Exodus 32:1-5; Deuteronomy 30:19). Jesus' constant confrontations with the devil and religious

leaders came down to an issue of allegiance, to God or to the devil (John 8:31-47). This is the scenario that has gone on throughout history, a choice as to which wolf we pledge our allegiance and therefore to which one we feed. It is with this background that we now turn our attention to the book of Revelation, a book in which creatures other than wolves play a significant role.

Overview of the book of Revelation

As mentioned, this book has caught the imagination of Christians down through the centuries and has led to many various and speculative interpretations especially when applied to a chronology of events leading up to the end of the age. But is this the way the book is meant to be interpreted? Or is there a more important message to be learned from the book, such as, to whom do we pledge our allegiance or our “faithfulness”? Is God more concerned that we construct one neat timetable for the end of the world or that Christians remain faithful to Him in a hostile world that challenges our allegiance to Him? The language used in Revelation is highly symbolic and metaphorical so we need to be careful we don’t allow ourselves to interpret them according to our pre-conceived ideas or assumptions. However, there are two assumptions we can take to the bank and those are, at the end of history, 1) Life, not destruction is going to prevail as God is the life giver and, 2) God in Christ will be there both as Judge and Savior.

As with all good Bible study, the approach we are going to take is to first look at the book in its historical and cultural context. That is, it is written to Christians living during the persecuting reign of Nero or Domitian (depending on the date of the authorship of the book) in the Roman Empire. Then we will see what lessons can be applied to Christians living down through subsequent centuries. Looked at in its historical context, the book creates a contrast between the rule of the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men. Second, as the first few verses of the book explain, this is a revelation from Jesus Christ himself.

Revelation 1:1-2 The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The word revelation or apocalypse from the Greek literally means "an uncovering" or "unveiling." a disclosure of knowledge or revelation. In religious contexts it is usually a disclosure of something hidden, "a vision of heavenly secrets that can make sense of earthly realities."

I like this definition for two reasons. First, it is completely opposite to the confusing speculations commentators have made of the book down through the centuries. Instead of making things clearer, these speculations in most cases have only further clouded the issue. The second reason I like this definition is because as this definition says, it gives us a heavenly perspective of earthly realities. In other words, this is the big picture of all that is taking place on this earth viewed from God’s heavenly perspective coming directly from Jesus Christ Himself, the great “Unveiler.” You will remember He was the one responsible for the tearing apart of the veil at His crucifixion giving humanity direct access to God’s throne room. This not only allows humanity access to God once again, but also an insight into what is going on behind the scenes in the flow of history. We are aware of God’s purpose in creating humanity; we are aware of the time of the new creation operating behind the scenes of the old decaying creation; and most importantly, we are aware of the one who stands at the centre of salvation history, that is Jesus Christ Himself. And to me that is an exciting revelation. The history we read about in textbooks is not the real history of humanity. Rather it is what God is doing behind the scenes to restore the relationship between God and His creation we have read about in this series. It is also a foretaste of what Jesus Christ will unveil to all humanity when they stand before Him in the general resurrection at the end of the age. The mystery of our existence and the working of God behind the history of the world will be revealed to all mankind. At that time we will get the blow by blow account from Jesus Christ himself, but until then, we have to be satisfied with the big picture account revealed by the angel sent by Jesus Christ to reveal to John, ***“what must soon take place” (Revelation 1:1).*** It should also

be a caution to over-enthusiastic interpreters not to ride the wild horse of speculation too hard as Jesus alone has the title, “Unveiler.” History is littered with false predictions as to who the latest version of the beast is?

Sub themes of the Book

Like I said, the major theme of the book is one of allegiance. But there are a number of sub themes running throughout the dialogue. Following in the apocalyptic tradition of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, we can identify two contrasting mysteries revealed in the book of Revelation: 1) the sources of evil along with their destruction, and 2) a final vision of hope. The prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel depict the world as a place of struggle.

- ◆ A struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness.
- ◆ The power of life against the power of death.
- ◆ The power of sin against the power of grace.

From a human perspective it appears like the forces of evil are winning the battle but in the end the forces of good prevail. Jesus’ insight to John then is to reveal to him and his readers what is going on behind the scenes that makes the world the way it is. There are evil powers at work that infiltrate and infest all levels of society, and the book of Revelation systematically exposes these malevolent powers. But in each case of these apocalyptic writers, the prophecy ends with a remarkable message of hope.

Isaiah 2:4 He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Daniel after interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about the great statue representing the various empires who struggle for dominance down through time finishes with this vision.

Daniel 2:44-45 “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. 45 This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

So in the face of tyrannical rule, there is introduced a message of hope, the same message given at the end of Revelation.

Wild Beasts represent Empires

However, the book of Daniel reveals one of the keys to understanding the book of Revelation and that is, Daniel portrays the flow of these historical empires with wild beasts (Daniel 7). Each of these beasts is representative of an empire, and he characterises the nature of those empires with a particular animal. Babylon with a lion, Medes and Persians with a bear, Greece with a leopard and Rome as a great terrifying ten horned beast with iron teeth and bronze claws. Each of these beastly kingdoms in turn will be overthrown by a succeeding beastly power. However, at the end of time, God will overthrow all of these beastly kingdoms and replace them with His kingdom that operates in a totally different fashion to that of a wild beast. In similar fashion, this too is how the book of Revelation ends. The kingdoms of this world are overthrown and we read about a new heavens and a new earth, one without tears or crying or death (Revelation 21:1-4). It was during the reign of this terrifying fourth beast with teeth of iron and claws of bronze that John is given this revelation from the angel sent by Jesus Christ.

So the stage is set for a decision concerning one’s allegiance. To which kingdom will John’s readers commit their allegiance? Will it be to the terrifying ten-headed beast representing imperial Rome or to the kingdom of God? Or to frame it in terms of the Native American legend we read at the beginning, “Which wolf will they feed?”

Chapter 78 – Revelation 1-7 – Evil Powers Exposed

Last session we made a tentative step into the book of Revelation as we approach the end game of God's great project of creating man in His image. We saw the major theme of the book comes down to one of allegiance. We shared the legend of a Native American grandfather speaking with his grandson about the two competing wolves that reside in each of us, one representing evil, and the other good. The story ends with the grandfather answering his grandson's question as to "Which wolf will win?" with the response, "The one you feed." Sooner or later in the design of things however, our allegiance would be tested.

We also saw there are a couple of sub themes running throughout the dialogue. There are evil powers at work that infiltrate and infest all levels of human society, and the book of Revelation systematically exposes these malevolent powers, along with their destruction. However, the book does not end with destruction, but with a final vision of hope. The stage is set for a decision concerning one's allegiance. To which kingdom will John's readers commit their loyalty? Will it be to the terrifying ten-headed beast representing imperial Rome or to the kingdom of God?

And so it is not surprising then to read to whom this Revelation is written.

Revelation 1:4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia.

Life for Christians living under the rule of this terrifying beast, the Roman Empire had its challenges. First of all as monotheists, they refused to acknowledge the pagan pantheon of gods worshiped by the Greeks and Romans. Second, they refused to participate in the state organised cult of emperor worship. The Romans didn't so much mind them having their own god, it's just they didn't recognise everyone else's gods as was common practice at the time. As far as they were concerned, the more gods the better! So to these seven churches, Jesus gives this "disclosure of events," (a heavenly perspective on earthly realities) to encourage Christians to be faithful in the face of these challenges.

When we look at these messages to the seven churches situated in modern-day Turkey we can identify three groups. There are churches suffering persecution at the hands of the empire (Smyrna, Revelation 2:8-10). In the same way Hitler singled out the Jews as the cause of Germany's troubles, Nero for instance, found an easy target in the Christians especially when he needed a scapegoat with the burning of Rome. But persecution varied from city to city depending on the temperament of the Roman governor or prefect. Then there are those who were feeling relatively comfortable with life under Roman rule (Laodicea, Revelation 3:14-18). The Laodiceans had become complacent, life was good and they were too comfortable, and had found a way to blend in and assimilate with the culture around them. Then there was the third group, those in the middle trying to remain true to their convictions in an evil world (Philadelphia, Revelation 3:7-10). In each case there is the admonition to hold on to what you have and in some cases to repent of your ways, but this is followed up with the promise of future glory. Notice this part of the message to the church at Smyrna.

Revelation 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

We see this theme of allegiance coming through in each of these messages to the churches. Persevere and be faithful to my kingdom and you will receive your reward.

But the message of Revelation was not just for these churches in Asia Minor, it is a message that resonates for Christians down through the centuries, as we too have to live by our Christian convictions in an evil world dominated by malignant beastly powers. Christians are warned to

keep their eyes on the bigger picture in the face of society's pressure to conform. In the end, it is God's kingdom that will endure while competing kingdoms will be destroyed. So the message to the seven churches is to cast your allegiance in with the winning team and you will not be disappointed as your Savior is waiting there to reward you.

In Revelation 4 we are given an insight into the heavenly throne room of God. This heavenly scene is again meant to contrast the splendour associated with the heavenly throne room with that of the throne room of the Roman Caesar. In the centre is the vision of God, then the four mysterious creatures who lead the worship, then the 24 elders who cast their crowns before God signifying there is only one god worthy of their allegiance and that is not the tyrannical Roman emperor who stands in opposition to God.

Revelation 4:9-11 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

The honor and glory sought by Rome's emperors and generals was in recognition for their own great victories and accomplishments over their enemies. In contrast, the glory and honor given to God is for His willingness to sacrifice for the salvation and redemption of His rebellious children. Again the message is one of loyalty to the Christian message and not to compromise or become complacent with the way earthly powers are exercised.

In Revelation 5, we are introduced to a new word picture, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.

Revelation 5:5-6 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

John turns around to see who this conquering lion is and what does he see.

V.6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.

Earlier we saw in the book of Daniel the kingdoms of the world represented by wild beasts. Now in contrast we see the kingdom of God also represented by a beast, but one that has a totally different nature to these world-ruling empires. John is using these word pictures to expose the true nature of these rulers. In contrast to the wild beasts that seek to devour and kill, the choice of the lamb is used to reveal Jesus' true character of sacrificial love, even a willingness to die for others. Although He is as mighty as a lion, with limitless power, this power is exercised through what he suffers for the sake of others. It is this quality of sacrifice for the sake of others that makes Him worthy of worship.

Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation."

This is in contrast to the worship demanded of Rome's citizens in response to the despotic power exercised by the all-conquering Roman Caesar. The one is motivated by fear, the other by love. Glory through domination of others was the modus operandi of Imperial Rome or what Augustine called "Libido Dominandi" or the "lust for power." So again the question is asked, to which power will you give your allegiance? To the power of conquering love, or to the power bent on domination, subjugation and destruction? We also need to take note of this phrase, "***persons from every tribe and language and people and nation***", as it is repeated over and over throughout the book.

In Revelation 6 we are introduced to the opening of the seven seals. The scene shifts from the heavenly vision to an earthly one. The *first four seals* represented by four terrible horsemen are released. These horsemen represent the methods employed by these beastly powers to subdue

and conquer **“persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.”** This is in contrast to the method employed by the slain lamb, which **“with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.”** The first two horsemen, one holding a bow, the other a sword of the Pax Romana or “Roman Peace”, ride forth with teeth of iron and claws of bronze. Interestingly, it was under this apparent rule of “peace” that the “Lamb of peace” was slain. Following conquering armies come the carpetbaggers ready to exploit the subdued populations represented by the third horseman carrying a pair of scales. This pattern has been repeated over and over down through the centuries where subdued populations are exploited for their natural resources and for their slave labour. We don’t have to look too far past the last century to see this pattern of behaviour repeated, e.g. Colonial powers, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union taking advantage of occupied countries. It’s possible the Laodicean church was caught up in this exploitative behaviour (Revelation 3:14-18).

So far we have been introduced to three sources of evil, the despotic Roman Emperor (Rulers), his conquering armies, and grasping businessmen. But there is another evil force alluded to here with the fourth horseman, and he will be identified in more detail later, but this is an evil force which appears to have the ability to manipulate nature itself.

Revelation 6:7-8 When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” 8 I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Jesus in his earthly ministry had to deal with demonic forces that had the power to inflict disease and possess beasts (Mark 5:1-13).

The Fifth Seal is addressed to the victims of persecution and injustice that invariably follows conquest. The conquering powers appoint new administrators like Pilate to tax and impose their culture, including pagan worship practices on the subdued population (“Render unto Caesar,” Matthew 22:21). This was the fate of the Smyrna congregation as we read (Revelation 2:8-10), but also the Jews under Nazi Germany, and recently Christians and other minority groups at the hands of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. So now to our list of evil powers are added corrupt government agencies and false religious institutions.

The Sixth Seal comes in the form of a divine warning to these evil forces. God is not going to stand by and let this repetitive evil process continue forever. John reminds them that eventually the world will face a higher standard imposed by God. God will hold the rich and powerful accountable for their exploitive behavior. At that time, they will sing a different tune.

Revelation 6:16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?”

Empires established through conquest and violence will themselves be destroyed by these same forces. But eventually after humanity has had its fill of evil, God as prophesied by the prophet Daniel (Daniel 2:44-45) and now here, will use His divine power to bring it all to an end. But it would be a mistake not to see the warning message this section of scripture has for Christians living down through the ages not to get caught up in these evil practices. Our allegiance is to the Lamb and what He represents rather than the evil beast and what he represents.

But now before the *seventh and final seal* is opened, the scene returns to the heavenly throne room. John sees a countless multitude from every nation standing in a posture of hope and celebration.

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their

hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

What we have seen here in these first seven chapters is a scene that moves in cycles. They start with foreboding images of war, beasts and terrifying horsemen, but instead of death and destruction, the scene ends with multiple millions and possibly billions singing praises to God and the Lamb. So just before God steps in to bring about the annihilation of the wicked, there is a pause.

Revelation 8:1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

It's as if God is hoping people will come to their senses and He won't have to use force to bring them to their senses. This pattern of foreboding, a pause, and then hope is repeated throughout the book. However, if the wicked don't respond, then sudden destruction is brought upon them.

Chapter 79 – Revelation 8-12 – The Dragon vs the Woman

Last time we finished up looking at the message to the seven churches of Asia Minor. In each case there is the admonition to hold on to what you have and in some cases to repent of your ways, but this is followed up with the promise of future glory. We see the message is one of allegiance to the heavenly kingdom rather than to the conquering power of the Roman Empire. We also looked at the first six seals and through them identified a number of sources representing the malignant powers of evil that dominated the early church age. They were the despotic and cruel Roman emperors, his conquering armies, grasping businessmen, corrupt governments, politicians and agencies and false religious institutions. We finished with the sixth seal, which was a divine warning to these evil forces. God is not going to stand by and let this repetitive evil process continue forever. He will use His divine power to bring it all to an end. But just before God steps in, there is a pause. It's as if God is hoping people will come to their senses and He won't have to use force to bring them to their senses. However, if they don't respond, then sudden destruction is brought upon them.

We pick up the story in Revelation 8. *The seventh seal* is opened revealing the seven plagues that will befall these evil powers unless they repent. We need to be careful we don't read too much into this scenario as though it is a fait accompli. Even though the souls under the altar cry out, **"How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:9-10)**, we need to remember God is about life and not death. We need to remember there are previous examples where people heeded God's warning to repent and God relented, like the people of Nineveh.

Jonah 3:9-10 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." 10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

And again there is a caution in the story of Jonah for all Christians and that is, we shouldn't sulk like Jonah did when evildoers repent and don't receive what we think they deserve (Jonah 4:1-4). We like the angels in heaven should rejoice when sinners come to repentance (Luke 15:8). On the other hand, we have the example of Pharaoh during the time of the Exodus, although warned repeatedly, only relented after being afflicted with ten plagues. Before each plague, God sent Moses back to Pharaoh to warn him of the wrath to come. As we will soon see, this same scenario of warning is repeated here in Revelation.

However, it is during one of these plagues, the fifth, we see another source of evil added to our list. ***Revelation 9:11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).***

Later on we will identify who this "Destroyer" is. Suffice to say here, destruction is his modus operandi. In addition, he has at his disposal a host of evil cohorts who go about inflicting torment and destruction on humanity.

Revelation 9:2-3 When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. 3 And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.

Normally this scenario in Revelation is applied to the end days, but in reality these evil supernatural powers have been inflicting their torment on humanity down through the ages as all the victims of war and pestilence (including those under the yoke of the Roman Empire) will testify. The German philosopher Friedrich Hegel recounts an insightful story while He was writing his *Phenomenology of Spirit* in Jena when the emperor Napoleon rode through the village with his entourage. Napoleon was about to fight a crucial battle against Frederick William III of Prussia. From his window above the street, Hegel made this telling observation about the evil forces at play

behind world history, “I saw the world spirit outside my window.” Tyrants like Napoleon become willing pawns in the hands of the dragon and his evil cohorts.

Back to our story. However, after six trumpets, similar to what happened in Egypt, nothing changes, they did not repent even in the face of these horrific plagues.

Revelation 9:20- 21 *The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.*

We expect the final trumpet to sound, but again a voice from heaven interrupts the scenario.

Revelation 10:11 *Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.”*

So again, in the face of impending doom, there is a pause, and the reason is to allow a prophetic voice in the mode of Moses and Jonah to call for repentance. Again we are reminded God is a God who seeks to give life not take it. God appoints two witnesses to go forth calling for change (Revelation 11:3). However, the call for repentance is rejected and they are killed (Revelation 11:7).

The seventh trumpet sounds and again a different vision is displayed, rather than a vision of a world bent on destruction, we see one under the gracious reign of God.

Revelation 11:15 *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah and he will reign for ever and ever.”*

This cycle of foreboding, a pause and then hope is repeated. The message for us as Christians regardless of the age in which we live is, we too are to be “life bringers” not “life takers.”

In Revelation 12 we are introduced to another beastly power that was alluded to earlier. It is here we come face to face with the ultimate source of evil.

Revelation 12:1-5 *A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.*

These heavenly bodies are the same ones that appear in Joseph’s dream where his family bows down to him (Genesis 37:9). This pregnant woman represents the nation of Israel bringing forth the Messiah. But the woman has a mortal enemy intent on destroying her child.

V.3 *Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.*

V.9 identifies this dragon as Satan the devil. Its reference to seven heads is later identified as the city of Rome (Revelation 17:9). John identifies the true source of evil motivating these world dominating beasts and it is this enormous red dragon who was earlier called “**Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).**”

V.4 *Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.*

This is a flashback to an earlier time. Back before humanity existed this dragon mounted a rebellion against God with the support of a third of the angels. However, they were defeated and thrown down to the earth (Isaiah 14:13-14).

Right from the beginning, we see this dragon’s modus operandi is to destroy God’s good work. His intention in the Garden of Eden was to destroy God’s good work. Now we see him trying to destroy Jesus’ redemptive mission.

V.4 ...*The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.*

You will remember King Herod's attempt to destroy Jesus as a young child by ordering the deaths of all male children from two years old and under who lived in and around Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-18). Jesus however fled with His family to Egypt and went on to complete His mission of redemption and returned to heaven.

Revelation 12:6 The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

The woman, now representing the New Testament church is protected and nourished by God down through the ages, despite the devil's attempts to destroy it (Matthew 16:18).

V.7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

This is not referring to the previous rebellion just mentioned but a new battle after Christ's atoning sacrifice and resurrection. Prior to this event, we are told in the book of Job that Satan had access to God's throne and used it to bring accusations against God's people (Job 1:6-7; Job 2:1-2). But because of Christ's saving work, the devil's accusations are no longer valid so his access is denied and he and his demons are cast down to the earth for good.

Revelation 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

As we saw earlier, the decisive battle to rid the world of evil is not going to happen at the end of the age, as it has already taken place when Jesus defeated the principalities and powers with his atoning sacrifice at the cross (Colossians 2:14-15). As Genesis 3:15 had predicted, there would be ongoing "enmity" between the serpent (Satan) and the woman (God's people) and the "Seed" (Jesus) who would come from the woman. Satan was able to "bruise" Christ's heel through the crucifixion, but that very event fatally doomed the devil by "bruising" his head. By defeating the devil through the temptation, atonement and resurrection, Jesus dethroned this beastly illegitimate ruler and claimed rulership of the cosmos back for God.

Ephesians 1:19-22That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

This is why we read here in verse 22, God has already "***placed all things under his feet***" and appointed him to be head over everything," even though the full manifestation of this reality is still in the future.

Again, this is the "already, but not yet" tension we discussed earlier. Jesus' decisive victory over Satan at the cross and his banishment from heaven sends the fatally wounded Satan into a fit of rage.

Revelation 12:12-13 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." 13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

This event precipitates the clash between the reign of the newly instituted kingdom of God and the evil values of the kingdoms of this age. It sets the stage for the inevitable clash between the values of the new creation and the bestial and brutal images a desperate devil is about to unleash on God's people.

This is why the early church suffered such heavy persecution at the hands of the dragon's human instruments, the beastly Roman Empire with its iron teeth and bronze claws. Jesus through John wants his readers to understand they are the victims of a defeated and desperate devil. They are

encouraged to hold firm and not give in to the prevailing conditions as God will give you the strength to prevail.

Revelation 12:14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.

This ***"time, times and half a time"*** is the same period of 1260 days mentioned in verse 6, but represented in years rather than days. Remarkably, the persecution of Christians ceased when the emperor Constantine who had "converted" to Christianity in 312AD granted Christianity official tolerance a year later with the "Edict of Milan," in 313AD. It was 67 years later that Christianity was proclaimed the official religion of the Roman Empire by emperor Theodosius in 380AD. The point being, God is not going to allow the destroyers to have their way as He has and will overcome them with the opposing power of life. So again the question comes back to one of allegiance, even in the face of terrible persecution, "Are you with the dragon who presides over destruction or with the Creator who presides over life?"

Chapter 80 – Revelation 13-18 – Two Beasts and the Great Harlot

Last session we came face to face with the ultimate source of evil, the great red dragon. So far we have identified a number of sources representing the forces of evil. They were the despotic and cruel Roman emperors, his conquering armies, grasping businessmen, corrupt government agencies and false religious institutions, and finally a fierce supernatural red dragon called the “destroyer” and his evil cohorts. God is not going to allow these destroying evil forces to have their way forever and He is going to step in and bring this cycle of destruction to an end.

This is the focus of the book from this point on, the destruction of the destroyer and his evil cohorts both natural and supernatural. These evil agents have invaded God’s good earth and infested all areas of life with their wickedness. We see this represented now by the two beasts sponsored by the dragon, one that comes up out of the sea, the other out of the earth.

Revelation 13:1 The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.

This is the same beast that was identified earlier, but now we get more details. What we see here is John adopting the same practice Daniel used to portray the natures of conquering empires as wild beasts. But John takes this symbolism further by combining these evil traits from Daniel’s first three beasts and combines them into the fourth fearsome beast.

Revelation 13:2 The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.

This beast is used by Satan to inflict his wickedness on people by controlling the political arm of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire rampaged across the earth crushing all in its path. Julius Caesar’s famous quote, “I came, I saw, I conquered.”

Revelation 13:3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed.

This is referring to the reincarnation of this type of evil power down through the ages. Regardless of the age, the dragon will infect each political system with his destructive evil influence.

John, in speaking to the churches, is again contrasting two types of power at work. The Lamb too had suffered a fatal wound but rises from death to give life while the beast rises from the dead to take life. The Lamb “conquers” by faithfully suffering death for others while the beast inflicts death on others. The Roman Empire prided itself on its system of justice, but their justice was implemented from the perspective of “might is right.” God’s justice in contrast is implemented from the perspective of “love.”

Revelation 13:7 It was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

As mentioned earlier, the dragon inspired the beast to wage war with God’s people. Nero, for instance, blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians and unleashed violent persecution on the Christians. Christians were arrested and thrown to wild beasts in the circus or were crucified. Many were also burned to death at night in Nero’s gardens to serve as lighting while Nero mingled among the watching guests or rode around the fires in a chariot.

Revelation 13:8-10 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

Worship is an expression as to whom one gives their loyalties.

V.9 Whoever has ears, let them hear. 10 “If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed.” This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people.

Are you going to give your loyalty to this predatory beast or to the suffering lamb?

The beast from the sea works in the realm of politics, but now we are introduced to a second beast.

Revelation 13:11-12 *Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. 12 It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed.*

The second beast from the land supports the beast from the sea through the religious and economic practices that serve the interests of the empire. But beware; even though it looks like a lamb, it is really a wolf in sheep's clothing. What is being revealed here is the two ways the dragon infests society with his evil practices, first through the political sphere, then through false religion and economic bondage. Notice the terms used to describe the methods of this second beast in regard to worship practices.

Revelation 13:13-15 *And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. 14 Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. 15 The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.*

The role of the second beast is to promote the imperial cult through worship. Julius Caesar was formally deified as "the Divine Julius," and his son Augustus Caesar became "Son of the Divine One."

Now notice the methods it uses to control economic forces.

Revelation 13:16-17 *It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, 17 so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.*

The mark of the beast is symbolic language used to represent the social and economic ways of engaging with the empire. The warning is, as you engage with the empire in your day-to-day living, be careful you don't adopt the same evil practices you see at work in the culture around you that exploit and oppress others. And of course you don't have to look too hard to see these same evil forces at work in today's world. The political establishment even in our leading democracies have become so corrupt and self-serving (snouts in the trough) that the call has gone out to "drain the swamp." The religious force of Islam holds sway over much of the world's population, and even Christian institutions are accused of violating their sacred trust with those most vulnerable with predatory priests. The fat cats of the corporate and business world retire with multi-million dollar golden handshakes even when they have been kicked out because of blatant failure or fraud.

Now John introduces the intriguing number of 666 into the dialogue.

Revelation 13:18 *This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.*

This number too has led to a great deal of speculation and some have gone to great lengths to identify who it may represent. This is usually done through a system called "gematria" where a number value is applied to successive letters of the alphabet. Under this formula, the emperor Nero was identified in Hebrew if his name is used as "Nero Caesar." Later even the name of the prophet Mohammed apparently fitted into the system. But was John really giving a secret code to identify a particular person or was he using it as a symbol representing a particular system? We have already seen how he has used symbolism such as, horsemen, dragons, beasts, etc. to represent a particular system or process. We do the same thing today when we use images such as Elephants and Donkeys to represent the republican and democratic parties in the US. We use the symbols of bulls and bears to represent the direction of the stock market. The wisdom that is called for in this verse is to identify the various evil methods used by these powers represented by

symbols so that you are not deceived. “Are you going to worship the Lamb or the dragon?” “Are you going to cast your allegiance in with the 144,000 or with those represented by 666?”

And this is precisely the message as we move to Revelation 14 that identifies two groups, the 144,000 who are faithful to the Lamb and the destruction of those who oppose the Lamb and give their allegiance to the beast.

Revelation 14:9 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, 10 they, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.

God’s people are again warned not to adopt the same evil practices you see at work in the culture around you otherwise you will find yourself on the wrong side of God’s fury.

With Revelation 15-16 the vision shifts again to God’s throne and the seven angels holding the seven last plagues that are released on those who worshiped the beast and its image.

Revelation 15:1-3 I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed. 2 And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God 3 and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb.

While destruction is the fate of those who continue to resist God, the destiny of those who remain loyal are rewarded for their faithfulness.

Revelation 17 is an obituary (looking back) and we are introduced to another powerful symbol of evil, a great harlot dressed in purple and scarlet, glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls and inscribed with the name, “Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” The harlot like the two beasts already identified, represents another form of wickedness that infests these evil empires. Conquering empires filled with the arrogance of their conquests, degenerate into hotbeds of hedonism, debauchery and depravity. Babylon the Great, symbolising the city of Rome situated on the seven hills (seven heads of the beast, Revelation 17:9) is portrayed as a harlot riding on the back of the political and economic power of Imperial Rome. Her depiction by John point to her deceitful practices that revolve around pleasure, profit and power.

Revelation 17:4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.

First of all, the fact she is riding on the beast demonstrates the influence she wields in the powerful ruling circles of the empire. A prostitute exchanges pleasure for profit and in the process dehumanises and degrades life. Second, the harlot’s attire shows she is obsessed with the desire to display wealth, status, and opulence. Third, the golden cup “filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries” along with the fact she was “drunk with the blood of God’s holy people” (Revelation 17:6) testify to her vicious use of power and her appetite for violence. Of course Rome was known not only for its violent conquest of other nations but also for its gladiatorial sports that included the persecution of Christians. As a harlot without values, she will even stoop to murder in order to further her goals of domination.

John’s goal through this cheap and gaudy image is again, to warn Christians not to be seduced by her vices. He paints a portrait of Babylon so repulsive one has to question why anyone would want to be part of it. Of course this picture is the antithesis of the image Rome would like itself to be portrayed as. It wants to portray itself as strong, virtuous and elegant but in reality she is a cheap drunken whore. By comparing Rome to Babylon, John warns his readers not be seduced by her ways, but to look beneath the surface to reveal the true beastly nature underneath. Of course, this advice is just as applicable today as it was then. We live in a society that is obsessed with the

pursuit of pleasure (sex and pornography), profit and consumerism (out of control debt and credit cards) and violence (TV, video games, crime, cage fighting). Each of these pursuits dehumanises and degrades life. Eventually a society dominated by these vices will consume and devour itself. And this is what eventually happens to the harlot.

Revelation 17:16 The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

Evil eventually becomes evil's undoing. The society that uses violence to dominate others will in the end be consumed by violence. We see this rise and fall process repeating itself over and over throughout history.

This is why the call goes out to God's people in Revelation 18 to come out of this lifestyle of violence and consumption.

Revelation 18:4 "Come out of her, my people,' so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues.

But even as she is destroyed, we see the politicians and merchants who benefited the most from committing adultery with this harlot mourning her loss.

Revelation 18:9 "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her.

V.11-12 "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore— 12 cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls...

But at the end of this long list of items is one commodity upon which this wealth and luxury has been built.

V.13 ...cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves.

Everything including people in this beastly system had been reduced to a commodity. The lifestyle of the rich and famous is made possible through the repulsive trade of human souls. This same exploitation is very evident today as our rich economies exploit the low paid masses of the third world to subsidise our extravagant lifestyles. The question at the end of this obituary is left hanging, "Is the legacy of this drunken whore something you want to be part of?"

Chapter 81 – Revelation 19-20 – Christ’s Return in Majesty

Last session we finished with the destruction of the great harlot (Babylon) riding on the back of the beast. So far we have seen how the devil has infiltrated and infected the political, economic, and social systems with his evil ways. God is not going to allow these destructive evil forces to have their way forever and He is going to step in and bring this cycle of destruction to an end.

After the obituary of the harlot, we are back to real time and we pick up the story in Revelation 19. The scene switches again to the heavenly throne room and we are introduced to a great multitude crying three hallelujahs over Babylon’s fall. The last hallelujah signals God’s long awaited intervention in worldly affairs.

Revelation 19:6-7 *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.*

At long last, the cry of the martyrs, “How long O Lord?” is answered. The heavenly army sallies forth with all the power of Almighty God to put an end to evil once and for all.

Revelation 19:11-15 *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron sceptre.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords.*

This is none other than Jesus Christ leading the heavenly army against the forces of evil, who under the influence of the great red dragon mount one final desperate battle.

Revelation 19:19 *Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army.*

The kingdoms of this age rise up in defiance to battle the righteous kingdom of God, one representing the brutal and bestial images of this age against the perfect kingdom of love and grace representing the Lamb. We were first introduced to this battle in Revelation 16 when the seventh angel released the seventh plague.

Revelation 16:16-17 *Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. 17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!”*

Armageddon is another one of those terms that has come in for a lot of speculation over the centuries and is usually associated with the geographical location of the final battle between good and evil. But is John referring to it as a literal geographical location or is it being used in much the same way as Rome is represented by the symbol, Babylon? The literal interpretation of Armageddon is “Hill of Megiddo.” Rather than a literal location, the original readers would have regarded this in the same way we regard the terms, Waterloo, Pearl Harbour, or Ground Zero (2 Kings 23:29-30). In other words, this is where evil finally meets its “ground zero” or “Waterloo.”

We need to notice a couple of things about this battle. Christ’s robe is dipped in blood at the start of the battle, not the end (Revelation 19:13). We saw earlier in the book how His robe became covered in blood (Revelation 1:5; 5:9). In contrast to the enemies He is fighting, His blood is shed for the sake of others. Heavenly armour of Christ’s army is a white robe not breastplates. The only weapon Christ needs is the sword that comes out of His mouth; such is its power. These evil forces are destroyed when truth and justice overpower it.

Revelation 19:20-21 *But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.*

Armageddon culminates with the destruction of the forces of evil represented by the beast and the false prophet, when they are thrown into the lake of fire never to raise their evil and malevolent heads again.

Revelation 20 is a flashback or a summary of the preceding events. Back in Revelation 12 we were given a summary of the ongoing “enmity,” predicted in Genesis 3:15, between the serpent (Satan) and the woman (God’s people) and the “Seed” (Jesus). Satan was able to “bruise” Christ’s heel at the crucifixion, but that very event fatally doomed the devil by “bruising” his head. The decisive battle to rid the world of evil is not going to happen at the end of the age. It has already happened when Jesus defeated the principalities and powers including the devil and his demons with his atoning sacrifice.

Colossians 2:15 *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

Christ’s victory over sin and death effectively took away Satan’s power to accuse and he was banished to the earth.

Revelation 12:10 *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.*

This defeat and banishment effectively curtailed Satan’s evil influence over earthly matters to a certain degree and this is the 1000-year or millennial period now referred to in Revelation 20.

Revelation 20:1-3 *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.*

If you like he was put on a chain like a wild dog, which restricts his ability to create havoc. You will remember how the woman (church) was given divine protection from the furious dragon after he was thrown down from heaven (Revelation 12:13-17).

We briefly looked at this millennial period in an earlier session on the kingdom of God, but we need to revisit it at this point as this 1000 year period is another one of those issues that has come in for a great deal of speculation. As we saw earlier, the course of humanity and history has been set on a whole new trajectory as a result of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. This is the pivotal moment in salvation history and the beginning of the new creation. As a result, we have two times running in parallel, the new creation, i.e. the kingdom of God is steadily advancing, while chronos time is falling away into decay. However, this all changes at Christ’s return. We just read back in Revelation 19:11-15 the description of the returning King of kings and Lord of lords in all his unveiled majesty and glory. This is the planned consummation of the new creation initiated with Jesus’ victory over sin and death at the cross. Christ is returning to make all things new; there is no going back to the old, decaying structures of this present evil world. The book of Revelation, as we have discovered, has revealed the source of evil that infests all of human activity and the downfall of each of these evils. So to view the 1000-year earthly reign of Christ within the old decaying structure of chronos time fails to recognize what transpired when Jesus rose from the dead. Rather it is referring to this “between the times” period between Jesus’ victory over sin and death and His triumphant return to judge and renew all things.

But shortly before the end of chronos time, the dragon is released from his restricting chain to again wreck havoc.

Revelation 20:7-8 *When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.*

This again is the final end-time battle between good and evil already mentioned in Revelation 16 and 19.

The devil mobilises Gog and Magog for one final battle, but they are destroyed when fire comes down from heaven before they can inflict more wickedness.

Revelation 20: 9-10 *They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

The one *“whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer)”* (Revelation 9:11) is finally destroyed when he too is thrown into the lake of fire.

This final decisive battle and the destruction of the dragon, the beast and false prophet mark the end of their destructive influence in world affairs. To hark back to Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 2, this is when the *“a rock was cut out, but not by human hands”* destroys the great image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Daniel 2:34-35 *While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.*

No longer will these sources of evil who have infiltrated and infested every aspect of human activity, Satan, his evil cohorts, demons, tyrannical rulers, their conquering armies, predatory government politicians and bureaucrats, grasping businessman, and peddlers of false religion be allowed to function in this new kingdom. Instead this whole system in opposition to God represented by the description of “Babylon the great” is destroyed and in its place a new system represented by the heavenly New Jerusalem is introduced.

Revelation 18:21-24 *Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: “With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.*

The destruction of these evil powers also reminds us that the hoped for ideals of the kingdom of God will not come within history but at the end of history. Despite what some in our societies may naively think about achieving a golden age through human efforts, more education, better forms of government, more laws, etc., it just isn't going to happen. It's a noble ideal of course.

Unfortunately, each generation goes to its grave with dashed expectations and the world about the same as it has always been. The forces of evil are so powerful and their influence so pervasive, it is only Christ at the end of history who will finally destroy them. This doesn't mean it gives us the right to disengage from the world. We need to remember we serve a risen Lord who along with the life-renewing Holy Spirit is already at work alleviating human suffering and opposing the destructive powers of darkness. But as John reminds us in this book, we need to be part of the life-bringing kingdom of God rather than the destructive kingdoms of this world. These vivid images in Revelation are designed first, to highlight the destructive evil power of these beasts, but also to remind Christians that in the final analysis, these brutal forces that would destroy life will be overcome by the conquering power of Christ's Word.

At the beginning of this series on the book of Revelation, we identified three themes running throughout the book. The first and major theme is one of allegiance. We shared the legend a

Native American grandfather speaking with his grandson about the two competing wolves that reside in each of us, one representing evil, and the other good. The story ends with the grandfather answering his grandson's question as to "Which wolf will win?" with the response, "The one you feed." John wants his readers to align themselves with the kingdom devoted to the preservation of life rather than the destruction of life despite the perils they may face. In other words, align yourselves with the kingdom representing "good."

But there are also a couple of sub-themes running throughout the dialogue. There are evil powers at work that infiltrate and infest all levels of human society, and the book of Revelation systematically exposes these malevolent powers, along with their final destruction. However the book does not end with destruction, but with a final vision of hope. From a human perspective it appears like the forces of evil are winning the battle but in the end as we just saw, the forces of good prevail. We now turn our attention to this final vision of hope.

Chapter 82 – Revelation 20 – Resurrection of the Saints

At the beginning of this series on the book of Revelation, we identified three themes running throughout the book. The first and major theme is one of allegiance. Then we looked at a couple of sub-themes running throughout the dialogue. There are evil powers at work that infiltrate and infest all levels of human society, and the book of Revelation systematically exposes these malevolent powers, along with their final destruction. However, the book does not end with destruction, but with a final vision of hope. We now turn our attention to this second sub-theme, the final vision of hope.

Now we are introduced to two resurrections – the resurrection of the saints and the resurrection of all peoples. Last session we finished with the destruction of the dragon, the false prophet and the beast representing the forces of darkness. Now we see what the giver of life has in store for humanity now that the sources of evil have been removed.

To look at this first resurrection, we need to back up again and look at this 1000-year “between the times” or “millennial time” period between Christ’s resurrection and His promised return.

Revelation 20:4-6 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

This as we saw is referring to the millennial or church age (v.5). John identifies these faithful Christians as martyrs (or from the Greek, “witnesses”) those who had remained loyal even in the face of death down through the centuries.

V.5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

In order to comprehend what is going on here, we need to make a distinction between what happens to one of God’s saints when they die and those who are not. As we learned earlier, there are two different dimensions at work, the physical one we humans occupy of time and space, and the spiritual one, eternal time, the one God occupies. Back in Revelation 7, we were introduced to the 144,000, the church, who are the continuation of the Israel of God, hence the mention of the twelve tribes (Revelation 7:4-8). These mentioned here in Revelation 20 are the same group, the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 7 who have remained loyal to the Lamb down through the ages and have their future sealed. They may have died from persecution or natural causes but because they died in the faith, the second death has no power over them. The second death is reserved for those who at the end of time refuse to accept Christ’s gift of grace. But notice the saints came to life and reigned with Christ as priests during this 1000-year period of the church age.

To understand this section of scripture we need to remember that with Christ’s victory over death at His resurrection, He introduced the age of the new creation. We have these two overlapping times, the old corrupt age leading to death which is passing away, and the new age of the kingdom of God leading to everlasting life. It is these two overlapping ages that can be a little confusing as we read scriptural references concerning these issues. Sometimes they are looked at from the perspective of the new creation, sometimes from the perspective of the old decaying creation. But not only has time changed with the introduction of the new creation, but also the status of Christians. Prior to our conversion, like the rest of humanity, we were born of the earth or “dust”, in other words, mortal (Genesis 2:7). But now, because of baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit we have been born from “above” (immortal) (John 3:6; 1 Corinthians 15:49).

1 Peter 1:23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Christians, by the fact they have been baptised and incorporated into the body of Christ, have passed from death, (the old corrupt age of the flesh), to the life of the Spirit of the new creation (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14).

Romans 6:3-4 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Baptism pictures the death of the old man and the birth of the new man in Christ. As far as God is concerned and from the perspective of the new age, we are already citizens of the new creation, the kingdom of God and spiritually speaking, already sit with Christ in the heavenly realm (Colossians 3:1-3), and reign with Him (Revelation 20:4; 3:21).

Ephesians 2:4-6 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

And even though this old body, which is part of the old corrupt age, is decaying away, we also have a spiritual body that is being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

A Christian already partakes in the power of the resurrection by the fact the Holy Spirit lives in him (Romans 8:9-11). It is because of the believer's status as belonging to the realm of the new creation and his new relationship status to Jesus Christ that his death is different to that of a non-believer. Paul confirms this in Philippians 1:21-23

Philippians 1:21-23 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

Paul is saying, "If it is God's will for me to continue his work to preach the gospel in this old decaying time, so be it. But my preference is to depart and experience the life of the new creation in Christ's presence."

Paul understood that when viewed from the perspective of the new creation, when a believer dies, they immediately cross that threshold between mortality and immortality and enter into the presence of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8). This seems to be Jesus' understanding when He promised the thief on the cross, "**Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.**" (Luke 23:43). Of course a more traditional view on the resurrection of the saints is that the body waits in the grave until Christ's return. But again, this appears to be what is happening because it is being viewed from the perspective of old time and space. Another position held by some is that of "soul sleep" or an "intermediate state" which is an unconscious state between death and resurrection. Both of these positions fail to take into consideration the impact Christ's resurrection to glory and majesty had on the old structures of time and space and the granting of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to believers. After these momentous events instigating the new creation, there is no going back to the old decaying structures of time and space. This is also why a millennium within the old structures of time and space after Christ's return in all His manifest glory is a contradiction of all that has transpired with Christ's atonement, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost. Both of these positions, the traditional view and the unconscious or intermediate state are difficult to reconcile with what we read earlier. As we read in Revelation 20:4-6, it would be difficult to be seated on thrones and reign with Christ as priests during this millennial church age from the grave or in an unconscious state. We also saw back in Revelation 6 the souls of those slain under the altar asking the question, "**How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?**" (Revelation 6:9-11). Although this could be

interpreted figuratively it could also suggest a conscious state. And then there is the reference to this being the first resurrection.

Revelation 20:5-6 ...This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection.

The implication of this verse is that the saints who die are resurrected to glory during this 1000-year church period prior to Christ's return. Paul gives a further insight when he addressed the concerns of the Thessalonian church as to what would happen to those of their fellow believers who had died in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

Again, the implication is these saints have been with Christ in heaven all along in order for Jesus to bring them back with Him. Those saints who are still alive at Christ's triumphant return will join them.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

There is no reason to believe that what happens to these believers who are still alive at Christ's return when they are transformed and receive their glorified spiritual body will not happen to believers at the point of their death prior to His return.

This section of scripture also refutes the modern popular idea of the rapture of the living saints being taken from the world prior to Christ's return to escape the coming "tribulation." There is no scriptural support for this position. The 144,000 figuratively represent these two groups of saints together, those who have died in the faith, and those still alive at Christ's return. And finally, what would be the point of leaving these saints in either the grave or in an unconscious state when we are told the second death has no power over them? Why unnecessarily prolong the Christian hope of eternal life with our God?

That takes care of the resurrection of the saints but what about the rest of humanity? The great mass of struggling sinful humanity who up till this point have never heard of Jesus Christ, or if they have, refused to engage with the gospel message of salvation? What does God have in store for them? This is where the second resurrection comes in.

Before we move on to the second resurrection, we need to just back up to Revelation 20:4-6 again and ask the question, what are these resurrected saints doing while they reign with Christ as priests during this 1000-year period? Besides experiencing the pleasure of being with their Lord in heaven, I would like to suggest these now glorified saints are given another responsibility while they wait for Christ's triumphant return to the earth. I want to stress this is a personal point of view but I feel the saints of God are going to play an important role in the next phase of God's purpose and that is the second resurrection to judgment. The mission Jesus gave to His disciples prior to His ascension to heaven is given in Matthew 28:19.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The church, with mixed results, has been carrying out this mission over the last 2000 years. But the question is, does this mission stop at Christ's return or does it continue and really come to its ultimate exciting conclusion after Christ's return? I would suggest these saints who are ruling with Christ during the 1000-year period are being prepared to play an important role in the great white throne judgment when the billions who have ever lived are resurrected back to life

Revelation 20: 11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.

Here standing before Jesus Christ is this great mass of humanity, most of whom haven't even heard the name Jesus Christ or what He has done for them. Another group who have different levels of comprehension of who Jesus is and what He has done for them but have not acted on that information. Then there are the countless babies who have died in infancy and the mentally disabled who have not had the capacity to make a decision one way or the other. Unlike those in the first resurrection, this group is subject to the second death.

V.14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

What is the fate of these billions?

Chapter 83 – Revelation 20 – Resurrection to Judgment

Last session we finished with the resurrection of the saints, those who had died in the faith or were resurrected at Christ's return. But what about the rest of humanity? The great mass of struggling sinful humanity who up till this point may never have even heard of Jesus Christ, or if they have, refused to engage with the gospel message of salvation? What does God have in store for them? This is where the second resurrection comes in.

Revelation 20: 11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.

This is judgment day when all have to give an account for their thoughts and actions.

But before we look at this section of scripture a little more closely, I made the non-traditional statement last time that Christ's mission to the church of making disciples of all men does not cease at Christ's return. A more traditional interpretation of this event is for the "good" to go up to heaven and the "evil" to go down to hell based on their deeds. However, in this scenario I am proposing, this mission to make disciples comes to its ultimate exciting conclusion after Christ's return. Christ has gathered together a special group of people who have been prepared to play an important role in the great white throne judgment when the billions who have ever lived are resurrected back to life. This special group is made up of the resurrected saints of the church age who join with the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament. Imagine this group for one moment. Here we have the great cloud of witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 11; Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the prostitute Rahab, David, Samuel and the prophets, together with Jesus' disciples, Paul, the early church fathers, the reformers and saints from every age being brought together in preparation for this great day.

Revelation 20:4-6 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

All of these faithful servants would have arrived in heaven with their own personal worldview depending on the age in which they lived, with their own limited or distorted view of God's purpose or doctrines, with the opportunity to meet with the risen Christ in preparation for this great event. And like the apostle Paul, who had a special encounter with the risen Christ and was the greatest proponent of the gospel message after meeting with Jesus, these saints have had the opportunity to be taught personally by Jesus Christ in preparation for this momentous day (1 Corinthians 15:3-7; Galatians 1:11). Notice they were given positions of leadership, (thrones), authority to judge so that when this great mass of humanity rise from their graves, there are saints there from their own era to relate to them and I would suggest, guide them into God's gospel truth.

1 Corinthians 6:3 Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?

What would be the purpose of having saints there to judge if it were already decided who was "in" and who was "out"? I would suggest the trained, resurrected saints have been enlisted by Jesus Christ to further His mission of making disciples of all nations at this crucial time of judgment. And perhaps this is when the foolish and powerless bride of Christ will shame the wise and powerful of the world (1 Corinthians 1:26-27; James 2:5).

Back to Revelation 20, where we see the bewildered and confused dead, both small and great mulling around wondering what is going on. This great mass of humanity standing before the judge Jesus Christ is made up of various groups. There are billions who haven't even heard the name Jesus Christ or what He has done for them. Another group who have different levels of comprehension of who Jesus is and what He has done for them but have not acted on that information. Then there are the countless babies and children who have died prematurely and the mentally incapacitated that have not had the capacity to make a decision one way or the other. Also included in this group will be those whose lives were brought to a premature end because of their extreme wickedness such as those in Noah's flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the inhabitants of the Promised Land. This is also the time when those who have suffered collateral damage as part of the great drama being played out on this earth are resurrected such as Job's children, and the child of King David and Bathsheba.

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

Two sets of books are identified, a book of deeds, and the book of life. Our actions matter to God. He is a holy God of justice and righteousness and injustice needs to be punished (Romans 6:23). And when this book of deeds reveals our deeds, there is only one conclusion for all men, we are all pronounced guilty of sin and injustice.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We are all exposed for the wicked sinners we are. And if this is the basis by which we are judged, then there is no hope for any of us. We would all be shipped off to the hell that rebellious sinners deserve. But God has provided a way for sinners to make the transition from having our names moved from the book of deeds to the book of life. This is because; in reality this is not the final judgment. The final judgment happened when Jesus went to the cross on behalf of not only the resurrected saints of the first resurrection, but also for the rest of humanity now standing before Him. Once Jesus has uttered that awful cry of God-forsakenness on the cross (Matthew 27:46) are we supposed to believe there will be those who have to take this cry up on their own lips as though Christ has not uttered it for them? The great decisive turning point of salvation history happened when Jesus defeated Satan, sin and evil at the cross. So even though Jesus stands before them as their Judge, He also stands there as their Savior with a robe dipped in blood that wants to give them the gift of eternal life (Revelation 19:13).

Romans 11:32 For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

We read about this Savior who wants to extend mercy to all back in Revelation 5:9.

Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

I have mentioned this before, but whether or not we want to admit it or not, as this verse stresses, we have all been implicated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With His blood He has "***purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.***" Jesus Christ has invested His blood in every individual as He substituted Himself and died for all humanity (2 Corinthians 5:19). He came and did for us what we could not do for ourselves. And if the death penalty has already been paid, God is not going to ask for it a second time, unless of course someone is foolish enough to reject what Christ has already paid for on their behalf.

In an earlier session, I mentioned we should take note of this phrase, "***every tribe and language and people and nation.***" In the five times this phrase is mentioned in the book of Revelation, it is applied in reference to both the wicked and the redeemed. For instance, in Revelation 13 it is applied in reference to worshipers of the beast out of the sea.

Revelation 13:7-8 *It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.*

By contrast, in Revelation 7 it shows them joining with the 144,000 faithful saints of the church age.

Revelation 7:9 *After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.*

Somehow this immense group of sinful humanity has made the vast leap from beast worshipers to wearing white robes and waving palm branches. How is this possible? There is only one way sinners can cross this vast gulf and that is via the same way the saints have crossed, through the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ.

The deck is massively loaded in favour of the defendants

To understand how this judgment of people from ***“every nation, tribe, people and language”*** is going to proceed, we need to remember some important principles we have learned throughout this series.

1) All have experienced the hell of what life is like without God.

All, both good and bad have eaten from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil and seen and experienced the consequences of that diet. Unlike Adam and Eve who had no experience of sin or evil prior to their fateful decision to disobey God, all of mankind now knows the consequences of what life is like separated from God. One truth the serpent was right about was, they would ***“be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:5)***. Given the opportunity to now experience heaven, life with God, the possibility of their accepting the gift of grace increases dramatically.

2) The devil and his demons are no longer around to exert their evil influence on mankind.

They were cast into the lake of fire prior to this event happening and now cannot meddle in the decision, as has been the case since the Garden of Eden.

3) Jesus Christ has redeemed man's fallen human nature.

When Jesus became man, He assumed our humanity including its fallen nature in order to restore it to its original state. *“That which He has not assumed He has not healed.”* – Gregory of Nazianzus. It is with this redeemed nature humanity will be resurrected.

4) This great multitude, because of God's grace, in an objective or corporate sense, stand before Jesus Christ as forgiven sinners (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:19).

For the preceding 2000 years, the message of the gospel has been about God's grace. This doesn't suddenly change at this crucial point in the story. It is best to anticipate what God will do on past behaviour rather than on how we may interpret Daniel and Revelation. However, what is clear is each individual has to accept God's gift of grace personally in order for his or her position to move from the objective to the subjective. This means repenting of their sins and accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior. This is not universalism, a decision for Christ is non-negotiable, and the gift offered has to be accepted.

5) The Holy Spirit along with the resurrected saints teach them spiritual truths and are willing each of them to accept Christ as their Savior.

As we have all experienced, the Holy Spirit gives us the capacity to understand spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:10-14). He opens closed eyes and softens hard hearts to be receptive to the freely given grace of God. We have to assume an adequate period of time is allowed for this spiritual instruction to take place. This allows for those who have never had the opportunity to choose for or against the kingdom “before” death are now given the opportunity to do so “after” death. This view is referred to as “future probation” or “probation after death” although this option is rarely given serious consideration among many theologians. I'm sure God will have a special program prepared for infants, children and the now healed mentally impaired to be instructed in the ways of the Lord, most likely involving their parents.

But back to the vast multitude. As in the case of the repentant thief on the cross (Luke 23:42-43), or the repentant crowd on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36-38), this process of instruction does not necessarily take an inordinate amount of time. The 3000 that were added to the church on the day of Pentecost will be peanuts compared to what will happen on the Day of Judgment when both Jesus and the Holy Spirit show up. And on the subject of the Jews, this is also the time when Paul's prophecy of the Jews being grafted back onto the olive tree in Romans 11 comes to fruition (Romans 11:1-32).

6) Standing before them is the merciful judge, Jesus Christ wearing a robe dipped in blood, who has died for every last one of them and no longer holds their sin against them.

This is the Judge who has pronounced them guilty, but then gets up, walks around from behind the bench and accepts the death penalty on their behalf. Even the worst sinner in the lowest depths of despair will find the God who judges them will accompany them to the seat of judgment and stand in their stead to receive that judgment, such is God's love. Salvation is possible for all men, but God's gift of salvation has to be accepted. Hopefully all will realize resistance to God's love is futile and willingly respond to His gift of grace.

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

7) Finally, as we have seen throughout the series, God is about life and hope, not death and destruction.

Death and destruction are not going to have the final word. The God humanity has to deal with at the judgment has already revealed His wrath and judgment to punish sin through the death of His Son. It is not God's nature to bring children into existence just to consign the vast majority to hell any more than a loving parent would? God's purpose throughout this whole process is to create man "in His image," not to destroy him. From the beginning God chose Abraham, the father of God's people, that through his descendant, Jesus, "all nations of the earth would be blessed" (Genesis 22:15-18). He wants to share the life and love of the Trinity with humanity and has gone to extraordinary lengths to achieve this purpose. Instead of ending in tragedy, this event is a victory celebration as it is the culmination of all God has planned for humanity. Evil will finally be rooted out of existence and that is good news for everybody.

Because of these factors, the deck is massively loaded in favour of the defendants. In these circumstances, what do you think is going to happen? It is hard to believe any could resist this divine invitation of grace. One's destiny is no longer linked to death through their sin, but rather through relation to Jesus Christ through faith. Through His atonement on their behalf, Christ has broken the link between sin and death and is instead offering them eternal life.

These billions now face a decision, is it going to be heaven or hell. Do they wish to proceed based on their deeds, or on Christ's deeds? If you like, it's very much like the circumstance of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal, does he swallow his pride and join the party after his father's loving plea, or does he stand outside and wallow in self pity? (Luke 15:25-32). Jesus is patiently waiting, pen raised to cross out their name in the book of deeds and add it to the book of life. A simple nod is all that is needed but most fall down in worship of their Savior. Jesus takes their hands, lifts them into a loving embrace and leads them over to partake of the tree of life and to drink from the healing waters that flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1-2,14). All the bitterness and pain of their past life that has been gnawing at their hearts falls away and they are filled with an extraordinary feeling of ecstasy as their fleshly earthly body is transformed into a glorious spiritual body equipped for life in heaven. The accompanying host of saints and angels break into joyful celebration as another child of God joins the family of God.

Chapter 84 – Revelation 20 - Hell

Last session we looked at the second resurrection, when that great mass of struggling sinful humanity are raised to life again and stand before Jesus Christ, the righteous Judge on the Day of Judgment. We saw because of God's great love and graciousness towards His creation, how the odds are stacked in favour of them accepting God's invitation to join Him in heaven. Given the circumstances, it's difficult to imagine anyone turning down the invitation to join Him in eternity. However, it seems there are some recalcitrants who are not so enthusiastic to have their names moved from the book of deeds to the book of life. Unlike those involved in the first resurrection, this group is subject to the second death, that is, spiritual death.

Revelation 20:14-15 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

This introduces the subject of hell. Again, this is another of these subjects that has invited all manner of speculation over the centuries. So we should be careful not to read too much into an area in which scripture gives us few details. However, we can discern a number of principles from scripture. *First*, rather than focusing on the temperature of hell, such as fire (Matthew 18:8-9; 25:41), and darkness (Matthew 8:12; 22:13, 25:30) which are mutually exclusive, or of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12), we need to understand these images are not intended to describe the literal characteristics of hell, but rather what it means to be cut off from their God who is their Creator, Father and Savior. It comes back to relationship; heaven is to be in communion with God, hell is to be cut off from God. *Second*, we should not embrace the sadistic pleasure some of our reformation forebears displayed when talking about the wicked being condemned and thrown into everlasting hell, as this is not God's attitude.

Ezekiel 18:23 Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

As we have witnessed throughout this series, God is not about the destruction of His enemies, but rather loves them and wills their redemption (Romans 5:10). *Third*, the Judge they are brought before is none other than Jesus Christ, the one who loves them and gave His life for them.

The Traditional view of Hell

With that let's look at the subject of hell. I think most of us are familiar with the traditional understanding of hell so we don't need to spend a great deal of time on it. In this view, hell is the place where the wicked will suffer excruciating pain in a lake of fire which shall never be extinguished for all eternity (Luke 16:22-24; Revelation 14:9-11; Revelation 20:10, 14-15). But in recent times, this view has come under increased pressure. The main objection to this view is how this horrific scene reflects on the nature and character of a loving God. If the subject of God allowing evil to exist in the world is a challenging one for Christianity, then the subject of hell, at least when viewed from a traditional standpoint is even more difficult to reconcile with an all-loving God. How do we explain this understanding of God in subjecting these recalcitrants to a miserable existence of conscious eternal suffering? How does this interpretation of hell square with what we read in Revelation 21:3-4?

Revelation 21:3-4 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

After millennia of suffering, we have finally reached that victorious period in time when in answer to the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come....thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," has arrived (Matthew 6:9-10). The devil, sin and death have been defeated and thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

The kingdom of God has arrived in its fullness (Revelation 12:10). God has come to dwell with man in the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:1-4). The bride has made herself ready to sit down with her heavenly husband at the great marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). "All things" have been made new (Revelation 21:5). Christ has "reconciled to Himself all things in heaven and earth" (Colossians 1:20), and God is "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

This backdrop raises two important questions. First, are we to believe this God who loves and died for every human being, chooses to preserve the existence of these rebels for no other reason than to subject him or her to perpetual torment? If this were the case, instead of portraying God's nature as one of love and mercy, rather it would portray it as one of cruelty and vindictiveness. Second, is God going to allow this triumphant heavenly scene mentioned above to be marred for all eternity by the screams and shrieks of those writhing in agony in a far off corner of the cosmos where God is not "all in all"?

The Annihilationist view of Hell

In contrast to this traditional view, there is a growing school of thought that rejects this scenario and has come to regard hell as the place of "annihilation." The "annihilationist" view is that hell will ultimately cease to exist because the wicked thrown there will be destroyed (Matthew 25:46, 2 Thessalonians 1:9). Like the destroyer, Apollyon the devil who went before them into the lake of fire, they will reap what they sow, their ultimate destruction.

Matthew 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Notice the original intention of hell is not for humans but for the devil and his angels. It is not God's intention that any humans end up in this place (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9). If humans ultimately end up there it is because they have wilfully aligned themselves with the destructive and wicked tendencies of those for whom it was intended.

It is not my intention to outline the whole annihilationist argument but here are a few points that make this position quite compelling.

1) The punishment for wilfully rejecting God's offer of grace is spiritual death.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul here is in agreement with Revelation 20:14 where those whose names are not found in the book of life are subject to the "second death," that is, spiritual death. The question, "What is it about death that does not die?" is an appropriate one in these circumstances.

2) The pattern of divine judgment on evil throughout scripture ends with the annihilation of the wicked.

At times, God allows evil to run its course before finally stepping in to annihilate the wicked. We have examples of God having to take this drastic action in the case of Noah's flood, (Genesis 6:5-7, 13) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20-21, 19:1-29). Later, the apostle Peter linked these two examples to the fate of the wicked on the Day of Judgment.

2 Peter 2: 4-6 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly...

Jesus' comment in Matthew 10:28 also seems to reinforce this view.

Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

This implies the "personhood," both body and soul including the consciousness of the wicked will not survive their planned destruction.

3) Eternal life is a promise made only to the righteous, not the wicked (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Eternal life is a gift God alone can grant and there is no indication in scripture it is given to the wicked, which they would have to have in order to survive indefinitely (John 3:15-16; Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 4:14).

John 5:24 *“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.*

4) Our existence whether physical or spiritual depends on the gift of life from the Life-giver. Acts 17:27-28 *God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’*

All created beings both in heaven and earth rely on this gift of life for our continued existence. At any time, God can choose to remove this gift and we will cease to exist (Genesis 6:3; Job 1:21; Psalms 37:20,38; Obadiah 16).

1 Corinthians 15:28 *When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that **God may be all in all.***

This goes back to our earlier point where the heavenly host is celebrating the new heavens and the new earth where “all things are made new” and God is “all in all.” It’s difficult to imagine these wicked beings being included in God’s “all in all.”

The Judgment is about God’s gift of Life

Whether or not we take a more traditional view or an annihilationist view, one thing we can be sure of is, God is not going to allow the wicked to interrupt the heavenly celebrations. So who are these party-poopers who say “no” to God’s “yes” and refuse to accept Christ’s invitation to join the party? The judgment is about God’s gift, an offer of a new life, a new life that longs to break forth out of the corrupt and decaying age of the past into the new life that has broken forth in the resurrected Jesus Christ. It is God’s desire to share this new life made possible by Jesus Christ with all of His children. This is, and has been God’s purpose behind all that has transpired since creation. The judgment, rather than a time to be feared, is a time to leave behind the old decaying life that leads to death and to accept God’s gift of sharing eternal life with Him. Standing before this vast humanity is the righteous Judge and Savior, who in love, took on their cause and substituted Himself as their representative and poured Himself out on the cross for all humanity (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Hebrews 2:9-10 *But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. 10 In bringing many sons and daughters to glory.*

God through Christ has shown that He has not withheld His love from anyone, but has given Himself to all, even if they choose to refuse Him.

Inconceivable as it may seem in the face of such divine love, to now refuse the gift of grace offered them is to reinstate the judgment of the second death Christ so graciously has suffered for them and subsequently God has no option but to grant them their wish, life apart from God, destruction in hell. In other words, they bring this judgment on themselves. In choosing to oppose God’s positive gift to love humanity, it now becomes humanity’s judgment when they refuse it.

John 3:18 *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.*

There is only one way to enter heaven, and that is through Jesus Christ, **“the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6).** Hopefully, none will be foolish enough to bring God’s judgment on themselves.

However, based on the reception Jesus Christ received at His first coming, there may be a couple of groups who may be reluctant to accept God’s gift of grace. Next time we look at the dangerous attitude of those who may be willing to jeopardise their future.

Chapter 85 – Revelation 20 -Hell and the Super-Righteous

Last session we looked at the subject of hell. We saw that hell is reserved for those foolish enough to reject the gift of salvation offered to them by the righteous judge and Savior, Jesus Christ. Although the odds are stacked in favour of them accepting God's invitation to join Him in heaven, there appears to be some recalcitrants who reject the invitation. The decision comes back to one of relationship; heaven is to be in communion with God, and hell is to be cut off from God. Hopefully, none will be foolish enough to bring God's judgment on themselves.

The danger of self-righteousness

However, based on the reception Jesus Christ received at His first coming, there may be a couple of groups who may be reluctant to accept God's gift of grace. A common misconception of hell is that, heaven is the reward for being "good," and hell the punishment for being "bad." However, according to Jesus' teachings, this concept is turned on its head. Instead He taught, "heaven is for sinners, and hell is for "good" people.

Mark 2:16-18 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

The simple exercise of looking at those who accepted Jesus and who rejected Him at His first coming is a good indication of this principle. Sinners such as prostitutes, tax collectors, and social outcasts primarily welcomed Jesus' good news of grace and salvation. In contrast, his sternest criticism and warnings were directed at the "super-righteous" of His time, the Jewish religious leaders (Luke 1:52-53; 4:18). It was almost exclusively to this super-righteous church-going group of the time that Jesus' teachings and parables on the subject of hell were addressed.

The classic tale on this subject is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who went to the temple to pray.

Luke 18: 9-14 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

What riles this super-righteous group so much is their perceived injustice in the equation. "Here I am fasting twice in the week, tithing my income, going to church each week for the last 50 years and these no-good bums come along and get the same reward as me?" "The tax collector gets let off the hook despite his self-confessed long list of sins!" "The prodigal son gets a free pass despite bringing shame and scandal on the family!" (Luke 15:11-31). "The workers in the vineyard get the same pay for a half-hour's work as I've received for a full day!" (Matthew 20:1-16). The problem with grace for the super-righteous is, according to their calculations it is just so unfair. "These bums don't deserve the same reward after all I've done for God." However, the lord of the vineyard sees right through their self-righteous attitude and cuts straight to the point by asking, ***"Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Matthew 20:15).*** "Why are you unhappy that I am merciful and want to include the dregs of society in my heavenly party?" In reality, the super-righteous wants to revive a book that no longer exists, the book of deeds. They preferred the old system of rules, regulations, and score

keeping. And it's to those who refuse to extend mercy that Jesus directs his sternest judgment (Matthew 7:1-5). "If you want to live by those rules, and reject the gift of grace offered through my blood, then there is only one fate that awaits you." Repent of this attitude of superiority, recognise you are no better than these bums otherwise you will find yourself on the rubbish dump outside the city where the worms do not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:48).

The danger of privilege

There is a second group who may be reluctant to accept the grace of God and they are those who enjoyed the privileged life at the expense of others. We read back in Revelation 18:9-13 about the kings of the earth and the merchants of the earth mourning over the fall of Babylon as they saw their power, wealth and privilege vanishing with her. These are the "beautiful people" used to being on the covers of glossy magazines who no longer could conduct business as usual by exploiting "**human beings sold as slaves**" (**Revelation 18:13**). This was the attitude of the rich man who found himself in torment in hades while Lazarus rested in Abraham's bosom. In response to the stunned rich man's question as to why he was in this unexpected position when he was so used to living in the lap of luxury, we read Abraham's response.

Luke 16:25-26 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

Each day the rich man drove past Lazarus covered in sores at his gate and didn't lift a finger when he had the resources to do something about it. Wealth and privilege had so distorted his thinking; there remained no milk of human kindness in him. "If only he would apply himself as much as I do, he would not be in this self-inflicted position!" Yet despite the fact Jesus had crossed this great chasm between God and humanity on his behalf, it appears this rich man refused to acknowledge this gift and take advantage of it.

And it appears being super-righteous was not the only problem the religious leaders had in Jesus' time as they too enjoyed a privileged life. They had two strikes against them, being both self-righteous and privileged. Jesus took them to task about this privileged existence as well.

Luke 16: 13-15 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." 14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. 15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.

Two chapters later in Luke 18 Jesus makes this comment after asking a wealthy ruler to sell all he has and give to the poor.

Luke 18:24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

However, this does not mean they are doomed as Jesus shows in His response to the disciples' question, "**Who then can be saved?**"

Luke 18:27 "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

Also the indication of Jesus' statement in Matthew 21 is, although they are more reluctant to accept God's gift of grace, there is hope for them though it may take a little more time to persuade them.

Matthew 21:31 Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

The point is Jesus has thrown out the book of deeds and replaced it with the book of life. Jesus has cancelled everyone's record and nailed them to the cross (Colossians 2:13-15). The door of salvation is flung wide open to all, Jews, Gentiles, prodigal sons, tax collectors, Pharisees, punk rockers, you name it...everyone is invited to the party.

Everyone that is, except those who want to hang on to the old arrangements. There is no place in heaven for those who think they are morally, spiritually or intellectually superior to others and thereby contradict the very nature of Jesus Christ who ***“made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:7-8).*** Only those who recognise their own need for God’s love, forgiveness and acceptance and are willing to extend this same love, forgiveness and acceptance to others will inhabit heaven (Matthew 6:14-15). Those who want to wilfully hang onto the power, privilege and wealth they enjoyed in their old life will be excluded. God will give them what they have chosen, to live in the godless and inhuman loneliness of hell, life without God. If darkness is what one loves, darkness is what one gets (John 3:19).

Entry into heaven or hell is not a simple calculation to adding up the score to see who will go up and who will go down. Jesus’ message of “heaven is for sinners, and hell is for “good” people” carries both a warning and promise. It is a warning for so called “good” people to be careful not to become smug or superior to those they consider less righteous or less privileged than themselves. On the other hand, it is a promise to sinners they can be forgiven, loved and accepted by God, because Jesus has forgiven their sins and stands ready to welcome them into heaven.

No one is excluded without first of all being included. The good news of the gospel is, both those who considered themselves insiders with God and those who considered themselves outsiders with God receive an invitation to the party. In the parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew 22 both the insiders and outsiders were invited.

Matthew 22:8-10 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

No one is excluded without first of all being included. However, there is the unhappy situation of the man who refused to put on the wedding clothes provided by the king.

Matthew 22:12 He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

The wedding clothes are representative of being clothed with Christ’s grace and righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27). Showing up in your tee-shirt and board shorts representing your own righteousness is a recipe for disaster.

Matthew 22:13 “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Repentance has to be sincere; no one is going to slide into the kingdom through playacting. Jesus, the righteous judge searches the minds and hearts of man (Revelation 2:23). The good news is no one needs to be excluded. God through Christ has made provision for all.

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

The coming judgment need only be feared by those unwilling to let go of the privileged position they enjoyed in their past life and refuse the gift of grace being offered to them. For everyone else, God’s administration of justice tempered with grace is a great blessing for all.

The good news is at the end of this period of judgment; the terrible and repetitive history of man’s disastrous foray into deciding for themselves to be their own gods by rejecting their Creator finally comes to an end. There is now only life in the new heavens and the new earth where there is no wickedness or evil of any kind. We will look at this subject next time.

Chapter 86 – Revelation 21 - The New Jerusalem

Last session we finished with the subject of hell. We saw that hell is reserved for those foolish enough to reject the gift of salvation offered to them by the righteous Judge and Savior, Jesus Christ. Although the odds are stacked in favour of them accepting God's invitation to join Him in heaven, there appears to be some crazy enough to reject the invitation. So God gives them what they desire, life without Him.

The good news is at the end of this period of judgment; the terrible and repetitive history of man's disastrous foray into deciding for themselves to be their own gods by rejecting their Creator finally comes to an end. Up to this point in the book of Revelation, we have identified the socio, political, economic and spiritual forces that have been in opposition to God's purpose of creating man in His image. After this period of judgment, no longer will these forces that make up the Babylonian system be allowed to disrupt life in God's heavenly kingdom.

Revelation 21:4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

From now on there is only life in the new heavens and the new earth where there is no wickedness or evil of any kind (Revelation 21:27; 22:14-15). This is the final scene of the book of Revelation, the culmination of God's purpose to create for Himself a holy people within whom He will dwell and who will participate with Him in the very life and love of the Godhead.

A contrast of two cities

This final scene in Revelation is a tale of two cities, a contrast between Babylon and the New Jerusalem.

Babylon as we saw was depicted as a harlot riding on the menacing beast. By contrast we now see the New Jerusalem pictured as a beautiful bride betrothed to an animal with a totally different nature, the Lamb of God.

Revelation 21:2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

The contrast between the two cities could not be more striking. Clients of a prostitute are seeking sexual pleasure while the harlot prostitutes herself for money. This lifestyle of pleasure and profit personified by the harlot and the beast dehumanises and degraded life. A bride by contrast personifies a lifestyle of faithfulness, commitment and integrity to her husband, principles which enhance and enrich life. Again, John is warning his readers not to be seduced by the outward appearance of the glory of Rome. The church as the bride of Christ has been chosen to faithfully reject the degrading lifestyle of the harlot and instead reflect the life-promoting principles of her husband Jesus Christ. One path leads to destruction, the other promotes life.

Then in order to ram the message home as to whom their allegiance belongs, John contrasts the impressive glory of imperial Rome at its height with the coming glory of the New Jerusalem. Rome at its zenith was an impressive city. It still attracts thousands of tourists each year to see its crumbling ruins. Caesar Augustus had transformed Rome from a city covered with bricks to one covered with marble. It was even called the "Eternal City." But it is nothing compared to the description John shares with his readers about the city they represent in Revelation 21. While the city walls of Rome are measured in feet, the walls of New Jerusalem are measured in miles, 1500 miles square, and 1500 miles high, in the shape of a cube. Rome may have its streets paved in marble, but the New Jerusalem streets are paved in gold. The foundation of Rome is built on hills of rock, while the New Jerusalem is built on layers of precious stones. The gates and walls of the New Jerusalem aren't inscribed with the names of famous conquering generals as Rome does, but rather the names of God's faithful, the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. In contrast

to the gates of Rome that were designed to be closed for fortification, the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem are left perpetually open to welcome all who wish to enter to share in the life God intended. While Rome has its temples dedicated to its pagan gods that their worshippers never see, the New Jerusalem has no need of a temple as God now dwells face to face with His people. ***Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.***

There is no longer a need for temples or priests to mediate worship as humanity now dwells face to face with their God.

And really this is the key to life in heaven. Although the stunning description of heaven with its streets of gold and foundations of precious stones is meant to impress John's readers, to focus on the splendour of the surrounding is to miss the real intention of life in heaven. As we have seen through this series, God has gone to extraordinary lengths to bring about this final conclusion of bringing God and humanity face to face. So the focus of the whole exercise is not to impress us with the splendour of the heavenly surroundings, but rather the reality of living with our God, face to face, sharing in the life and love of the Trinity.

Recap of the Book of Revelation

Before we move on to discuss what God has in store for us in the heavenly New Jerusalem, we need to recap the important messages from the book of Revelation. Firstly, there are two major assumptions we can take to the bank and those are, at the end of history, "life," not "destruction" is going to prevail, as God is the life-giver. Second, God in Christ will be there both as Judge and Savior. The good news of the message of grace provided at such great cost is not suddenly ditched at this critical moment in salvation history. As we have learned, no one is excluded without first of all being included (Matthew 22:8-10).

Five guidelines for understanding the Book of Revelation

1) The book in its first instance needs to be looked at in its historical and cultural context.

That is, it is written to Christians suffering under persecution in the Roman Empire, not an outline of end time events.

2) Then as the first few verses of the book explain, this is a revelation from Jesus Christ himself.

In other words, this is the big picture of all that is taking place on this earth viewed from God's heavenly perspective coming directly from Jesus Christ Himself, the great "unveiler."

3) The major theme running through the book is one of allegiance; to which kingdom will you give your allegiance? To God's kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness.

The warning to the churches in chapters two and three is to remain faithful and not to become lukewarm or compromise with the culture of the Roman Empire.

4) Revelation then uses startling images to depict the world as a place of struggle between these two contrasting kingdoms.

The book reveals the character of the forces at work in the world by portraying them as a clash between the menacing evil beast and the Lamb whose robe is covered in blood. The beast wins victory by subjugating others through violence; the Lamb wins victory through self-sacrifice. The beast seeks domination by wielding the power of death; the Lamb seeks victory by giving life through death. John then contrasts the characteristics of the great harlot riding the beast with the bride of Christ. The harlot degrades and dehumanises life through the pursuit of pleasure, profit and power. The bride by contrast exhibits principles that enhance life, faithfulness, commitment and integrity to her husband. And finally, Revelation contrasts the glory of Rome built on the commodity of "***human beings sold as slaves***" with the glory of the New Jerusalem built on the precious body and blood of Jesus Christ. These images are designed to startle people into seeing the destructive forces of evil at work in the world and then to warn them not to be seduced by them even though they may look enticing.

5) The focus of the book needs to be viewed from a perspective of hope, not fear.

Many look on the symbolism and events portrayed in the book of Revelation with trepidation, but this is mainly because of the confusing speculations commentators have made of the book down through the centuries. The emphasis of this commentary has been on end time events with foreboding images of Armageddon, terrifying beasts, a fiery red dragon, a lake of fire, etc.

Just to emphasise one of these misleading images, let's look at the question of the "antichrist." The prevailing view of the antichrist in much of this commentary is applied to the great tyrant, usually represented as the beast that will oppose Christ at the end of the age. This interpretation has two problems. First we saw that the beast is not an individual, but rather a political system in opposition to the system represented by the Lamb. Secondly, if we allow scripture to identify who the antichrist is, we will see John uses the term to refer to those who spread an heretical message.

The term antichrist is only used in 1 and 2 John and it appears four times.

2 John 1:7 I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

The term is applied to those who were part of the Christian community, but have since departed over the issue of Christ's nature of being both divine and human.

1 John 2:18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

They had denied Jesus was human and were thus anti-Christ, and this is why the word is used in the plural, "**many antiChrists.**" As the word implies, the term is used of anyone who preaches a false gospel and as such history is littered with antichrists (Galatians 1:8-9). The lesson being we get a more accurate perspective of truth if we allow the biblical texts to interpret events. This principle applies just as much to the book of Revelation as it does in this case of the antichrist. Rather than viewing the book with fear based on trumped up speculation, we need to have a realistic interpretation of events. And in contrast to the trumped up speculation, the book does not end with fear, but with hope. It's a story of victory over the forces that would destroy life. In the final vision death, sorrow and grief are banished. Injustice and evil will not have the final say, God will see to that. In its place, the book points to a future way beyond anything humans can imagine. This is the future promised to those whose allegiance rests with the Lamb of God.

Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Chapter 87 – Revelation 22 - New Heavens and New Earth

We have finally reached that point in the narrative where God has achieved His goal of creating “man in His image” and as a consequence, God and man can dwell face to face in the New Jerusalem. Although the stunning description of heaven in Revelation 21 with its streets of gold and foundations of precious stones is meant to impress John’s readers, to focus on the splendour of the surroundings is to miss the real intention of life in heaven. As we have seen through this series, God has gone to extraordinary lengths to bring about this final conclusion of bringing God and humanity face to face. So the focus of the whole exercise is not to impress us with the splendour of the heavenly surroundings, but rather the reality of living with our God, face to face, sharing in the life and love of the Trinity (Revelation 21:3).

So what insights can we discern from scripture on what life will be like in heaven.

1) We will inhabit new heavens and new earth.

We started this series speaking about the two dimensions of life in the cosmos, physical life in chronos time, and spiritual life in eternal time. Jesus injected Himself into chronos time in order to shatter the stranglehold sin and death had on humanity but also to establish the new creation based on heavenly eternal time. Our inclusion in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis then for the creation of the “new humanity” which will live on into eternity.

2 Corinthians 5:17-18 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.

But it is not just man that is redeemed by Jesus’ resurrection; it has implications for the whole of fallen creation. As discussed earlier, because of Satan’s rebellion and Adam’s sin, mankind’s destiny and the whole creation were set on a trajectory of decay, corruption and death (Romans 8:20-22). And neither the natural world nor humanity can do anything about it; it is beyond our control. But it is not beyond the control of the one who is the source and creator of life who is Lord of both chronos and eternal time.

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

Notice Paul’s distinction between the two dimensions. The created first Adam was given life in a physical body in time and space, the second Adam, Jesus, not only was raised immortal, but has the power to give spiritual life to others, ***a life-giving spirit.***

V.46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

As the purpose of the decaying four-dimensional world of time and space is now redundant, it is no longer necessary for a humanity that has passed from mortality to immortality. So God puts the sad decaying period of rebellion and sin to the torch and replaces it with the new heavens and the new earth.

2 Peter 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. 11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

This reality is echoed in Revelation 21.

Revelation 21:1 [A New Heaven and a New Earth] Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

As there is no longer an old decaying world to live in, God will provide us with a glorious spiritual body especially designed to inhabit the eternal dimension of heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:35-49)

2) What kind of body will this new heavenly creature have?

We have covered some of this in an earlier session on the resurrection, so we don't need to spend a lot of time on it. However, the time is coming when we will have the same type of immortal body as the risen Christ has

1 John 3:1-2 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Incredibly, humans will be infused with the very spiritual life of the Godhead so we can share in their existence as their children. Although we are limited in what we can know at this time as we just read, there are some things we can know.

The apostle Paul gives us some insight into the spiritual realm in 1 Corinthians 15. The first thing he explains is, we will have a body, and we will not be disembodied spirits floating around in space. Our new spiritual bodies we will have will be perfectly suited to the spiritual environment of the new heavens and the new earth.

1 Corinthians 15: 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

So in the same way we are presently in the image of the earthly man Adam, one day we will be in the image of the heavenly man, Jesus Christ.

V.50 I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Although it will not be a flesh and blood body, the spiritual body we will have still retains an important connection to our discarded physical bodies. When Jesus appeared out of nowhere to His disciples in the upper room after His resurrection with His new spiritual body, He was still recognizable as Jesus (John 20:19-20). So not only is Jesus raised immortal, but also we see his “personhood” transcending death in the miracle of the resurrection. In other words, there was a continuation of His personal being and existence of the man Jesus before and after His resurrection.

But don't for a moment think this was the true glorified spiritual body that appeared to the disciples. This was merely a shadow of the now glorified Jesus Christ. A better description of the glorified body of the risen Christ is found in Luke 9 when He was transfigured before Peter, James and John.

Luke 9:28-30 About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. 29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

Here was the living Christ in all His divine glory, the same body He will have on His return, and we will then see Him as He truly is. The amazing truth that humans will also have a glorious spiritual body is confirmed here at the transfiguration.

V.30 Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.

Both Moses and Elijah, humans, also appeared with glorified spiritual bodies. But notice here too there is some connection between the old mortal bodies and their new spiritual bodies as both of these men were recognizable as Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:3-4). But just as a plant is so much more glorious than the seed from which it grew, so it will be with our glorified spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-37).

Bodies are necessary for relationships

But there is an important reason why we need “bodies” and it goes back to God’s purpose for us – to be created in the image of God. In other words, to be a true human is to have the same nature and character of the Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit share a deep, intimate personal relationship between them. This is difficult for us to grasp in our four-dimensional world, but this relationship is so intimate that they are what they are only in relationship to each other and it can be said that they live in and through each other. Try to wrap your mind around that concept! But it seems that even in our present corrupt state God has created this same desire in us so that there is another life longing to break forth in us.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT) He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end.

There is this basic yearning to want to share our existence with others, in other words, to share intimate relationships with others. Unfortunately, because of our selfish, fallen nature, instead of wanting to live and share our existence with one another and to live for the other, we resort to manipulating and control to achieve our own selfish ends and this of course disrupts relationships. This will all change with our new glorified spiritual body, which is made in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:5 (NKJV) For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.

He of course loves us so much He sacrificed Himself just so He could live and share His existence with us and we with Him. This is ultimately what love is, and why God describes Himself as love (1 John 4:8).

So contrary to the dehumanising messages of our age, these newly created humans will reflect the divine nature of the community that is at the heart of the Trinity. Real personhood revolves around a community in relationship, not in the false concept of this age, individualism. We need each other and can only truly be ourselves in relation to one another. That is why relationship breakups or the death of a loved one is so painful, part of us dies with them. True humanity is to embrace relationships, a relationship with God and with other beings.

But love is a medium or expression that necessitates separate entities or persons without which it cannot exist. God too, is a trinity of three persons for this very reason, to be able to express love to one another. So if we are to love, praise, serve and live with God, we will need a body to express these characteristics in the spiritual dimension of heaven. It is with these new spiritual bodies in relationship that we will reflect and participate with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the inner life of the triune God, or to put it another way, we will enjoy Holy Communion with one another. We will share in his rule, his love, his judgment, his salvation, his mercy, his grace, his healing, and his wisdom.

There is another benefit of having this remarkable spiritual body and that is, it is incapable of sin. We will look at that next time.

Chapter 88 – Benefits of Heaven

We have finally reached that point in the narrative where God has achieved His goal of creating “man in His image” and as a consequence, God and man can dwell face to face in the New Jerusalem. God through His work has created for Himself a holy people within whom he can come and dwell (Revelation 21:3).

We have been looking at what insights we can discern from scripture on what life will be like in heaven. We now continue this theme with the third remarkable benefit of heaven.

3) Another benefit of this remarkable spiritual body is it will be incapable of sin.

Right now as we sit here we have leaders of governments around the world plotting the demise of other nations they regard as enemies. There are spy agencies committed to undermining their opponents through subversive activities. We have opposing political parties openly fabricating the truth in order to discredit their opponents to score a few political points. Business leaders sit around boardrooms calculating how they can achieve a few more extra dollars in profit from unwitting customers. We have drug lords, criminal masterminds, petty thieves, plotting all sorts of devious, illicit activities undermining our society. There is a darkness that exists in the fallen human soul that at times is terrifyingly evil.

As the prophet Jeremiah, wrote, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

God is committed to not allowing this tragic spectacle of human nature that has existed since the beginning of human creation to continue to be repeated over and over again with even more disastrous consequences. History will not always be a story of human rebellion against God. And one of the glories of heaven is we will have a new nature that flows from God Himself. One of my favourite qualities of God’s nature is mentioned in 1 John 1:5.

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

Imagine what it would be like to have no evil or dark thoughts, ever! Yet, this is God’s existence, and it will be our existence in heaven. The inability to sin will be one of the major benefits of our glorified spiritual bodies. God through His grace has already delivered us from the consequences of our sin and death, but now His grace goes further by delivering us from sin itself.

Romans 6:17-18 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

In the past we made choices according to our old fallen nature whose natural inclination was in slavery to sin. But now we are part of the new creation with a glorified spiritual body. That new nature freely chooses righteousness and holiness. We will still have the ability to choose, but our choices will be in accordance with our new holy nature and the spiritual environment.

God’s goal in forgiveness is not just to forgive us and leave us with our old sinful nature, but also to grant us a new life that is no longer under the control or domination of sin.

2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

Can you imagine the different outcomes we will experience as a result of this dramatic change in human nature? Instead of creative minds mentioned earlier being used for devious intentions, these creative minds now governed by the new divine nature will be used for constructive purposes and who knows where this will lead.

4) This leads us to the next benefit of life in heaven. Just as God has gifted each individual in this age with special talents and abilities, so it will be in heaven.

We look around us even in this fallen world and marvel at man's creative ability. These gifts and abilities come from the God who calls Himself "Creator" who distributes His creative gifts through the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

And as Paul goes on to say, no one is left out, no one is gift-less.

V.7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

And contrary to how these talents and abilities can be misused in today's world, they will be put to constructive use "***for the common good***" of the heavenly community (Ephesians 4:11-12). This too is where the saints from the first resurrection who have been prepared for this time and are equipped with teaching ability will work with the billions of new saints from the second resurrection (Revelation 20:4,6). And just as He has shared His creative talents with humanity in today's world, so it will be in heaven.

1 Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"— the things God has prepared for those who love him.

Heaven will be an enriching environment where we will continue to grow in spiritual maturity by learning godly wisdom and knowledge, through the development of our heavenly gifts and abilities, and through the deep personal relationship we will develop with the Trinity and the billions of other saints. So contrary to the cartoon depictions of saints floating around on clouds playing harps for eternity, heaven will be a highly creative and productive place.

5) One of the areas where this creativity will manifest itself in a unique way is in our worship of the Father.

Worship is going to play a central role in the life of heaven (Revelation 4:8-11; Revelation 19:1-10). We learned in an earlier session that worship for Christians is our response to the grace God has shown us. Grace in some ways is very much like the act of breathing. We inhale the generous grace God has showered on us and in response we exhale and give back to the grace-giver our generous worship and adoration. We also learned our worship of God needs to go deeper than just being thankful for what God has done for us. Our relationship with God may begin with gratitude and thanksgiving, remembering all that God has done for us. But while gratitude is a fine quality, as our relationship with God grows deeper, we need to move past thanking God for all He has done for us to thanking Him for who He is. It is at this point that our focus shifts from thanksgiving for what God has done for us to true adoration where the focus is rightly on the makeup and character of the One who has provided these blessings. Now that we dwell face to face with our God and get to know Him in a more intimate way as the loving and graceful God that He truly is, worship will come as natural as breathing. And if you think present worship music like the Hallelujah Chorus makes our spirits soar, it will be nothing compared to the spine-tingling Spirit-inspired music of heaven as we join with the heavenly hosts in singing praises to our God.

6) Another benefit of heaven will be the joyful reunions that will take place.

Precious loved ones who were lost through death, husbands reunited with their wives, parents with their children, it will be a delightful time of reunion when the lost time of separation will be redeemed. The apostle Paul reassured the Thessalonian church that were concerned about the fate of their loved ones, that they would see them again.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

I'm sure there will be a lot of tears of joy shed at this time. But it will also be a time when we will be introduced to those ancestral relatives who belong to our family tree. No doubt we will discover we have some interesting characters in our family line that have preceded us. And of

course we will meet some of the great men and women of faith - Abraham, David, Mary and other famous persons of history.

But what about those awkward moments when we run into someone who we may not have expected to see in heaven? What if we suddenly bump into Judas Iscariot or Hitler, or it could be your murderer, an abusive parent, or divorced mate? How does one handle that awkward situation? It has been said the way we most imitate God is when we forgive someone, and not just anyone, but even our enemies.

Matthew 5:43-45 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

No one will be in heaven who has not first of all accepted the saving grace of Jesus Christ. And Jesus goes on to tell us, no one will be in heaven that is not willing to forgive, as it is part of God's nature to be graceful and forgiving.

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Forgiveness is the great leveller. When we forgive we renounce our moral superiority over another. The same culture of grace, which leads to adoration, also creates an environment where we live and breathe forgiveness. We inhale God's forgiveness and exhale forgiveness to others. Just as God has unconditionally accepted us despite what we have done, we have to unconditionally accept others despite what they have done.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

When we come to the table of Holy Communion, we are reminded of this fact. We come together as forgiven sinners among other forgiven sinners to be reminded of the fact His grace has provided all of us with His forgiveness. We stand side by side with other sinners under God's grace that forgives us all.

But back to our question about bumping into Judas Iscariot or Hitler in heaven? The Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus would not be in heaven anymore than Gary Regazzoli who also betrayed Jesus will not be in heaven. Instead, if Judas is there, it will be a "born again" Judas who through the power of the Spirit has repented of His sins, and accepted the grace made possible by the One he betrayed. No one who is still "dead in transgressions and sins" will inherit the kingdom of heaven (Ephesians 2:1-2). No one needs to fear the final judgment if they are "***in Christ Jesus.***"

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So neither Judas Iscariot, nor Hitler, nor Gary Regazzoli need fear the judgment if they are in Christ Jesus. This will be the culture of the new heavens and the new earth.

Chapter 89 – The Father’s Love

God through His work has created for Himself a holy people within whom he can now come and dwell (Revelation 21:3). We have been looking at what insights we can discern from scripture on what life will be like in heaven.

Relating to God in a personal way

I have purposely left the major benefit of life in heaven to the last and that is, we will come to know the God who is the Trinity in not only His majestic glory, but also in a very personal way. Hopefully through this series we have come to regard the God we Christians worship in a totally new light. Rather than being regarded as a remote abstract concept described with terms such as “almighty, omnipotent, omniscience, infinite, transcendent, etc., we have also come to regard Him as a loving parent who wants an intimate relationship with all His children, in other words, a personal God who cherishes relationship with others. Although these abstract terms are accurate ways of describing God, to place undue emphasis on them to the detriment of the personal God we have learned about is to do great harm to our understanding of the true nature of God.

One of the objectives of this book has been to address the misconceptions (usually negative) surrounding God’s character and nature, and to highlight the vast love God has towards His creation and the ends to which He has gone to reach this point where God and humanity now live side by side in eternity. In contrast to the hierarchical concept of God that has developed in western Christianity usually depicted by a triangle, John of Damascus, a Greek theologian (7th century) pictured the Trinity as three dancers holding hands dancing around together in joyful freedom. He coined the word, *perichoresis*, *peri* (as in perimeter) means “around,” and *choresis* literally means, “dancing.” Rather than thinking of the Trinity in a hierarchical and individualistic sense, this description invites us to think of a community of persons in complete unity who love each other and live together in perfect harmony. This is the existence and inner life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Of course this is difficult for us to fathom because of our four-dimensional limitations. However, we get an insight into this life from Jesus’ statement in John 10.

John 10:38 “But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”

John of Damascus’ concept of *perichoresis* gives us a completely different perception of the inner life of the Godhead than the Western hierarchical model. Gone is the person in isolation, gone is the hierarchical structure of first, second and third in importance, gone is the competition and rivalry of who is in charge, gone is the conflict over opposing ideas. Unfortunately, some of these negative characteristics have made their way into our current church structures. Instead, with *perichoresis*, we get a picture of a community of equals living and sharing with one another in self-giving love. It is into this divine circle of love that humanity has been drawn through the combined efforts of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. No longer is it a society that places its emphasis on “looking after number one,” or of dominating others, but of all working together in the best interests of all.

And it is now humanity’s privilege to get to know this God in a personal and intimate way in all His manifest glory, not only as the God who is creator, almighty, omnipotent, full of wisdom and knowledge, but also the God who is loving, graceful, merciful and kind and calls Himself “our Father.” And we can ask the question, why would God choose this title to describe Himself unless He planned to do something with it? And of course the answer is, the title “Father” implies bringing sons and daughters into existence. And that one title of “Father” completely changes the way we regard God because it changes our emphasis from this detached, powerful God off somewhere, to a personal, relational God who is very much involved in each of our lives.

Ephesians 1:5 (NLT) His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.

This is the reason you and I and every other human being has been brought into existence – to be adopted into the Father’s family.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT) He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end.

We were created with a yearning in our hearts – a yearning that will never be satisfied this side of eternity, a yearning that keeps drawing us towards a relationship with our God. Look what Jesus said on the eve of the conclusion of His mission. Notice the inclusive, relational terminology that Jesus uses to describe the relationship the Godhead wants to share with His children.

John 17:20-26 20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

It can’t be any clearer than that – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit want to take us by the hand and include us in their great dance of eternity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit will share their combined divine attributes of love and relationship with their children. This will be the culmination of God’s grand purpose of drawing humanity back into relationship with Him. It was a process. He first dwelled among Israel in the tabernacle; He drew closer when God Emmanuel walked among us; He came and dwelt in us via the Holy Spirit; but now we can interact with Him face to face in all His majestic glory.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

It is testimony to God’s great love for humanity that we have arrived at this point. Each person of the Godhead has contributed His own unique role to the process of redemption. The Father initiated the process of salvation, the Son has effected it, and the Holy Spirit applies it to humanity. So to finish this series, let’s summarise these roles according to the way they are described in the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14.

2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Although Paul singles out the primary role each plays in the process of salvation, we need to be aware the other two persons are also involved because *God is also “One.”*

The Love of the Father

We will start with the Father from whom the love of God flows as He initiates the process. Earlier we spoke about how God the Father is the source or fountain of love.

1 John 4:7-8 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

The source and origin of love is God. And astoundingly, way back before time existed, this God whose very nature of love is so generous and overflowing, decided to lavish the very existence that infuses the Trinity on others. By looking at the process of salvation that has brought God and humanity face to face, we can identify eight characteristics that exemplify the love the Father has showered on humanity.

1) The first thing we can say about the love of God is He wants to share this particular divine virtue with others.

His whole purpose in creating the cosmos is precisely for this reason, to share His divine love with others.

Our questions about our existence go back to this one factor, to create a holy community sharing the love of God.

1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

2) His desire is to share His love with all, not just a chosen few, but all peoples. In other words, His love does not discriminate.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Jesus through His life and death has implicated all in this process, and God will make sure all get the opportunity to respond to the love and grace of God.

3) Through the whole sordid process, God has remained faithful to His rebellious children. Such is His love.

He didn't abandon them despite their constant rejection of Him, not Adam and Eve, not Israel, not Peter, not even the wicked as we saw when we looked at the subject of the judgment and hell. He will pursue us even to the gates of hell; such is His desire to share what He has with us.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

4) He took the initiative in going after the lost sheep.

He doesn't say, "Okay, first, repent of your sins, believe in me, then I will come after you!"

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He doesn't wait around for us to clean up our lives but goes after us despite our sinfulness (Luke 19:10).

5) His love is unconditional.

He doesn't say, "If you love me, then I will love you!" Or, I will love you when you become God-fearing, law-abiding respectable citizens.

Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

6) God's love involves a personal cost.

In order to share His love with humanity, God the Father had to suffer the loss of Himself through His one and only Son.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God didn't display His love from the comfort of heaven, but got down and dirty by joining us in our fallen state.

7) God's love is a reconciling love.

God's motive in all His dealing with us is to bring about reconciliation, even with those who oppose Him.

His command to love our enemies is one of the most difficult challenges we Christians face. We want revenge, we want to respond to what we perceive as injustice, and we want retribution, yet God wants to redeem even His enemies.

2 Corinthians 5:19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

8) Finally, God's love is a renewing love.

God's love is more than just forgiving and accepting us. His purpose is not just to save us, but also to conform us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). He doesn't expect us to do this on our own strength, but instead gives us His Holy Spirit who regenerates us and sets about empowering us to

become different people, people who recognise their limitations and allow the Holy Spirit to mould and shape them into God's holy people. So it is the love of the Father that has initiated this whole process of creating a holy people within whom He can come and dwell.

Next we turn our attention to the roles the Son and the Holy Spirit play in the redemption process.

Chapter 90 – Grace of Jesus Christ and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

We have been looking at what insights we can discern from scripture on what life will be like in heaven. Last time we started looking at the major benefit of life in heaven and that is, we will come to know the God who is the Trinity in not only His majestic glory, but also in a very personal way. It is a testimony to God's great love for humanity that we have arrived at this point where God and humanity now dwell face to face. Each person of the Godhead has contributed His own unique role to the process of redemption. The Father initiated the process of salvation, the Son has effected it, and the Holy Spirit applies it to humanity.

As we finish this series, we are summarizing each of these roles according to the way they are described in the benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14.

2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

Last time we looked at the role of the Father from whom the *love* of God flows as He initiates the process. Now we'll look at the primary role of Jesus Christ – how he has effected salvation for all through "grace." Grace is God's love in action towards His creation. When man rebelled, God had to overcome two problems if reconciliation was to come about. Man through his sin had separated the two parties and created a barrier between himself and a holy God. So the question became, how could a holy God approach sinful mankind? And how could God draw sinful mankind back to Himself? The solution could not possibly come from sinful humanity, so what was God to do? God's solution to these two problems is breathtaking in its audacity and is testimony to the great love God has for us. But in order to make this dream possible a terrible price had to be paid, but it was a price they willingly paid. As it was impossible for reconciliation to happen from the side of humanity, God's solution was, "I will come and do it for you. I will send you my beloved Son, and He will act vicariously on your behalf."

As we learned, this great event in salvation history is what the Christian world calls the miracle of the incarnation, where God the Son would empty Himself of His glory and join humanity as God in the flesh (John 1:14).

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Not only does God the Father devise this incredible plan, but now provides the means which will accomplish it through the life of His Son. Here is the sacrifice God the Father was willing to make *so He could draw near to us and in the process draw us near to Him*. But it was a sacrifice Jesus, too, willingly accepted with joy in order to make this dream a reality as we read over in Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In order for Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice, He had to be both God and man as only God can forgive sins and die for the sins of all humanity and He had to be fully man in order to be a true representative of humanity on the cross. It was through this event called the incarnation that God chose to draw near to mankind.

But the incarnation was only part of the solution. Jesus also had to suffer the ordeal of the atonement if reconciliation was to be completed. Jesus knew the ordeal He was about to face. He inspired Isaiah 52-53. He chose to invade humanity when the cross was the method of execution.

He walked the streets of Jerusalem and saw on a distant hill the crucified silhouetted against the sky. Yet such was His love. He voluntarily accepted the cross, which was His to bear.

John 10:17-18 (NLT) *“The Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may have it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I lay down my life voluntarily. For I have the right to lay it down when I want to and also the power to take it again. For my Father has given me this command.”*

Again we see this extraordinary love, this time displayed by the Son of God as He substituted Himself on our behalf in the terrible sacrifice He was willing to suffer in order for us to be drawn back to God (Romans 6:1-5). Now we begin to see the second challenge being addressed – through the incarnation, God drew near to man, now through the atonement, God has opened the way for a sinful humanity to be drawn back to Him.

But the other aspect of Christ’s saving work which gets scant attention today is, He not only died for humanity, but He also came and lived out the faithful son’s response to the Father’s love on behalf of humanity. In other words, Jesus in His life *“lived the life of the faithful son we failed to live in response to the Father’s love.”* Unlike Adam and Eve who were unfaithful to their Creator and Father, Jesus lived a perfect life of trust and faithfulness in response to His Father’s love. When we express faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ we don’t just enter into the death and resurrection of our Lord, we enter into the complete faithful life Jesus lived on our behalf. Jesus vicariously absorbs our lives into His own perfect life. So through the incarnation and the atonement, Jesus:

- ◆ Lived the faithful life we could not live on our behalf.
- ◆ Died the death we should have died for our sins on the cross.
- ◆ Gave us the eternal life we could not attain by defeating death through His resurrection.

As a result, we are now accepted by the Father, not based on the life we live, but rather on the perfect life Jesus lived. Jesus, like the Father, displayed this unbelievable love to make it possible for us to be drawn back to God through “grace.” The groundwork has been set for man to be able to be drawn back to God.

Philippians 2:6-8 (NLT) *Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. 7 He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. (Incarnation) 8 And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal’s death on a cross. (Atonement).*

To go back to 2 Corinthians 13:14, we see how Jesus has effected salvation through His primary role of “grace.”

The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Now we move onto the role the Holy Spirit plays in the salvation process, and that is He draws us into “fellowship” with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God’s goal in forgiveness is not just to forgive us and leave us with our old sinful nature, but also to grant us a new life that is no longer under the control or domination of sin. It is the role of the Holy Spirit to draw mankind back to God by making him aware of what God has done for him through the incarnation and the atonement. In John 16 Jesus promised his disciples He would send another helper, comforter or advocate.

John 16:7 (NKJV) *7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.*

In his bodily presence Jesus was limited by His physical constraints. He could only affect a limited number of people at any one time. However, as the Holy Spirit is spiritual, He is not restricted in His ability to draw people from all over the world to God.

V.8 *And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.*

The Holy Spirit is going to be working on people’s minds convicting them of sin and their need for a Savior. Notice to whom the Holy Spirit points people.

V.14 *He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.*

The Holy Spirit draws people to Jesus and into His atoning work. So the *first* thing the Spirit does is open people's minds and draw them into the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. We mentioned earlier how all three persons of the Trinity are involved in each process although one's role is predominant. We see this process at work in this particular case.

John 12:32 (NKJV) 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.
John 6:44 (NKJV) 44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

The *second* thing the Spirit does is birth us spiritually.

John 3:5-7 (NLT) Jesus replied, "The truth is, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. 6 Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven. 7 So don't be surprised at my statement that you must be born again.

And we know this came to pass on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell on the crowd at Jerusalem.

Acts 2:38 (NKJV) 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The way we enter into this new life is to repent and be baptized.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV) 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

First, the Holy Spirit draws us to Christ and second; it births us into the spiritual realm of the new creation.

The *third* thing the Holy Spirit does is to draw us into an intimate relationship with the Godhead.

Jesus made this amazing statement to His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion.

John 17:25-26 "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

This is made possible by the Holy Spirit in His role of drawing people into fellowship.

Romans 5:5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

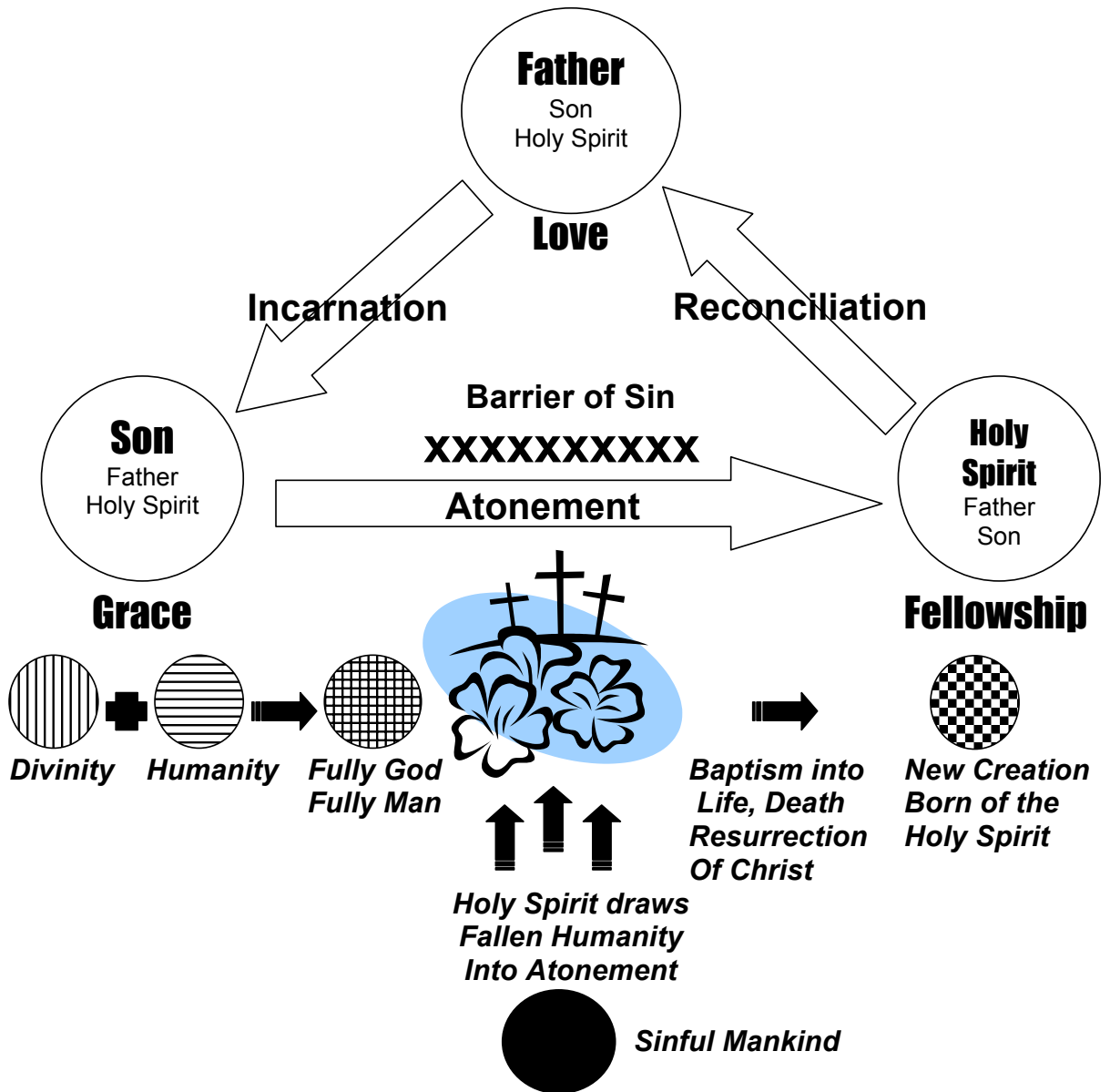
You and I are going to share fellowship with God through the work of the Holy Spirit. Living by the Spirit is a complete reversal of our previous way of life. In our past life we lived a life of self-centeredness where we valued individualism and independence with its de-humanising results. But now we recognise true life exists in openness, in fellowship with God and others. We were created to be in the image of God, a God who is by nature a community of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What ultimately it means to be a complete human being is to manifest the image of the triune God. God is forever humanizing, never dehumanizing, always personalizing, never depersonalizing.

When it is all said and done, the only spirit or medium between individuals that will exist in heaven is the medium of love. No more foul evil thoughts or wicked actions! When the devil and his followers were cast into the lake of fire, all the hate and destruction associated with him, which has had such a devastating impact on humanity, died with him (Revelation 22:14-15). They were cast there because they resisted becoming God's purpose for them. They chose against God and His love and became anti-God, anti-love and anti-human. In this state it is impossible to relate to others, because there is no shared medium between those who say "no" to God and those who say "yes." In heaven, the love of the Trinity will define all reality. Those that willingly refuse to participate determine their own fate. The only medium that will remain is the unsurpassable love of God (1 Corinthians 13:13).

It is through the unique involvement of each person of the Godhead that we have arrived at this point.

(See figure below).

The Three-fold Blessing of the Trinity in the Redemption Process



Challenge

- 1) How can a holy God draw near to sinful mankind?
- 2) How could God draw sinful mankind to Himself?

Solution

God drew near to us through His Son (**Incarnation**)
 God drew us near to Him through saving work of the Son and the Holy Spirit (**Atonement**)

Result: Incarnation + Atonement = Reconciliation (God to man and man to God)

In the Atonement, Jesus

- ◆ Lived the life we could not live (birth, baptism, born of the Spirit, death, resurrection, ascension)
- ◆ Died the death we should have died
- ◆ Gave us the gift of eternal life we could not attain

Three-fold Blessing of God

- ◆ *2 Corinthians 13:14 (RSV) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

The Father through His love has initiated the process of salvation, the Son has effected it through grace, and the Holy Spirit applies it to humanity by drawing us into the fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When all this is put together, what we end up with is “reconciliation.” Through their saving work, God is reconciled to man, and man to God. This saving work is all of God and nothing of us. He initiated the plan, He provided the means to make it possible, and He has carried it out to completion. Through their combined love they have moved us from exclusion to inclusion, from physical to spiritual, from temporal to eternal so we can participate in the life and love of the Trinity. This is the purpose for which we were created. Our physical life in this four-dimensional world is just the start of an incredible journey that continues on into eternity sharing the everlasting life and love of the triune God.

What then should be our response?

Ephesians 3:20-21 (NLT) Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. 21 May he be given glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages. Amen.

This is the purpose for which we were created – to give glory to God

Our Prayer

Father, we humbly bow before you, acknowledging you as the one true God.

You alone are worthy of all praise, honor and glory.

Through the love and saving work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit

We have been redeemed.

You have lavished us with one spiritual blessing after another.

You Father, have pursued us with an unfailing love.

Through Jesus’ sacrificial grace we have been forgiven, justified, reconciled,

And made at peace with you.

Through the life-giving Spirit we have been born again, adopted as son and daughters

And enjoy fellowship with you.

And at a future time, we will be glorified and share eternity with you.

We bow down in humble adoration in response to your vast love for us.

Amen.