

*Christ, the Sun of
Righteousness*

Christ, the Sun of Righteousness

By Ian Potts

*"But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with
healing in his wings..." Malachi 4:2*

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife Rachel,
my sons Benjamin and Joshua,
and to my parents and family to all of whom
I am indebted and thankful in so many ways.

Acknowledgements

My thanks and appreciation
must go out to all those who have visited
“Grace and Truth Online” over the years
and to the many who have written to express
their appreciation and their unity in the truth
as it is found in Christ Jesus.

What a debt we owe to Him for His great
Salvation and wonderful mercy towards
fallen sinners. May God be pleased to
use this book for the good of His people
and for His glory and honour,
to whom all praise is due.

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Preface

THIS work largely comprises chapters based upon a number of articles which were originally published on the website “Grace and Truth Online”. A couple of the articles have also appeared in print in the pages of “New Focus” magazine.

My intention in this volume is to set forth some pictures of Christ as He is revealed throughout the scriptures. The whole message of the Bible regards the person and the work of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. He is to be found on every page of Holy Writ. He is the sum and substance of God’s message to lost mankind, He is the One through whom God reconciles sinners to Himself, He is the One through whom God reveals Himself to man, He is the One in whom all the blessings of God to His people are revealed. The Gospel of God concerns His Son, Jesus Christ, and the message of the Bible is one of the Salvation of sinners through Christ, by Free and Sovereign Grace. Yes, Christ is God’s message to man, so when we read the scriptures we look for Him.

My prayer is that God the Holy Spirit would be pleased to use the chapters in this book to point the reader towards Christ, the Saviour, the “*Sun of righteousness*”. Each chapter centres upon a different book in the Bible, some in the Old Testament, and some in the New. Each chapter reveals a different aspect of God’s work in Christ and of His salvation of sinners. But what I hope becomes clear to readers as they read this book, is that the central theme never changes – the word of God speaks of Christ from start to finish. May the Lord grant light to His people to see Him to whom the word testifies.

In addition to the chapters in the main body of the book two appendices have been included, with a slightly different emphasis, covering somewhat ‘topical’ matters which are particularly relevant for our day.

I trust that what is contained herein will prove as much of a blessing to others as they meditate upon Christ and His work as these thoughts were to me when I was led to write them down. Any faults and failings contained within these chapters I readily and freely confess to be my own, but the truth found within these pages I will gladly credit to the Holy Spirit's revelation as He has testified of the glorious person and work of Christ, the eternal Son of the Living God, the One whom Malachi prophesied of as the "*Sun of righteousness*".

May the Lord bless His word.

In Christ Our Saviour,

Ian Potts

July 2005

Introduction

"...Sir, we would see Jesus" John 12:21

Introduction

Christ in "all the scriptures"

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Luke 24:27

THE whole Bible has one central message, one theme, one subject, running right through it, from Genesis to Revelation, like a crimson cord threaded through each and every word – that message regards the person and the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The message is clear – it concerns "Christ and Him Crucified". Wherever we read in the scriptures, Old Testament or New, it is Christ who is being spoken of and it is Christ for whom we should look. To miss Christ – both His person and His work - is to miss the very heart, the very essence of the message of the word of God.

In Acts 8:32-35 we read of the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot:-

"The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

The eunuch needed the Holy Spirit to open his understanding in the scriptures. But the message which Philip preached unto him from those Old Testament scriptures was clear – they spoke of Jesus.

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Jesus Himself confirmed this fact to the disciples in Luke 24:27 where we read: *“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”*

Elsewhere we read that the scriptures testify of Christ: *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me”* (John 5:39).

Of whom it is written: *“...thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:21), *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12), and also: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not”* (John 1:1-5).

But not only has God given us the scriptures which testify of Christ, but the Holy Spirit, through the written word of God, testifies of the Living Word – the Lord Jesus Christ - that those chosen out of the darkness might comprehend the Light and believe on His name (John 1:12):

“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (John 15:26).

How we need the Comforter, the Spirit of truth to give us eyes to see and ears to hear what wondrous things the Lord Jesus Christ has done in dying to save sinners. May God be pleased to give grace to see Christ in *“all the scriptures”*.

Amen.

Chapter One

“And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.” Genesis 1:16

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Two Great Lights

“And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.” Genesis 1:16

IN Genesis 1:16 we read of the two great lights which God created – the Sun and the Moon. Each was created to rule over its own realm – the Sun for the day and the Moon for the night. *“And God set them in the firmament to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.”*

But were the sun and the moon simply created to provide physical light for day and night? To give light upon the earth?

Well they have that use but there is more to these two great lights than just that - much more. Each has a spiritual meaning. Each were given as “*signs*” to signify something, as it says in verse 14 “*and let them be for signs*”. When verse 17 says that they were created to “*give light upon the earth*” it does not simply mean physical light, but spiritual. Spiritual light is given by what they signify. In fact the sun wasn’t actually needed to provide light physically as there was already light in the day before the sun was created, as we read in verses 3-5 “*And God, said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.*”

So it is clear that the sun and the moon which were created on the fourth day were made to give more than just physical light. They

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were made to give spiritual light (Psalm 19:1-2) – they are signs. Then what do they signify?

The answer may be seen by considering the realm in which each light is created. The sun was created to rule the day. The moon was created to rule the night. Each light rules over its own realm. The sun was not created for the night, neither the moon for the day. The day has no need for the light of the moon as the light of the sun far exceeds it. So each light is for its own realm – they are separate one from the other. They ‘rule’ over their own realm - one over light and one over darkness.

Light and darkness have much spiritual meaning throughout the scriptures. The first chapter of John’s Gospel contrasts the light with the darkness:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” John 1:1-9

Before the coming of Christ the world lay in darkness - spiritual darkness. Having fallen in Adam into sin and death all mankind was full of spiritual darkness. All men had sinned (Romans 3:23), all were blinded to God’s truth by their fallen nature (Ephesians 2:1-3).

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But John speaks of that one who was the true Light – the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the world was darkness and death brought in by sin (Romans 5:12), but of Christ it is written *“In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”*

Two Witnesses

In the dark night of this fallen world God sent witnesses to His truth, who bore witness of the Light – reflecting the light of God in a dark place. Heralding the coming of Christ into the world, John the Baptist – the last of the prophets - was sent forth from God as a witness, like a “star” in the night sky. But *“He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light”*. John pointed men to the true Light who would follow him; he witnessed to that Light; he pointed to the Light; but he was not that Light. Indeed John said regarding Christ *“He must increase, but I must decrease”*. See John 3:28-31.

Likewise Moses had been sent into the world and by him the Law of God was given as a witness to the Light which would follow and as a light to reveal the darkness of men’s hearts by exposing and condemning their sin. Moses and the law reflected the light of Christ, but they were not that Light, but bore witness of that Light - they reflected it, as the moon reflects the light of the sun in the darkness of the night. The moon illuminates the night but its light is merely a reflection – a reflection of that light which comes from the sun. In contrast the sun radiates light from itself of an altogether greater brightness than the moon. Despite the light of the moon the sky around it remains dark – the moon can be bright, but not that bright. But when the sun shines *everything* is lit up!

Moses and John were both witnesses of that Light who would follow them. They mirrored His light, but they had no light in themselves. Moses represented the Law and John the Prophets, God’s two great witnesses which He sent into the world to testify of the coming of Christ and His Gospel.

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These lesser lights, these witnesses, point the way to that greater light, Jesus, the Saviour, much as the star in the east led the wise men to where the infant Jesus was that they might worship Him who was born the King of the Jews (Matthew 2). May we be led likewise!

In Romans we read that the law and the prophets witnessed to the Gospel and the revelation (the light) therein of the righteousness of God:-

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

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:”

Romans 3:20-22

From these things can be seen something of the meaning of the ‘signs’ of the two great lights which God created. God set the moon to rule over the darkness of the night – to illuminate those things done in the dark. Likewise He gave the law by His servant Moses to rule over the spiritual darkness of men in the ‘night’ and to reveal those deeds done in the dark – *“for by the law is the knowledge of sin”*. The Law of Moses, the “moon” casts light upon the works of darkness – it exposes them. But still the darkness remains dark. The light of this “moon” is insufficient to cast the darkness away.

But the sun is a picture of a far greater light - a light which completely transcends that of the moon in both brightness and glory. The sun points us to Christ, the true Light, the *“Sun of Righteousness”*; the One who came to deliver His people from darkness into light. We read of this in the last of the Minor Prophets, Malachi, when he concludes the Old Testament scriptures with that expectant word *“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings”*. Though another 400 years would pass before Jesus, the true Light and the Saviour of

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sinners, would be born of the virgin at Bethlehem, yet the prophet wrote by the Spirit in expectation of that great day, when the darkness would be past and the light of the Sun of righteousness would rise up and shine forth unto all those that fear His name and believe on Him for salvation. What a day!

Two Glories

The two great lights which God created each had a glory. Likewise the Law of Moses was glorious. Moses' face shone when he came down from the mount holding the tablets of the law. He had been in the presence of God and that glory was reflected in his face. But it was merely reflected. Moses and the law, along with the prophets, bore witness of the true Light, but they were not that Light – Christ was the true Light and His glory far exceeded that of the law.

“But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.” 2 Corinthians 3:7-16

Two Realms

The law has its own realm, its own sphere – the night. But when the day comes, when the sun rises over its own realm dispelling all the shadows and lighting up all things under its glorious radiance, warmth and brightness, what need is there of the moon? Its purpose has been fulfilled. When the true Light shines, then no other light is needed. We don't stand under the light of the moon during the day, but under the sun!

“But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:22-26

Yes, each light has its own realm – and they don't mix! The moon rules over the night and the sun rules over the day. Likewise the law was given to rule over the darkness of men's hearts, to expose sin, to condemn. The moon illuminates the dark – it exposes things done in the dark. But its light is only a reflection of the sun. It has NO LIGHT IN ITSELF. This is just like the law. The law reveals what is done in the dark but sin is only really revealed to us when the Spirit takes the law and applies it – then the commandment 'comes' to us in our conscience. As Paul writes in Romans 7:9: *“For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”* It is then that the law by the Spirit has fulfilled its purpose – having exposed our sin, applied its guilt to our conscience, condemned us and brought us in guilty before God, dead in trespasses and sins.

“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in

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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.” Galatians 2:19-20

But when Christ, the Sun of righteousness arises in our hearts, Oh! What deliverance He brings! How He brings us from darkness into light. How this dispels all the gloom, all the shadows, all the deadness, all the guilt. The light of the Sun shines forth in its beauty, brilliance and radiance. Then the law is done away with just like the moon. The moon is for the night, not the day, its 'light' is but a dark shadow when seen against the light of the sun, and it sinks down beneath the horizon as the sun rises to its highest height. When the Light of Christ arises in our hearts then all things are seen clearly, all darkness is past, and all need of the "moon" - the law - to direct our path is gone, for now we have a far exceeding light, the one true Light, Christ, to guide us in our way. Now we walk in the day, not the night, by the light of the Sun, not the Moon, looking unto the Saviour. For God created two great lights, each in their own realm - the moon for the night and the sun for the day. *“And God set them in the firmament to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness”.*

From Darkness to Light

Hence the light is divided from the darkness, and those who walk in the light have passed from darkness into light, and walk by that great light of the day, in the Lord's day, that day in which Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, has risen to the highest height, having died in the place of sinners, having made an end of transgressions, having taken all His people's sin and guilt away by shedding his precious blood in their stead, having risen again the third day and then having ascended up on high to sit down at the right hand of the Father ever to reign in glorious light as the risen Son of God – the Sun of Righteousness who arose with healing in his wings. Thus John writes:-

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“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” 1 John 1:5-7

Oh! may all God’s people be brought to see the glorious radiance of the Son, by whose light they walk, and not be tempted to return to the realm of darkness or even to the ‘glory’ of the law which was given as a light in that darkness *“for even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.”*

What glory there is to be seen in Christ and His Gospel, for He alone is the one true LIGHT. And will the “children of light” (1 Thessalonians 5:5) walk by any other light or under any other rule?

May Christ be our all in all!

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” John 1:14:-17

Amen.

Chapter Two

“And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” Hebrews 12:24

Chapter Two

“The Blood... That Speaketh Better Things”

“And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” Hebrews 12:24

HERE we read of the blood of two men, of blood which is said to speak. Both Christ’s blood and Abel’s have this in common – they speaketh. We read in Genesis 4:10 regarding Abel’s blood when God confronted Cain:

“And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.”

Cain, having murdered his brother Abel out of the envy that rose up in his heart against him, could not run from the consequence of his actions; he could not hide from God. His brother’s blood cried out to God from the ground. God heard and God knew. The blood of Abel spoke of Cain’s wickedness.

Abel’s blood was innocent blood. Abel had done his brother no wrong, yet Cain, filled with envy, slew him who was innocent. Christ’s blood too was innocent blood. Christ did not deserve to die. He was innocent of all that was charged against Him. Men with wicked hands took Him and slew Him. Judas, having betrayed Jesus to the Chief priests, realised the horror of what he had done and repented of it:

“Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.” Matthew 27:4

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But Christ was righteous; He was sinless, He was perfect, He was innocent. His, like Abel's, was innocent blood. But unlike Christ Abel was still a sinner like other men – his innocence was only before his fellow men. Before God Abel stood as a sinner and he knew it – he knew that his sins needed to be atoned for, to be taken away. In offering to God a lamb which he had sacrificed Abel saw beyond the type and the figure to the reality – that God would provide Himself a perfect sacrifice for sin, a sacrifice which would remove all Abel's sin and make Him righteous before God. This Abel believed, this Abel saw by faith (Hebrews 11:4), and it was this which filled his brother Cain with envy and hatred against him. For Cain sought righteousness by another way. He sought to come before God, to find acceptance before God, by his own works and by his own righteousness. Cain despised his brother and the truths he stood for. He hated his brother because of the acceptance with God which Abel found by grace alone – surely God should look upon Cain's works with pleasure? Surely there was merit in his labours? How dare Abel find acceptance simply by grace?!

Cain, like many who follow him in seeking to please God by their own efforts, by their own works and by self righteousness (yet failing to see that even the best of those works are as filthy rags before a holy and a righteous God), hated his brother because Abel found grace in the eyes of the Lord. And the envy, the hatred, bubbled up within Cain until he could contain it no longer – he slew innocent Abel and shed his blood.

"Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths."

Isaiah 59:7

"They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood."

Psalms 94:21

THE BLOOD... THAT SPEAKETH BETTER THINGS

But Cain could not hide from his actions, and nor can we. The blood of Abel cried out to God from the ground. And so it does and so too does the innocent blood of countless numbers of the Lord's people throughout history who have been slain (whether in thought or deed) by others out of enmity against God and His righteousness as seen in those who testify of Christ, the Son of God. The innocent blood speaks - it cries out. Nothing is hidden from God.

But there is another blood which speaketh better things than that of Abel's. This is the blood of Jesus. The blood of Him who was truly innocent, who knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), a lamb without spot or blemish, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This is the blood of Him who freely laid down His life for others, the blood of the innocent shed for the guilty. This is the blood which was not shed in vain - it is the blood of God's perfect sacrifice and it accomplished all that God desired it should. Through it was wrought a perfect and an everlasting salvation for sinners. There is a power in this blood - it is the blood of "Christ crucified", proclaimed in the Gospel of Christ. The power of God is seen in this blood, the power of God unto Salvation (Romans 1:16). Why? Because of whose blood it is - the Son of God's. And this blood, like that of Abel's, is not silent, it speaks and it goes on speaking throughout the ages. Oh, may many be given ears to hear what is spoken by this blood!

Let us briefly look at twelve things which the blood of Christ speaks of in contrast to the speech of Abel's blood; twelve ways in which Jesus' blood speaketh better things than that of Abel's.

Firstly, Abel's blood speaks of murder - the taking of another's life (Job 24:14, Matthew 5:21-26).

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of substitutionary sacrifice - the giving of one's life for another (1 John 3:16, John 15:13).

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Secondly, Abel's blood speaks of envy and of hatred (1 John 3:12),

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of the love of God, a love set upon God's people whilst yet still in their sins (Romans 5:8).

Thirdly, Abel's blood speaks of sin, the power of sin, and of unrighteousness (Romans 3:10-23),

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of righteousness and of cleansing for all sin (1 John 1:7, Revelation 1:5).

Fourthly, Abel's blood speaks of death – the consequence of sin (Romans 5:12),

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of life – eternal life – because of righteousness (John 6:53, Romans 5:21, Romans 8:10).

Fifthly, Abel's blood speaks of guilt – it cried out to God against Cain who was guilty of Abel's murder (Genesis 4:10, Matthew 23:25),

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of peace with God (Hebrews 9:14) and of redemption (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Sixthly, Abel's blood speaks of the condemnation of sinners (see Revelation 14:10),

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of justification before God (Romans 3:24-26), of pardon (Micah 7:18) and of forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14).

Seventhly, Abel's blood speaks of judgement – of separation from God and of the wrath of God (*“And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear”* Genesis 4:13, Revelation 14:10),

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of mercy, of propitiation (Romans 3:25), of atonement, of the covering of sin, and access to God (*“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ”* Ephesians 2:13).

THE BLOOD... THAT SPEAKETH BETTER THINGS

Eighthly, Abel's blood speaks of evil fruit – *“a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit”* (Matthew 7:17),

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of good fruit – *“every good tree bringeth forth good fruit.”*

Ninthly, Abel's blood speaks of the fallen countenance of Cain (*“But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell”* Genesis 4:5),

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (*“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* 2 Corinthians 4:6).

Tenthly, Abel's blood speaks of shed blood which was spilt on the earth (Genesis 4:11) – of man's mortality, being made out of the dust of the earth man returns to dust in his death,

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of that which was taken up and sprinkled in heaven on the mercy seat in the holiest of holies by Christ our great High Priest and *“the mediator of the new covenant”* (Hebrews 12:24, 1 Peter 1:2, Hebrews 10:19).

Eleventhly, Abel's blood speaks of how Cain was set apart in judgement - he had a mark set upon him, he was cursed in becoming *“a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth”* (Genesis 4:14),

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of sanctification – of a people set apart - in Christ unto holiness (Hebrews 13:12).

And **Twelfthly**, Abel's blood speaks of Abel's offering – of a lamb, the firstlings of the flock, which made Cain envious because the LORD had respect unto it (Genesis 4:4), an offering however, which was but a figure of the true,

Whereas Christ's blood speaks of that one great offering for sin, of Christ Himself, that perfect offering once and for all which rose as a sweet smelling savour to God, by which He perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Hebrews 9:14, 10:10-14).

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“And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.”

Genesis 22:8

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”, John 1:29.

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”

Revelation 12:11

How much better are the things of which Christ's blood speaks than those of which Abel's blood speaks, and Christ's blood always speaks for the sinner, not against him. We have but touched upon the wondrous truths spoken of by Christ's blood – what of the finished work of Christ on the cross? Or of Christ being the fulfilment of the Passover as the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world? Or the everlasting covenant of which Christ's blood speaks (Hebrews 13:20), a covenant which cannot be broken, that new covenant in which Christ fulfilled all the types and figures of the old covenant ceremonies, sacrifices and offerings?

But, we must ask ourselves, which blood will God hear speaking of us? Christ's blood or another's? Will God hear the sentence of death against us because of our sins? Or will He hear the plea of Christ's blood on our behalf – *“Washed in the blood of the Lamb”, “Thy sins be forgiven thee”, “Loose him and let him go”?*

Oh may it be the blood of Christ which speaks on our behalf! That blood which speaks of righteousness, of pardon, of forgiveness, of everlasting love, of mercy, of deliverance from sin and the power of sin. That blood which speaks of the finished work of salvation, of everlasting life in Christ Jesus, of salvation which is of God by free grace alone to all those who believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That blood which washes God's people from all their sins, and through which they are made perfectly righteous

THE BLOOD... THAT SPEAKETH BETTER THINGS

in Christ Jesus. What a mercy to have such blood speak for us and to have it sprinkled within our hearts.

What a Saviour! What a sacrifice! How precious is the blood of the Lamb of God, freely shed for sinners, and yet at such a cost to the Son – that blood which speaketh better things than that of Abel!

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

2 Corinthians 5:21

Amen.

CHRIST, THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Chapter Three

*"...For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us"
1 Corinthians 5:7*

Chapter Three

Christ Our Passover

*"...For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us"
1 Corinthians 5:7*

IN the third chapter of John we read of two vital truths which relate to the salvation of the sinner through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Firstly, in verse 3, *"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

And secondly in verses 14-15 we read *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."*

Two vital truths - the new birth by the Holy Spirit and the atoning death of Christ - without which no man could be saved. The first a consequence of the second, and both entirely the work of God, for "Salvation is of the Lord".

*"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."
John 1:12-13*

These truths, set forth in the Gospel of Christ as recorded by John, were the fulfilment, thousands of years later, of what was promised to Israel of old in a figure by the types and shadows of the Passover.

The nation of Israel were a people in sore bondage in the land of Egypt. Forced to work as slaves to the Egyptians their workload

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was made harder and harder as Pharaoh's heart became harder and harder towards them and their God. The Lord sent his servant Moses to Pharaoh to demand the deliverance of His people, but after sending many fearsome plagues upon the Egyptians still Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. In Exodus 10:27-29 we read the following:

"But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.

And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die. And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more."

Pharaoh had spoken the truth because, unknown to him, the following night God would bring such a plague upon Egypt, such an awful judgement, and bring about such a deliverance in leading His people out of Egypt, that Pharaoh would indeed never see their faces again - God would call out His people to Himself, deliver them from their misery in Egypt, loose the bonds that tied them, and lead them forth "by the right way" that they might worship and serve Him. This was the night of the Passover, that night when the firstborn of the Egyptians would be slain, but not the Israelites, for they had a sacrifice which spoke of deliverance: a sacrifice of a lamb, whose blood would placate the wrath of God. A sacrifice which pointed in a figure across countless years and ages to the one great sacrifice for sins, that of the Lord Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God" - "*Christ our passover*".

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

John 1:29

CHRIST OUR PASSOVER

In this chapter I would like to bring out seven main points from the Passover as recorded in Exodus 11 and 12 and how it points us in such a wonderful, dramatic, and powerful way to Christ and His Gospel. We shall look at the Passover under the following headings:-

1. God's Judgement –

The destruction of the firstborn of Egypt and the deliverance of God's people

2. When It Started - Midnight

3. When It Finished - Morning

4. The Entrance to the House

5. The Safety of the House

6. The Earthly Pilgrimage

7. The Heavenly Destination

1. God's Judgement –

The destruction of the firstborn of Egypt and the deliverance of God's people

"And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt:

And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts.

And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more."

Exodus 11:4-6

During the night of the Passover "the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the first born of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle." The *firstborn* of Egypt were destroyed.

What does this signify? Well Egypt is figurative in the Bible of the world and of the flesh. It is both a picture of that which the believer is delivered from, the world, and that in the believer which is crucified with Christ - the flesh, or the *firstborn*.

When God judges the world in righteousness at the great day of the Lord when Christ returns only those who have been born again of the Spirit will be saved. Why? Because the *firstborn*, the flesh, will be destroyed. But those born again of the Spirit, those who have a *second* birth have eternal life and will dwell with God forever. Those 'in Christ' washed in His blood, having had their flesh crucified with Him, yet born of God by the Spirit, will rise with Him in the power of an endless life.

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Galatians 6:14

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Unlike the Egyptians around them the children of Israel found grace in the eyes of the Lord. They found mercy. They were a chosen people. And when God destroyed the firstborn of Egypt the Israelites passed safely through the judgement, because of the blood on the door of their house.

Likewise all those elect, chosen, vessels of mercy whom God has chosen in Christ, His Spiritual Israel will pass safely through the rivers of death in Christ to dwell with Him for ever.

But those outside of Christ, those who see nothing in Him to desire Him, those who love the world and the things of the world, who live for the gratifying of their flesh - *these* will face certain and swift destruction. For eternity to come. For they *have no second birth*.

"Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again."

John 3:7

2. When It Started - Midnight

Notice the time when the judgement of God upon Egypt started - at midnight. In the pitch black of night when the sun was at its lowest point.

Now consider the time when Christ was crucified.

From nine in the morning (the third hour) until midday Christ hung upon the cross for three hours in the light of the sun. As He suffered men passed by and reviled Him, others mocked Him, others cursed Him. They all thought that this was His lowest point. The one who had claimed to be the Son of God had fallen, they thought. He had reached his lowest point - this was the end of Him.

Yet all the while the sun was steadily rising higher in the sky. All the while the Son of God was glorified. What man saw as His

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destruction, was actually His greatest work. The Son of man was lifted up on the cross in the place of sinners.

"And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.

... Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

This he said, signifying what death he should die."

John 12:23, 31-33

"Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him."

John 13:31

At 12 noon as Christ hung upon the cross the light of the sun was suddenly taken away and the land became thick darkness. It became as **midnight**. Why? To signify that Christ was made sin for His people. As He bore their sins in His own body on the tree the light of the Sun of Righteousness was veiled. For the next three hours Christ drank of the cup of the wrath of God against the sins of His people and He drank it to the very dregs. God came in judgement against sin, but He judged it in the Substitute - in His Son who died in the place of sinners; The Lamb of God - God's sacrifice for sin; Christ our Passover.

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Matthew 27:45-46

3. When It Finished - Morning

On the night of the Passover the Israelites were to remain in their houses until morning. Until sunrise. In this picture of the sunrise we can see the following:-

Firstly, the Israelites were not to leave the house until God's work in judgement was complete. Until the day dawned. Otherwise they would face destruction. The work had to be finished. This reminds us of the finished work of Christ at the cross. After three hours in the darkness Christ's work was finished. He gave up the ghost with a great cry and then the light of the sun returned. Every sin of God's people had been borne away. Every drop of God's wrath had been drunk. Not one sin remained. So nothing remained to darken the light of the Sun of Righteousness - not one blemish was left, in Christ, or in His people - all sin was gone. Hence the light of the sun returned.

Secondly, the rise of the sun pictures the resurrection of the Son of God on the third day, and the spiritual resurrection of all God's people in Him. We rise in Christ in His resurrection. The flesh is gone, crucified in Him, and we rise in the power of an everlasting life, that eternal life which is in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

"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."
Galatians 2:20

Thirdly, the sun rise pictures the physical resurrection from the dead of all God's people in Christ at the last day. That day when Christ will return in all His glory to take His people, His bride to be with Him for all eternity. The day when the bodies of all God's people will be raised from the graves as glorious, spiritual bodies in the image of the Heavenly Man, Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15.

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 6:40

As the night of the Passover ended and the sun rose over the land of Egypt two things were made clear by its light. The awful results of the sins of the Egyptians were seen in God's judgement against them - what was done in the darkness was now revealed in the light: *"and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead."* But the judgement of God did not fall on Israel, God's chosen people, for they found grace in the eyes of the Lord, they were spared the results of judgement which they saw all around them and were brought forth out of the house of bondage by a mighty deliverance.

"But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." Exodus 11:7

4. The Entrance to the House

On the night of the Passover the Lord commanded Israel to take of the blood of the slain lamb and strike it on the lintel and the two side posts of the door of their house. These three points on which the blood was applied are pictorial of the cross of Christ - they represent the top of the vertical and the two sides of the horizontal beams of wood upon which Christ died.

Notice also where the blood was applied - on the doorway, the entrance to the house. This gives a vivid picture of the entrance to God's House which is only by way of the cross, through Christ crucified for His people. Christ is the door through which His sheep enter. As it is written:

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"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

John 10:9

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

John 14:6

Christ's body slain for His people on the cross also speaks of the veil of the temple which was rent from top to bottom when Christ died, symbolic of the access which had now been made into the Holiest place through Christ. God's people can enter in to the presence of God through Christ their great High Priest and mediator who was crucified for them.

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;" Hebrews 10:19-20

5. The Safety of the House

The children of Israel were to remain in their houses until morning. Outside the Lord would come in judgement upon the Egyptians but the children of Israel were safe whilst they remained in their houses, with the blood of the Passover Lamb on the door. This reminds us of the safety which Noah and his family found within the ark by which they were brought through the awful judgement of God in the flood which destroyed the old world. The ark, like the houses wherein the Israelites found safety, was a picture of Christ, and the deliverance through judgement that Christ wrought for His people. Through being "in Christ", abiding in Him, all God's people are brought safely through judgement into everlasting life.

The Israelites remained in their houses, in their "ark", all through the night of the Passover until morning, until the rising of the sun, which spoke of a perfect deliverance, of being brought out of the land of bondage into freedom, unto glory.

6. The Earthly Pilgrimage

The houses where the Israelites dwelt during the night of Passover also speak of the House of God, the "Church", the Body of Christ, during its earthly pilgrimage. Safe in their houses the children of Israel were commanded to eat the flesh of the sacrificed lamb, roast with fire, and unleavened bread, with bitter herbs. None of it should remain until the morning. Exodus 12:8-10.

This is symbolic of how God feeds His people during their earthly pilgrimage. As Israel were to find out during their forty year pilgrimage through the wilderness on their way to the promised land, God provides for His people. On their journey God provided them with manna for bread, and water from the Rock to drink, both of which point to Christ, the bread of life and the source of living waters.

This physical food which Israel was provided with on the night of the Passover and during their earthly pilgrimage were physical symbols of that spiritual food and drink which all God's people eat and drink on their pilgrimage through this world, that is, the flesh and the blood of Christ. As we read in John:

"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

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This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

John 6:53-58

In the night of the Passover God "*put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel*". He judged the Egyptians, but delivered Israel who were called out of Egypt, separated unto God. So too are all God's people in Christ. They are chosen of God, "*called out*" of the world, separated unto Him, strangers and pilgrims on the earth, seeking a better country, that is an heavenly. Hebrews 11:8-16.

The Israelites were commanded to have their loins girded, their shoes on their feet and their staff in their hand, Exodus 12:11. This spoke of readiness for the journey ahead of them, of pilgrimage, of always being on the move. It is just the same with all God's people - as they pass through their earthly pilgrimage they keep on moving, knowing that there is nothing in this world to profit them, nothing to satisfy, no reason to put down roots. They walk by faith, looking unto Christ, on their way to...

7. The Heavenly Destination

Though the hours of the night of the Passover must have seemed to pass by slowly, as the judgement of God rained down upon the Egyptians all around, nevertheless it was *"but for a moment"*. With the rise of the sun in the morning deliverance awaited - Israel walked free.

So as God's people journey through this world, through this "vale of tears", as the Body of Christ passing through on its earthly pilgrimage, they have set before them an heavenly destination, a glorious hope, an eternal inheritance.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."
2 Corinthians 4: 17-18

God's people journey through this world looking unto Jesus by faith (Hebrews 12:2), having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way (Hebrews 10:19-20), even now seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6). But what is now seen by faith will one day be a reality. Soon the Lord Jesus Christ will return to raise up all His blood-bought people and take them to dwell with Him for ever and ever around His throne in the new heaven and the new earth wherein is the city of the living God. A city with twelve gates through which God's people may enter in and have right of the tree of life, that is Christ, their Saviour. Revelation 22:14.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

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And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

Revelation 21:1-7

In Summary - A Finished Work

"The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up."

Matthew 4:16

So at the break of morning, in the light of the rising sun, the Israelites emerged from their houses where they had sat in darkness through that dreadful night of judgement, as it were in the shadow of death as God destroyed those around them, to be met with the news they longed for - they were free to go - delivered.

"And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said." ...

"And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies."

Exodus 12:30-31, 51

So too, when Christ had drank the last drop of God's wrath against the sins of His people, when He cried out *"It is finished!"* and gave up the ghost, a perfect deliverance had been wrought. Every single one of God's people were now just before God. Their sins had been atoned for, they were put away. God had finished the work of deliverance, the Son had been lifted up, the sins of His people washed away in the blood of the Lamb - a people bought at such a price, but now free to worship and serve their God for ever and for ever.

May all God's people never forget the wondrous work of Salvation which their Saviour wrought upon the cross. May we keep our gaze upon *Christ - Our Passover*.

Chapter Four

“Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley” Joshua 8:13

Chapter Four

The Midst of the Valley

“Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley” Joshua 8:13

THE book of Joshua is a book full of Christ. Its very name, “Joshua”, is the Hebrew form of the Greek name “Jesus”, meaning Saviour, and Joshua himself is a type, a picture, of Jesus. Hence Joshua and the events of his life point us in various ways to the person and work of Christ.

Joshua followed Moses, as Christ and His grace follow Moses and the law, in the work of God in a convicted sinner. It was Joshua who brought the children of Israel over the river Jordan into the promised land, and it is Christ who brings His people through the rivers of death into everlasting life in Him. Joshua fought many battles and, by the Lord’s strength, obtained many victories for the Israelites as they conquered the various cities in Canaan. Christ too fights battles on behalf of His people, and in the most momentous battle of all time which was waged at the cross He too was completely victorious, utterly destroying all His enemies, every foe, and all opposition, bringing in a perfect salvation, a complete justification and everlasting life for all those for whom He died and shed His blood.

In the siege of Jericho when the children of Israel marched silently around the city walls for seven days we see a wonderful picture of the power of God in the Gospel. The horns which the priests blew were ram’s horns pointing figuratively to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, and the power of God, as symbolised by the horn, which is the Gospel. It was by the sounding of that Gospel,

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spiritually speaking, that the walls fell down flat. Israel used no carnal weapons of warfare to bring those great walls down - they had no need to. God's power to save through the Gospel is greater than any power of man or of his making (2 Corinthians 10:4).

In the eighth chapter of Joshua however, we read of another battle, another siege, which although maybe not as well known as the siege of Jericho, nevertheless still powerfully pictures the cross of Christ, and the tremendous battle waged there between good and evil.

We read here how Joshua and his men were sent by God to ambush the city of Ai. Some of the men lay in wait outside the city on the west side (Joshua 8:2-12) whilst during the night Joshua descended into the midst of the valley (Joshua 8:13). When the king of Ai and his men saw this they arose early and went out to fight Joshua and his men. But Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten and fled into the wilderness causing the king of Ai and all his men to pursue after them. Not one man of Ai was left in the city! It was left wide open. On seeing Joshua raise his spear towards the city, the Israelites who lay in wait ambushed the city from behind and burnt it with fire (Joshua 8:14-19).

The men of Ai found themselves in the wilderness, outside the city, helplessly surrounded by Israelites on all sides. The Israelites slew them all, leaving not one man alive, except the king of Ai. Israel then returned to the city, slew all the remaining inhabitants, and took the cattle and all the spoils. Ai was destroyed – it was a total and an overwhelming victory (Joshua 8:20-28).

Symbolically the king of Ai was then hung on a tree and buried under a great heap of stones (Joshua 8:29). Finally, Joshua built an altar to the LORD, offered up burnt offerings, sacrificed peace offerings, and wrote upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses which was then read out to all the congregation of Israel (Joshua 8:30-35).

In this chapter I'd like to draw attention to several points drawn from this siege of Ai and how it directs our gaze to the victory which Christ wrought on the cross, outside the city of Jerusalem, as He suffered and died in the place of sinners.

[I would also draw the reader's attention to the twelfth chapter of Revelation which allegorically pictures many truths in a passage which has some parallels with what is shown spiritually and symbolically in Joshua chapter 8.]

1. "Perfect love casteth out fear..."

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18)

The chapter starts with these words of encouragement from the LORD to His servant Joshua: *"Fear not, neither be dismayed"*.

Faced with such fearsome enemies all around them in the land of Canaan, enemies which far outweighed them in number, this is just what Joshua and the Israelites needed to hear. Fear of the great forces arrayed against them could easily have overcome the children of Israel. But that the LORD was with them, that He loved His people, that He would fight for them, and that the victory would be theirs, was just what Joshua and Israel needed to know to cast out their fears. And it is just what all the people of God throughout history need to know – what encouragement there is in knowing that we have a God and a Saviour who has said *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"* (Hebrews 13:5), who fights our battles for us, who is our strength in times of weakness. How the perfect love of God shed abroad in the hearts of his people casts out all fear. Surely, *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31)

But Joshua, the battles he fought and the fears he felt, point us to another, a much greater "Saviour", even Jesus Christ the Lord. What a battle there lay before Christ as He approached the hour

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when He would be betrayed and given up to be sentenced to death upon a cross. How terrible were the foes set against Him. Satan, the prince of this world, the prince of darkness, knew that his moment was come. Now he thought to destroy the Son of God, to bring all his forces of evil to bear upon the "*Sun of Righteousness*", to pour out all his malice and fury against the Lord's Anointed - to bring Him to nought.

But as Christ entered into His agonies of soul in the garden of Gethsemane He anticipated far greater sufferings than any which the Evil One could bring to bear upon Him. That which He feared most, which He knew lay before Him, was the drinking of the cup of God's wrath against the sins of His people; being made sin on the cross in their stead, bearing their sins in His own body on the tree, being bruised, beaten and battered by His own Father under the outpouring of His righteous anger and wrath against sin. But most of all being forsaken of His Father, separated from the One in whose breast He had always laid, cast into an eternity of Hell within His own soul for the sins of all the elect. What a prospect! What a battle! What a cup to drink!

Yet in this most dark, this most fearsome of hours, Christ willingly submitted His will to the will of His Father (Luke 22:42). His love for His Father, His love for all those whom the Father had given unto Him and the love which He knew His Father had for Him, enabled Him to bear the agony, and to face the coming ordeal. For that love was no ordinary love - it was perfect love, "*which casteth out fear*". The perfect trust which Jesus had in the Father's will and His promise, His absolute faith that all the sins of the elect would be borne away by His sacrifice in death - and that on the third day He surely would be raised again from the dead, conquering every foe, every enemy, all opposition - caused Him to set His face like a flint towards the cross, not turning aside from the great task which lay before Him. Despite all outward appearances, despite the fact that His Father would forsake Him during those hours on the cross when He was made sin, Christ still knew that all would be accomplished according to the Father's will; all would be

finished, all would be perfected – a complete deliverance and salvation of all God’s people would be wrought - to the glory of His grace, for evermore!

And so in Christ’s great torments and fears, God comforted Him: *“And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him”* (Luke 22:43).

The help Jesus needed came from God, from heaven - not from man. The disciples slept whilst Jesus was in agony in Gethsemane, their tiredness, the weakness of their flesh overcoming them. But Jesus, like Joshua before Him, received the help He needed - direct from God.

2. The Promise of Victory

“Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle” (Psalm 24:8).

The LORD gave Israel a promise that victory would be theirs - *“I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land”* (Joshua 8:1) - and so it would turn out to be. The king and men of Ai were to be totally defeated and completely destroyed, Israel taking their cattle and the spoils, for the LORD was with them.

The Lord Jesus also knew that His death on the cross for His people would result in total victory over Satan and all his forces (Psalm 110). In dying in the place of sinners Christ would satisfy the full justice of God’s Law, yet at the same time show mercy to a great multitude. The Law with which Satan accused God’s people, which was the strength of sin, would be completely met and satisfied - not in them, but in another - the Substitute.

When Jesus died all His people had their sins justly punished and taken away - they were washed from head to toe in Christ’s blood,

shed on their behalf. All Satan's powers of accusation were stripped from him - he was utterly spoiled, totally defeated, completely destroyed. He had nothing in Christ with which to find fault, and nothing in God's elect. Christ spoiled Satan, delivering all His people from his evil grasp. Christ's victory was complete and triumphant (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

[See Revelation 12, especially verses 7-11.]

"When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke 11:21-22).

3. "The midst of the valley" Joshua 8:13.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

Outside the city, in the night, Joshua went into the midst of the valley. In this we see pictured the descent of Christ from the heights of glory into the darkness, the night of this world, made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death (Hebrews 2:9), taking the form of a servant, made in the likeness of men. Christ, the Son of God, humbled Himself by taking human nature into perfect union with His divine nature and person, so that He might suffer and die in the place of sinful men. He came as the light of men into the darkness of a fallen world to redeem a people, to deliver them from sin, death and the powers of darkness, that they might have life, eternal life, in Him, and be raised to glory with Him in the last day.

Christ came as the light which shone in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not (John 1:5). He came from such great heights of glory to such great depths of humility among dark, fallen,

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sinful mankind. Yet His greatest descent was yet to come. His pathway through His life in this world was always set towards one destination - the cross. At the cross Jesus, the Saviour, reached the lowest point of His descent into the valley. Here He would suffer in death for His people (Acts 8:33). Here He *"who knew no sin was made sin"* for them that they might be *"made the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). When Jesus was *"made sin"* and the earth became as night for three hours, the light of the Sun of Righteousness being veiled because of the sin which He bore, truly Jesus, Joshua, the Saviour *"went that night into the midst of the valley"*.

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

4. "Without the camp" Hebrews 13:13.

Notice where the battle of Ai was fought - not in the city; not in the camp; but outside the city, *"without the camp"*, in the valley - out in the wilderness. The men of Ai came out of the city to fight Joshua and his men. Why? Because Joshua's appearance in the valley gave the impression of defeat and it drew the men of Ai out to pursue after him and his men.

Likewise we read in Hebrews that *"Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate"* as typified by the carcasses of the beasts, sacrificed under the Law of Moses, which were burnt without the camp. Jesus was crucified, not in the city of Jerusalem, but outside, with two malefactors. Just as lepers

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were considered unclean and kept outside the camp, so Christ was treated as unclean. Like a common criminal He was taken outside the city to be executed. Jerusalem, that great city centred upon the temple, in which the Jews practised their religion and prided themselves on being God's chosen people, proud of their heritage, their law and their priesthood, had rejected Christ and handed Him over to the Roman authorities to crucify Him. That was where their enlightenment in religion in its merely outward form took them - *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not"* (John 1:11).

Outside the camp is where Jesus suffered. Outside the camp of man's forms of religion, rejected and despised of men. This, like Joshua in the valley, gave the impression of defeat - yet resulted in the salvation of a countless multitude (1 Samuel 16:7). Christ died for a people who sought Him not, a people at enmity with God, who deserved nothing but condemnation, a people who were sinners - *"I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"* (Matthew 9:13). He died for them while they were yet sinners (Romans 5:8-10) - while they were enemies He reconciled them (Colossians 1:21-22). These people God draws by grace irresistibly to the Saviour, outside the camp. These died when He died, and these rose when He rose, victorious from the grave. *"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"* (John 6:37), *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day"* (John 6:44).

"Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:13-14).

[Compare also Revelation 12, especially verses 4-6.]

5. "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more"

Hebrews 8:12.

Outside the camp, in the midst of battle, the men of Ai found they had Israelites on every side. Israel's enemies were surrounded, and come the end of the day not one was left alive. The victory over Ai was complete and overwhelming.

Likewise Christ's victory over sin and all the enemies of God and God's people at the cross was total. Christ took away all the sins of His people in His body on the tree. Not one sin, not one blemish was left. It was a finished work. All the elect of God died with Christ when He died. Their flesh was crucified with Him - every sin was taken away - and having died they rose again with Christ in His resurrection, in the power of an everlasting life (Galatians 2:19-20, Galatians 6:14).

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isaiah 44:22).

6. "The accuser of (the) brethren cast down"

Revelation 12:10.

The king of Ai is figurative of Satan, the Devil, the "*prince of this world*". Since Satan as the Serpent deceived Eve and, by her, caused Adam and all mankind to fall into sin, the consequence of which was death, he has maintained a power and a dominion over this world. All men are sinners and all come under his dominion and deadly influence (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Yet there is one who is greater than Satan, who came in to this world to deliver His people from Satan's grip. As the king of Ai and his men battled with Joshua and Israel, so spiritually Satan and his forces fought against Jesus and tried to overcome Him at the cross [compare Revelation 12:7]. But as Joshua defeated Ai and its king,

hanging him on a tree, so too Jesus turned Satan's opposition around, disarmed him, and ensured his ultimate defeat.

The hanging of the king of Ai on the tree graphically points us to the cross. Though Christ hung on the cross - on the tree - it was ultimately Satan's downfall. The cross destroyed Satan. The cross sealed his fate. Satan, the Devil, like the handwriting of ordinances which he so ferociously used to accuse the saints day and night (Revelation 12:10), was effectively nailed to, and hung on, the cross and taken out of the way (Colossians 2:14-15). Christ's 'heel' was bruised - leaving five scars in His glorified body - but the Serpent's head was crushed! (Genesis 3:15) Thus, Christ, victorious over all His foes, rose from the dead, having spoiled principalities and powers!

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through the fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

7. "Ye are not under law but under grace"

Romans 6:14.

After hanging him on a tree, when the sun was down Joshua had the carcase of the king taken down, cast at the entering of the city and buried under a great heap of stones, which, it is written, *"remaineth unto this day"*.

What does this picture? Well, we have seen how the king is figurative of Satan, the Accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). Also, stones speak of the Law of God which was engraven in stones (2 Corinthians 3:7), and which often demanded the stoning of those who transgressed it (Numbers 15:32-36). As the Accuser Satan stands, as it were, in the Court of God as the Prosecutor. He takes the Law of God and uses it to accuse God's people of their sins. He

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seeks to cast stones of condemnation at them. And he is right - they have sinned, they have broken God's law. What a prosecutor he is - he knows the law intimately. He knows what is required of man before a Holy God - a perfect and a continual righteousness.

But what Satan didn't expect, what he didn't reckon on, what utterly destroyed his case, was the work of Christ at the cross. What defeated him was the work of the Substitute. Here was God's answer to Satan's accusations. A lawful answer. A just answer. For God would be *"just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus"* (Romans 3:26). Christ stood in the place of sinners taking the just punishment against their sin in His own body. He met all the law's penal demands against the sins of the elect, answered every charge, every sentence. The law demanded death and that is what it got. Christ died in the place of the sinner - the Just for the unjust. God's law could require no more - all its demands had been met.

Jesus having paid the price for sin, having cast sin clean out of sight for all His people, had taken the accuser's strongest weapon - the Law - and turned it right around against him.

Satan was destroyed. The stones of the very law he sought to hurl at God's elect fell upon his own head, burying him in the earth, under a great heap *"which remaineth unto this day"*. Yes, the stone of the law buried Satan, yet that stone could not keep Christ in the tomb. The stone of Christ's tomb (figurative of the law being answered) was rolled aside and Christ and all His people rose triumphant from the grave. The victory was *"Joshua's"*.

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:14-15).

8. "Grace shall reign through righteousness"

Romans 5:21.

Having defeated Ai, slain all its inhabitants, spoiled the city, and hung its king, after a magnificent victory, Joshua set up an altar to the LORD, made sacrifices upon it, wrote upon it all the words of the law of Moses and read that out in the hearing of all the congregation of Israel. Hence the people were reminded of the covenant made between God and His earthly people, symbolic of that New Covenant which would be established in Christ for His heavenly people.

So Christ having finished the work of redemption upon the cross, having destroyed Satan, sin, death and hell, having spoiled Satan's city, throwing out the "prince of this world" to reassert Christ's rights of absolute dominion over His creation and His people, having risen from the dead and ascended into glory to sit on the right hand of God the Father; Jesus, the Saviour, established the New Covenant, the everlasting covenant, in perfect righteousness, and took of His shed blood, sprinkling it upon the mercy seat in the Holiest of Holies in heaven above.

"But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (Hebrews 8:6).

"Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every high priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:9-14).

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What a Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ is! What a covenant He established! Jesus is the mediator of this covenant, the priest and the sacrifice. He offered Himself as the one, perfect, sacrifice for sins, never to be repeated. A sacrifice so complete, so acceptable to God the Father that it completely atoned for all the sins of God's people, paid the ransom price, redeemed every one of the elect, made peace with God and brought in everlasting righteousness and eternal life. And it was all done out of free and sovereign grace, freely bestowed to undeserving sinners, at such a cost to the Saviour. Praise His Holy Name!

When we consider the wondrous work of salvation which the Saviour wrought on the cross for His people how thankful we should be that Jesus feared not to go "*that night into the midst of the valley*"!

Amen.

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Chapter Five

"The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." Nahum 1:7

Chapter Five

“A Strong Hold in the Day of Trouble”

“The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.” Nahum 1:7

THE prophecy of Nahum presents a powerful picture of the Gospel and the sufferings of Christ for the sins of His people. But this presentation of God’s saving grace towards sinners may not seem immediately apparent on first reading as this prophecy has much to say about God’s anger against sin and the impending judgement of a wicked and sinful people. Briefly, Nahum’s prophecy can be summarised as depicting the following...

Firstly, Nahum opens by gloriously setting forth God’s righteous, holy character; His majesty; His Almighty power and goodness; and His just and righteous indignation and fury against sin. See Nahum 1:1-7. How glorious the LORD God is; how majestic; how powerful. Yet despite all man’s sin against Him God is *“slow to anger, and great in power”* (Nahum 1:3), for He is a God who delighteth in showing mercy. Surely *“The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble”* (Nahum 1:7).

Secondly, the prophecy paints such a picture against a backdrop of the sins and iniquities of a people who had turned their back on God. A people who had sought their own things, their own pleasures, and their own gain. A proud, selfish and wayward people, who although perhaps outwardly religious, had lost sight of their true state before a holy God. Does not this description fit us all? Does it not describe all mankind? For who has not rebelled against his Maker? Who does not live for self and selfish gain if the

true motives of the heart be examined? Who can truthfully exclude themselves from this description? As we read in Romans, *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23).

So thirdly, we read in Nahum's prophecy of God's response to this sinful people, the inevitable sentence and judgement upon that people who had so deliberately rebelled against the LORD. A people who ignored the warnings given and who disbelieved that there was a day of judgement coming - just like those in the days of Noah who laughed and mocked at the Lord's servant as he faithfully built the ark, according to the Lord's instructions, to escape the wrath to come. But, I ask, do we heed the warnings given? Or are we content to eat, drink and be merry? Do we slumber on in our mad career towards death and judgement, crying *"Peace, peace!"* when there is no peace? Do we think our sins will be treated as a light thing by the One whom we have offended? Or, rather, will not the LORD of all the earth do right? I ask, *"What do ye imagine against the LORD?"* Nahum 1:9.

The picture throughout Nahum is of that which the LORD God looks down upon in judgement. He sees a great mass of people who have sinned and against whom He pronounces a sentence of everlasting destruction. But praise God that there is a people who are spared such judgement. A people loved of God and chosen of God from before the foundation of the world - a people who are recipients of His Sovereign grace and undeserved mercy, a people who truly trust in Him and worship Him, but a people who in the prophecy of Nahum are seemingly hidden from view - there is hardly a glimpse of them throughout the book. Why? Where are they? ... They are there... but they are hidden from view - because they are found in the "strong hold", in Christ their Saviour! The judgement of God rains down upon all the wicked in fiery anger, indignation and wrath, utterly consuming them all in an awesome display and vindication of God's justice. And yet this very same judgement rained down upon one other - a man, a perfect man, a righteous man, a man despised and rejected by all, yet a man who willingly stood in the place of sinners under the sword of God's

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justice, and the flames of God's anger whilst nailed to a cross and crucified – this is the man Christ Jesus, the LORD's Anointed, God incarnate, Jesus, the Saviour of sinners. In one verse (Nahum 1:7) we are given a glimpse of God's people, hidden, in Christ, hidden under the blood of the Lamb, safe in their refuge, trusting in their God to deliver them from the wrath to come, because of that glorious One who loved them, and gave Himself for them (Galatians 2:20). What grace! What mercy we see here!

Yes, judgement is all prominent throughout the book of Nahum, but hidden behind it all, in Nahum 1:7 there is this slight glimpse of the redeemed of God, whose lives are *"hid with Christ in God"* (Colossians 3:3), when we read that *"The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him"*. Here are God's people, known of Him in whom they trust, *"hid"* in their refuge, their strong-hold which is Christ their Saviour. HE brings THEM through the judgement, the *"day of trouble"*, because they like all others have sinned, and that sin will not go unnoticed, it will be judged. God's holy, righteous nature demands it. Justice must be met. But for them, by grace, it is met in the Substitute – all the fury of God spoken of in Nahum, the sins He is furious against, and the judgement to be meted out against those sins, as it applies to God's chosen people, was directed not at them, but at Christ. He who knew no sin was made sin for them - He suffered in His people's stead (2 Corinthians 5:21). What a picture we see of just how wicked God's people are, how vile they are, just how hateful sin is to God and how furious His judgement against sin is. And in seeing this we see something of just how deep the suffering of Christ was in the place of His people. What a picture is portrayed in Nahum in the graphic descriptions of God's judgement of Nineveh of the very flames of torment which Christ endured for those *"who trust in Him"* as He suffered and died in their place on the cross.

But how wonderful that the redeemed are found in the strong hold, safe from those very flames! As in the ark of Noah which passed through the judgement, in which ark Noah and his family were shut in by God, the Lord's people too are *"shut in"* to their ark,

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which is Christ – who is their refuge, their strong-hold in the day of trouble. And what brings them to flee to such a refuge? Well, the sound of the Gospel of Christ does, as brought to them by the Spirit of God, who is beheld *“upon the mountains”* and who speaks through His Word and by those servants whom He sends to preach the everlasting Gospel - those servants who bring glad tidings and publisheth peace! (Nahum 1:15)

What peace there is to be found in Christ from the storms which rage outside - but what fury and wrath there is to those found outside of the LORD's Anointed, to those who despise and reject the One who died in the place of sinners. How in this prophecy we see much of the wrath of God portrayed, but how wonderful that He who delights to show mercy has not forgotten to show mercy – mercy and peace is shown to all those found in the strong-hold, all those who trust in Christ, all those hidden with Christ, in God. May God have mercy upon us in bringing to our ears those glad tidings of peace, giving us ears to hear the trumpet sound of warning, and causing us to flee from the wrath to come – fleeing to that one refuge, that one strong-hold in the day of trouble, the LORD and His Anointed, Jesus Christ the Saviour (Habbakuk 3:13).

“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”
Acts 4:10-12.

Chapter Six

“If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” John 8:36

Chapter Six

Free Indeed

“If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” John 8:36

HERE is a verse which speaks about freedom. But what is this freedom and who is made free?

Is this a freedom that everyone needs? Surely freedom is needed by those in bondage?

“Why”, you may ask, “do I need to be freed? Aren’t I free already?”

Well, in this chapter I intend to look at this freedom under five headings:

1. Freedom from what?
2. Who brings this freedom?
3. How was this freedom brought about?
4. What is the nature of this freedom?

and finally,

5. How is this freedom received?

1. Freedom from what?

This verse will mean little to you until you realise that outside of Christ you are in bondage. Absolute bondage.

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How? What kind of bondage?

All men outside of Christ are in bondage to sin, bondage to the consequences of sin, bondage to death, bondage to the Law of God, and, though they may deny it, their own will is bound.

Sin has such a power on men that they are utter slaves to it. Sin is that rebellion against God and His righteousness that so pervades our thoughts, desires and intentions that everything we do is affected by it. Nobody worships God as they should or lives their lives in the way God would have them live. In fact most people rarely even think about God, or care about living with regard to Him. And even if they do, even if they try to worship Him and live a righteous life, everything they do is affected by sin – because they are in bondage to it. It is in their very nature – a fallen nature.

But you probably don't believe that do you? You probably think you are quite all right – and not in bondage at all, quite able to make your own mind up about what to do and what not to do. After all, you have freewill don't you?

Do you? Free-will?

Well, when God created mankind He created him with freewill. Adam, the first man that lived upon this earth, had it in the Garden of Eden. But when Adam used his freewill to disobey God he fell into sin and lost that freewill for ever.

Yes, Adam fell, and entered into bondage. Sin entered in and is passed on to every one of Adam's descendants. And the inevitable consequence of sin – death - entered too. Man wasn't created to die – he was created to live unto God, but when sin entered the human race so did death.

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:"

Romans 5:12

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But what of freewill? Surely we can decide what to do each day, what to eat, where to go? And of course, one day, when you're older, you'll probably look into religion and decide what's best for you – but not now. You want to enjoy life now, live it to the full, enjoy your freedom while you can...

But the truth is you're bound. That freedom, and that freewill has limits. You're like a prisoner tied to the wall of a cell by chains. Yes, that prisoner can stand up, sit down, move around, jog on the spot but no matter how hard he tries he can't get out of the cell because of the chains that hold him back. He has freewill to a degree but he will never be able to escape the cell no matter how much he wills it.

So it is with you. You have a will but it is bound by sin. You can decide to do certain things but you can never truly worship God or live a righteous life because you are bound - bound by the chains of sin, death and the Law of God.

Everything you do is affected by sin. And that sin brings with it a consequence – death. *"It is appointed unto men once to die"*.

No matter how much you choose to ignore it one day you will die. You can't escape it. Death affects everyone. It will come sooner than you think. And on the other side of death is the judgement. One day you will pass from this life into the next and have to give account before a Holy God for every sinful act you have committed in this life. And if you're found wanting, which you surely will be, then there awaits a just sentence for sin. An eternity of separation from God in that place known as Hell.

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:"
Matthew 25:41

"But what of God's Law?" asks someone religious, "Surely God gave us the Ten Commandments to teach us how to live? If we live by those commandments won't God spare us from that

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punishment? Won't He show us love? Isn't there a freedom that comes by living by the Law?"

The trouble is we are still in bondage to sin. Yes, God gave the Law containing the Ten Commandments and they teach us how holy and righteous He is. We should live by them, we should love God with all our heart, all our mind, all our will and love our neighbour as ourselves – but we can't. No matter how hard we try we always break the law and we find that rather than it being to our good it brings us into further bondage. It condemns us to the core:

"For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.

For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me."

Romans 7:9-11

All men are in bondage to the Law of God because of their sin. It tells us what to do but gives us no power to fulfil its demands. The harder you try to keep it the more into sin and condemnation you fall. You must keep it though, and if you don't you will find yourself under its curse.

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

Galatians 3:10

Yes, we are all bound by our sin, by death and by the law. So bound that our very wills are subject to sin. Mankind will not believe the truth of God, no matter how much of the truth he hears because he is in bondage, *"sold under sin"*, and he needs to be freed!

2. Who brings this freedom?

But praise God, there is an answer. There is deliverance from this bondage. Freedom from sin, from death and from the law and its curse.

But who brings this freedom?

The verse reads, *"If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"*.

It is the Son who brings this freedom. What Son? The Son. The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is that only begotten Son of the Father who *"being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God"* Philippians 2:6. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but is also equal with God. He is God. God is one in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And the Son is equal with God.

But,

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."
John 3:16

Because of His love for sinners and desire to see them free from the bondage they are in, God gave His Son. *His Son?*

This is the Son of God who dwells in light inaccessible, who is equal with the Father, who is holy and righteous. This is that Son of whom John writes,

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“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”

John 1:1-5

The Son of God, as God, created the heavens and the earth. All things were made by Him. He came into this dark, sinful world as a man to bring freedom to men, and yet this dark, sinful world “comprehended it not”.

God’s Son came into this world by taking upon Himself human flesh. He was born of a virgin. The Holy Ghost came upon Mary and joined her seed to that of Christ’s that He might take human flesh into perfect union with His divine being. But this flesh was without sin – spotless. Why did He do this? To deliver His people from their sins.

“...thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”

Matthew 1:21.

God’s own Son came to bring freedom to His people. A wretched sinful people, bound by their sin, unable to ever worship God or serve Him as they should. An undeserving people. Sinners.

But what does the Apostle Paul tell us of Christ?

“...Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Philippians 2:5-8

FREE INDEED

Christ humbled Himself as a man. He knew no sin. He never sinned. He was perfect. He lived a perfect life, completely fulfilling the law and all its demands. He was the perfect man, God as man who came into this world, a world which rejected Him, to bring freedom to His people.

This is the Son of God of whom it is written,

“GOD, who at sundry times, and in divers(e) manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?”

Hebrews 1:1-5

This is the Son of God who brings freedom to His people. For *“If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” John 8:36*

3. How was this freedom brought about?

This freedom for sinners came at a price. A very great price. But that price was not paid by us. It was paid by God’s only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, when He laid down His life on the cross.

Yes, the Son frees His people, *but not without a cost.*

We can’t be freed from the bondage of sin except our sin be dealt with. The just penalty for sins that the law demands must be met. Sin must be done away with.

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We can't be freed from the consequence of sin – death - except death be conquered, and new life be given to sinners who are "*dead in trespasses and sins*".

We can't be freed from the bondage of the law except its demands and its penalty be met in full, and a just deliverance be made.

And we can't be freed from the bondage of our own sinful will, unless that sin is taken away and we are given clean hearts and new spirits, and are given a will that desires to worship God and serve God.

All this was brought about by Christ at the cross. When the Son of God laid down His life for His people He wrought a complete deliverance and freedom. Christ had complete faith in His Father that in laying down His life the Father would put upon Him all the sins of His people, and justly punish all their sins in Him. Every single one. Christ was "*made sin*" for us, and as He hung on the tree God poured out all His righteous judgement upon His own Son – all His hatred for sin. The Son drank that bitter cup of God's wrath right down to the very dregs. Every drop.

He *suffered*. In a way that no one has ever suffered, and to a degree that no one can ever comprehend. Estranged from His father Christ died in the place of sinners, taking the punishment that they deserved in order to save them from their sins. To grant them eternal life – to free them from their bondage.

Wicked men drove nails into the hands and feet of the Son of God. And when He was dead they pierced His side with a spear, and out came blood and water. This blood shed by Christ for His people is that blood that washes them from their sins. The blood through which they are forgiven of all their sins and the blood through which God's righteousness is imputed to them – held to their account. Their sins were laid upon Christ, and the righteousness of God was laid upon them.

FREE INDEED

God's law demanded that a penalty be paid for sin. That the blood of a sacrifice must be shed. Christ, as the perfect Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice for sin, shed His own blood – the righteous for the unrighteous.

At the cross Christ paid the just penalty for sin – the law's demands were completely met. He died in the sinner's place that he might be freed from the bondage of sin.

On the third day Christ arose from the tomb. He conquered death and the grave.

"Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."

Romans 6:9

Christ delivered the sinner from the bondage of the law by fulfilling the law. All the law's demands were met in Christ and His sacrifice on the cross.

And finally, in His death on the cross Christ took away sin, and through belief on Him and His sacrifice the sinner can know salvation from sin, and from death, and by the Holy Spirit receive a clean heart and a new spirit being born again of God, and therefore being given a new will to worship and serve God.

All this was accomplished by Christ at the cross. Not merely to make it possible for sinners to be freed from bondage, but to actually free them – completely!

Why did He do this? For no other reason than that He loved a people and desired to save them and in so doing glorify God.

Are you a sinner? Do you see your need of freedom? Then you need to go to Christ and Him alone.

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“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

John 6:37

Christ paid a price to free His people. But He brings that freedom to that people at no price to them!

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

Isaiah 55:1

4. What is the nature of this freedom?

“If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”.

Our verse says, *“ye shall be free indeed”*. That is quite a statement! If the Lord Jesus Christ makes you free then you aren't just free, you are free indeed!

By His once and for all sacrifice on the cross Christ has freed all those who believe on Him from sin, from death, from the bondage of the law, and from the bondage of their will.

Firstly, Christ frees sinners from the bondage of their sin. Sin is dealt with completely by Christ's sacrifice – the full penalty for sin has been met. (Of course, as every Christian knows, as long as they remain in this world they will still sin, but they are no longer in bondage to it, no longer under the dominion of sin – a new life is present within those that Christ has saved that causes them to live unto God: they are now freed from the power of sin!)

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:” Romans 6:6-8

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“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”

Romans 6:14

“Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”

Romans 6:18

Secondly, Christ frees sinners from the consequences of sin – from death and the wrath to come. Christ rose victorious over death and the grave, and brought in everlasting life for all who will believe on Him.

“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it.”

Isaiah 25:8

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.”

Hosea 13:14

“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

“But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;”

2 Corinthians 1:9-10

“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:” Colossians 1:13

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“And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

1 Thessalonians 1:10

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

Romans 8:2

Thirdly, Christ frees sinners from the bondage of the law, the curse of the law and the rule of the law.

“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 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.”

Galatians 2:19-20

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:”

Galatians 3:13

The sinner saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is no longer bound by the yoke of the law but is now married to Christ. He is now “yoked” to Christ:

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:30

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Galatians 5:1

And finally Christ frees sinners from the bondage of their sinful will. With his sins dealt with on the cross the child of God’s will is no longer in bondage to sin. God creates in him a new heart and a new spirit.

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“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10

*“And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh:”
Ezekiel 11:19*

*“And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.”
Jeremiah 24:7*

*“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”
Philippians 2:13*

*“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power...”
Psalm 110:3*

If any man receives such a freedom he will never want to lose it – it will be precious to him. And God promises that all whom the Son frees will remain free.

*“For we hath not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”
Romans 8:15*

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.

*Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”
Romans 8:33-34*

5. How is this freedom received?

So reader, here is freedom indeed. A freedom far more precious and far more needful than anything else. A freedom that is everlasting. A freedom that comes from the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ – there is no other way to obtain this freedom but through Him.

This freedom is not earned, it is not merited, but it comes solely by Grace – the unmerited favour of God towards sinners – and is received by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Your own works will never save you nor merit God's favour because they are tainted by sin – you are bound. But God has shown grace to sinners through His Son – Jesus Christ!

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 8:32

“I am the way, the truth and the life” said Jesus.

John 14:6

Reader, if you know you are in your sins, still in bondage, then you need the Holy Spirit to lead you into the truth about Christ and the salvation that is in Him alone.

But if you know something of the truth about Christ, who He is and what He did; If you have been shown the way to Him, and if you know Christ Himself, personally, and believe on Him, and you know that He died for you, for your sins, every one of them, washing them away in His blood; If the Holy Spirit has given you eyes to see your state and what Christ did, and ears to hear the truth about Him, and if God by His wonderful mercy and grace has granted you that spiritual gift of faith to believe on Christ and put your trust in Him alone, then He will be faithful to His promise. He will deliver you from bondage, from sin and from death and give you eternal life - and set you free.

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“But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 6:22-23

Or will you yet continue in your own way, rejecting the Saviour, content with the freedom you think you have in this present world? If so take heed – there is no freedom outside of Christ, only an eternity of suffering. But the wise will hear the word of truth and seek that freedom that comes from above:

“If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”.

Free indeed! Praise God for His grace and mercy to sinners through Jesus Christ His Son.

Amen.

CHRIST, THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Chapter Seven

"...As it is written, the just shall live by faith" Romans 1:17

Chapter Seven

The Just Shall Live By Faith

"...As it is written, the just shall live by faith" Romans 1:17

THE Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans asks the question, *"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?"* The answer he gives is *"God forbid."* He asks this question because there were those who upon hearing the teaching of the Gospel, that sinners are saved by grace alone and not by their obedience to God's law, concluded that if so that must leave the child of God free to sin. But Paul denies this emphatically - *"God forbid."* Salvation by grace alone through faith does not lead to lives which remain in sin.

Some conclude from this answer that Paul is reiterating the importance of the believer striving to keep the law of God. They say that if the believer must not live a life of sin, which is seen in breaking the Ten Commandments, then he must have that "Moral Law" (The Ten Commandments delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai) as a "Rule of Life". That the law, although not a means by which he might be saved, and although no longer cursing him if he fails to keep it (because Christ has already been cursed by the law in the believer's place), nevertheless instructs him in how to live a righteous life and is therefore useful as advice or guidance on how to live before God - it is the believer's "rule of life", they say.

However this is to confuse what Paul is arguing for and to overturn what he has been saying from Romans chapters 3 to 5. Paul is teaching that God saves sinners by the Gospel by means of grace and that they then continue to live by God's grace on a

principle of faith. Their rule is not the law, but faith. Only by faith can the demands of the law be fulfilled.

But how can this be? If the believer does not set himself to reading the Ten Commandments and attempting to model his life upon them, how can he live a life which fulfils them? How can he avoid breaking these commandments?

Well, the simple answer to that is "through Christ". The Gospel is all about Christ, about who He is, what He has done, and about the believer's relationship to Him and his union with Him. The believer lives not by looking to the law but by "*looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith*" Hebrews 12:2. He lives by faith looking unto Christ, being led by the Spirit by union with Christ who is "*all in all*".

The believer is "*dead to the law*", his flesh is crucified, the rule of law over him has gone, not because the law is altered or "abrogated" but because the flesh has died to it and the believer is risen again in Christ the other side of death. He is a new creation, he has a new life within born of the Spirit. This is called the new man of grace. This new life in Christ is governed by a new law, or rule. This is the law of faith, or put another way, faith is his rule of life, for "*the just shall live by faith*". Life could not come by the law, it only condemned. Because of the sin which is in the flesh the law became a "*ministration of death*", a "*killing letter*" to men - it was certainly no rule of 'life'! No, the law condemned the believer to death, it carried out its final sentence on him in Christ, and having died in Christ he is now dead to the law. It has no more to say to those who are dead to it.

But the just shall **live** by faith. They are justified by faith; by faith they receive the gift of eternal life. This life is ruled by the principle of faith. Romans chapter five talks of the "*reign of grace*". Grace reigns through righteousness and that is the righteousness of faith as revealed in the Gospel. Thus the Gospel in revealing the righteousness of God *without law*, and in justifying sinners by grace

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through faith, reveals all the believer needs to receive life from God and to walk before Him in righteousness. The Gospel and not the law therefore is the believer's rule of life.

But how does the child of God know right from wrong if he isn't ruled by the law one may ask? How does he know what the right thing to do in any given situation is? The same way that Christ did. Not simply by turning to some lifeless commands written on stone (or paper) but by communion with God by faith. Christ lived by constantly seeking His father's will in prayer. The believer also lives by communing with God in prayer, by looking unto Christ by faith, by seeking the Spirit's leading. Yes, he reads the Bible and the whole of the Bible is useful for instruction in righteousness but it is by the Spirit's guidance in the Bible, by His opening it up to him, His applying words from it to him on a daily basis that he learns of God's will for him, not in a dry, fixed, unchangeable manner, but in a living way, suited to the changing providences of his life.

"But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." Romans 7:6

The new man of grace which is born in the believer is born of God, he is righteous like God is righteous. In the new man believers are *"made partakers of the divine nature"* 2 Peter 1:4, and this nature in itself knows instinctively what is righteous. Believers still have the flesh, the old man within them which is completely sinful, but the new man is righteous. The law was made for man in the flesh, not in the spirit. The law was given to condemn the sinner in the flesh, to show up his sin and to make him flee unto Christ for salvation. But when that man has been washed in the blood of the Lamb, the flesh has been crucified with Christ at the cross. In the eyes of God all that remains is the new man of grace because God looks at the believer in Christ who has taken away sin in the body of flesh which has been crucified. 1 Timothy 1:9 tells us *"Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners..."*. If so, then the believer is not under the

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law, it wasn't made for him, and it isn't his rule of life. No, he walks by a new 'law', the "*law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*" Romans 8:2, for he walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. As a just man he lives by faith.

"For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 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. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law then, Christ is dead in vain"
Galatians 2:21

But can't a believer walk by faith and still use the law as advice one might ask? Surely what it says is good? Yes, everything it says is holy, just and good. But it isn't just advice - *it's law!* - and it can't be used as a guide or a rule of life. Why not? Because although the believer has a new life born of the Spirit, and although the flesh is reckoned to be crucified with Christ, nevertheless until the believer actually dies physically he still has the flesh dwelling within. The law is addressed to that flesh, but although it demands righteousness from it, in practice all it does is flare up sin in the flesh. The more it demands from the flesh, the more the flesh sins. So although what the law demands is good and spiritual, reaching even unto the thoughts and intentions of the heart within, the effect upon man is to produce more sin, to stir up evil thoughts within. The law always retains its curse and if a man strives to live by the law then he only brings the curse upon himself again. He is a debtor to do the *whole* law, but he can't truly fulfil *any of it!* No, the only way to fulfil the righteousness of the law is to die to it, to be delivered from it, and to live by faith looking unto Christ *alone*.

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Romans 6:14

The law demands works from man who cannot perform them. He fails to fulfil the law because of his sinful flesh. Faith however rests in the finished work of Christ who has fulfilled the law's

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demands in every way. Christ has delivered the believer from the curse and the rule of the law to live in a new and living way - to live by faith. Faith submits to Christ, trusts in Him, obeys Him, walks by the Spirit who leads into all truth regarding Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the object of the believer's faith, not the law. He is married to Christ and is now dead to the law. *"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."* Romans 7:4. The more the child of God looks to Christ, his husband, the more the new man of grace within him grows in grace and the more the old sinful flesh is subdued and mortified. By walking by faith the child of God finds a principal of life which actually results in the righteousness of the law being fulfilled and sin no longer having the dominion which it once had in his life. This is a life lived entirely by faith, not in man's strength but in the Spirit, by grace alone. The work is all of God. Oh, what amazing grace there is in the Gospel of Christ! How it is the *"power of God unto salvation"*!

May all God's people ever turn from the works of the law, from the arm of the flesh, from all boasting in self and their own works, to rest by faith in the finished work of Christ, looking unto Him alone, who has delivered them from the power of sin, death, and Hell, to give them newness of life in Him, that they might have eternal life, the divine nature, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit, in the reign of grace!

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit." Romans 8:1-5

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*"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. **And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.**"*
Galatians 6:14-16

Chapter Eight

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23

Chapter Eight

All Have Sinned

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23

HERE is one of those verses in the Bible that you just can't run away from. It is addressed to us all.

It says *"For all have sinned"*.

"ALL have sinned". Everyone. That means you and me.

"But I'm not a sinner!" you say. "Not like others anyway."

"I'm not a criminal or anything like that" you say.

In fact compared to many people you probably consider yourself a pretty good, upright, honest member of the community.

But that's in your eyes, looking on the outside, comparing yourself with others.

But in God's eyes you're a sinner. *"All have sinned"*.

God looks on the hidden things of the heart. All those things you think and imagine and feel inside that you manage to hide from everyone else. But He sees it. Everything.

Do you know your own heart? That it is *"desperately wicked"* and *"deceitful above all things"*? - that *"out of it proceeds evil continually"*?

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And do you know that you have broken God's law, the Ten Commandments? Not just some of it - all of it.

All men have stolen, committed murder, lusted, coveted, taken the Lord's name in vain, told lies, worshipped idols.

"Not I!" you cry, "I've never stolen anything."

Maybe not *outwardly* but you have inwardly - probably every day of your life. We have all had angry thoughts towards our neighbour, we've all lusted after possessions and people and power. We've all lied even to ourselves.

But you were created to worship God, not live for yourself. You have never loved God with all your heart and with all your mind. None of us has worshipped God with all our energies and all our time, perfectly. We all seek the things which please us, the things of this world.

How often do you think of God? How often do you thank Him for all He has given you, for life and health, friends and family?

Do you consider God's majesty? His holiness? His almighty power demonstrated by the way He created the world and all things in it just by His word?

Have you considered the size of the Universe? That God is greater than that - that he is everywhere and knows everything that is happening at any moment in time? He knows everything about you, everything that has ever happened and ever will happen. He is completely righteous and just. He does all that He says He will. He knows the innermost thoughts and intentions of every man and woman on earth. Nothing is hidden from Him.

Have you ever considered these things? Ever worshipped God as you should do?

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No? Then you have sinned. And you are guilty before God, because you've failed to keep the law in its entirety.

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

Romans 3:19

You are a debtor before God. Your sins have mounted up a huge debt which you cannot repay!

Now do you see the hopeless state you find yourself in? Even if you attempt to keep the law all it does is condemn you - it shows just how sinful man is. How far short he falls.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Romans 3:20 reads, *"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."*

But sin is not just the breaking of God's law. It is like a disease which affects our very being. It entered into man when Adam fell by disobeying God in the Garden of Eden. And it affects everything that man does. He just *cannot* please God. The law shows us this sin within ourselves, and the utter impossibility of our meeting its demands, and satisfying God's righteous requirements.

We are all guilty. We are all under the curse and condemnation of the law, unless God should deliver us.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..." Romans 1:18

In fact although our consciences may show us that these things are true, that we are sinners and there is a judgement that awaits us, yet sin has such a grip on us that not only do we continue in it but we wilfully enjoy it. As Romans 1:32 tells us:-

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"Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

But God is not mocked. Continue in this way and the day of wrath will come sooner than you think.

And on that day all men will have to stand before God and give an account of themselves. And if they are found wanting then justice will be exercised and their sentence will be an eternity of separation from God. An eternity in Hell.

"The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Matthew 13:41-43

Do YOU have ears to hear?

--oOo--

"But", you say, "Isn't God supposed to be a God of love? Can't he just forgive people their sins? Overlook them perhaps?"

Yes, God is a God of love. He is a merciful God and slow to anger. But he is also a righteous and a just God who cannot look upon sin. Sin must be dealt with - justly. The broken law demands a penalty which must be met, a price must be paid.

Is there no hope for anyone then? How can anyone stand before a holy God?

How can anyone be saved? How can anyone escape the wrath to come?

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Only if they are righteous. *"Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."* It's all a question of righteousness. God's law describes a righteousness for man, which if he was able to keep he would live. But he is utterly incapable of keeping it because of his sinful nature. No matter how hard we try to live a life pleasing to God, no matter how religious we try to be we will always fail to come up to God's standards because everything we do is tainted by sin!

"Even our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

"For ALL have sinned", says the verse.

Then how can anyone be righteous?

How? When all have sinned?

Through another! We need righteousness in another. We need the price of the law to be paid, a ransom to be made. God's justice to be satisfied. Sin to be washed away. We need our sinful nature to be dealt with, we need a new heart.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me", cried David in Psalm 51, when he saw just how sinful he was before God.

Praise God He HAS made a way!

In Christ - the sinner's substitute - and in Him alone.

God sent His only begotten Son into the world to die in the place of sinners. To suffer the punishment that they deserve. To appease God's wrath and provide a way for sinners to be just before a Holy God.

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"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

John 3:16

Oh what love this shows towards wretched, guilty sinners! That God should give His own Son to suffer in their place!

God in the person of His Son, co-equal with the Father took upon Himself human flesh. Christ humbled himself to the point of becoming a man. Born of a virgin he took human nature into union with His divine nature. He was completely human just as we are. He knew our state, what it felt like to hunger, to thirst, to be weary, to suffer, to be tempted as we are. But with this exception - he knew no sin. Completely sinless, perfect in every way He was the only sacrifice acceptable unto God to pay the price of people's sin.

No amount of sacrificial lambs or goats offered up by human priests could ever atone for sin, because they were tainted by sin. But Christ, the perfect Lamb of God from the foundation of the world laid down His life on the cross once for all shedding His blood, the just for the unjust.

He was *"wounded for our transgressions"*. He was *"brought as a lamb to the slaughter"*.

When Jesus Christ the Son of God was crucified on the cross he laid down His life for His people. He died in the place of sinners to suffer for them. To actually take the punishment that was rightfully theirs - the Innocent died in the place of the guilty.

Christ came into this world not to save the righteous but sinners!

ALL HAVE SINNED

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

For scarcely for a righteous man some would even dare to die.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."

Romans 5:6-9

Christ died to pay the price of His people's sins, while they were yet sinners!

To take the punishment that was lawfully theirs. To suffer the curse of the law and deliver them from it. God poured out his wrath upon his only begotten Son. What agonies He suffered! The separation of the Son from His Father - the awful torments of God's just punishment of sin in His body. Oh, such love!

The Righteous died in the place of the unrighteous. Christ's blood was shed to wash sinners from their sins. To make them clean before God - to make them righteous!

Yes righteous before God! People who are such sinners, so incapable of worshipping God as they should, made righteous, not through their own efforts or merits, but by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and his blood shed for them. By being clothed with the robe of righteousness that God gives them through the shed blood of His beloved Son.

By this means God is just and the justifier of the ungodly. Sin has been dealt with - justly. Not overlooked, not ignored, but punished and removed by Christ.

Jesus was *"made sin, that we might be become the righteousness of God in him"*.

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The righteousness of God! Not only are the sinner's sins punished in Him, and they receive forgiveness of sins through His blood, but they are made the '*Righteousness of God*' in Him.

Romans 3:21-22 tells us:-

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

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."

God has brought in a righteousness for sinners, even the righteousness of God to all that believe on His Son. There is no other way to find forgiveness of sins or to escape the wrath to come and an eternity of separation from God in Hell but to turn from your sin and believe on God's Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

What love God has shown unto sinners! What grace he shows - what unmerited favour towards sinners that hate him and are at enmity to him.

Lost in your sin things may seem hopeless - how could God have mercy on you? The more you try to please Him the more into sin you fall.

But it isn't hopeless! God has brought in a full and free salvation through Jesus Christ the Lord. Through faith in His sacrifice on the cross for sinners such as you and I!

"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Romans 5:20-21

This is the Gospel of Christ. The Good News of Salvation through Him.

ALL HAVE SINNED

"And thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost."

Yes, it is a finished work. Christ did all that was necessary to save His people - there is nothing more to do, but look to Him and believe. What love!

What a Saviour!

And, *"he rose again the third day according to the scriptures"*.
1 Corinthians 15:4

Death had no power over Him - He rose again and is even now seated on the right hand of God the Father having made His enemies His footstool.

Praise God!

--oOo--

Now, do you remember the verse?

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"

All have sinned? All but one, Jesus Christ the Righteous.

Reader - are you a sinner? Are you still lost in your sins? If you don't know Christ then the Bible says that you are, and that you need to be right with a Holy God!

Repent of your sins and believe on Christ, who alone can make you just, and grant you eternal life. Plead for mercy! Seek Him while He may be found and turn to Him who alone can forgive you and set you free.

CHRIST, THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

"For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." 2 Corinthians 6:2

Amen.

Epilogue

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings...” Malachi 2:2

Epilogue

Christ, the Sun of Righteousness

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings...” Malachi 2:2

MALACHI, the last of the Old Testament prophets, at the conclusion of the Old Testament scriptures, four hundred years before the coming of Christ, wrote in prophetic certainty of that great Saviour who was to come, describing him in vivid imagery as the *“Sun of righteousness”*.

All that Malachi wrote regarding the coming of the Son of God into this world and the salvation which He would bring by His death upon the cross came to be. The prophecy was fulfilled, just as promised. It was sure and certain.

Yes, four hundred years after Malachi laid down his pen, the angel of the Lord announced the coming of the Son of God into this world, as Mary carried Him in her womb, with these words recorded by Matthew: *“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21.*

Jesus, the Saviour, had come, and for this purpose: **to save his people from their sins.**

“Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” Matthew 1:22-23.

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Isaiah's prophecy, like Malachi's, came about. Christ was born of a virgin; the Son of the Living God, who was God Himself, was born amongst men, God taking human nature into union with His divine nature and person in order that He might suffer and die in the place of sinners, and in so doing take their sins and the punishment against them upon Himself, that He might save his people from their sins.

Sin had brought all men into condemnation. All have sinned and all stand before a holy God as guilty and justly deserving everlasting judgement.

But how thankful mankind should be that God *delights in showing mercy*, and in His great mercy towards His people He sent His only Son into the world to suffer and die in their place, as it is written:

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8.

Yes, Christ, the perfect, the sinless Son of God died for His people. The just for the unjust. As Luke records...

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left." Luke 23:33.

"And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man."

Christ, whom Malachi calls "*the Sun of righteousness*" was nailed to a cross upon which He was crucified. God laid upon Him the sins

CHRIST, THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

of His people hence the light of the sun was darkened. But at the ninth hour all the sin of God's people had been borne away, all their sin was blotted out, Christ "*gave up the ghost*" and the light of the sun returned.

Joseph of Arimathaea begged Pilate for the body of Jesus, and having his wish granted "*he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid.*" Luke 23:53.

But did Christ, the "*Sun of righteousness*" remain in the grave? Did He who is the light of the world remain buried under its surface, held fast by the bonds of death and the grave?

No, thanks be unto God, He did not! Christ "*the Sun of righteousness*" arose "*with healing in his wings*"! On the third day He rose again from the dead, having conquered sin, death and hell and having brought in *everlasting righteousness* to the account of all His people. Yes, the "*Sun of righteousness*" arose – and the grave could not hold Him!

Neither will the grave hold any of those for whom Christ died, for when He died, they died, and when He rose, they rose with Him from the dead, in everlasting life. What victory Jesus Christ the Saviour wrought for His people!

*"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?
The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

So when the women came to the tomb on the first day of the week they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty!

"And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

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And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

And they remembered his words.” Luke 24:4-8

“And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus...

And it came to pass, that ... Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him...

...And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself...

...And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

...And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem...

Saying, The Lord is risen indeed...” Luke 24:13-34 (extracts)

Yes, the “*Sun of righteousness*” arose, with healing in His wings, just as Malachi had prophesied. The prophecy was *sure* and *certain*. The disciples’ heart burned within them as Christ revealed Himself to them by opening up the scriptures, and showing them how He was the fulfilment of what the prophets had written concerning Him.

Oh, what power there is in the resurrection of Christ! What power there is in His Gospel. What righteousness is revealed therein, even the *righteousness of God*, brought in to the account of all God’s people, and granted freely to them in Christ by sovereign grace alone. Oh, to be given faith to see such things! What mercy God has shown to dead, fallen sinners whom He quickens to life by His Spirit. Even to such far off, idolatrous, gentiles as were found at Ephesus, as we read...

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“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:1-9

Now my reader, I ask you, have *you* seen the Christ, the Sun of righteousness? Has He arisen in your soul? Do you know anything of His light, of His perfection, of His eternal life, of His almighty power? Do you know something of the power of His resurrection? Have you ever felt that healing in His wings?

Indeed, do you feel the *need* of such healing? Have you ever felt the burden of your sins? Do you know and feel that God would be just to condemn you for your sins? ...Do you fear His holy name?

Reader, do *you* know that Christ, the Sun of righteousness, has arisen, with healing in His wings?

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Appendices

Appendix A

The Gifts of the Spirit

*“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.
And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.
And there are diversities of operations,
but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-6*

Introduction

IN the New Testament, especially in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, we read of various gifts of the Spirit which were given to believers and practised in the churches. Some of these gifts were miraculous and some not so miraculous. We also read of various miracles being performed by the Apostles during the time of the early New Testament church.

Many today are fascinated by the miraculous and supernatural and many in Christendom are taken up with these accounts of miracles, signs, wonders and the gifts of the Spirit and desire to see such things repeated in the churches in our day. Indeed many would claim that it is only when such things are manifested in the church that the Spirit of God is truly working. They claim that such manifestations of the Spirit authenticate their ministry and churches and demonstrate the power of God at work.

But are these claims true? Is it true that such signs and wonders continue today? Do the miraculous gifts of the Spirit continue to be given and exercised in the church today? Do such things continue to the present day or did they cease with the passing away of the twelve apostles once the early New Testament church had been

formed? Perhaps some gifts have ceased but others continue, and if so, which gifts continue to the present and in what form?

The New Testament describes several different gifts of the Spirit such as prophecy, tongues, healing gifts and so on (see 1 Corinthians 12). Here are a few thoughts on this subject of the gifts of the Spirit and their continuation today, primarily with regard to the gift of prophecy. By considering this particular gift I believe we can also draw some conclusions regarding the continuance of the other gifts today.

The inauguration of Israel and the inauguration of the New Testament church

‘Signs and wonders’ were used by God when Israel was brought out of Egypt, to mark their deliverance and the subsequent giving of the law, for the time until they crossed over the river Jordan. During this period of 40 years they were led by a pillar of cloud, and fire, there was water from the Rock, they were fed by manna from heaven. All were signs which ceased once the children of Israel crossed Jordan and for the hundreds of years following until the time of Christ (this can be seen from the fact that these signs were recorded in the books of Moses and only ever referenced elsewhere in the Bible as historical references to those times. Joshua 5:6-12 informs us of the cessation of the provision of manna. See also Nehemiah 9:9-21, Psalm 99:6-7, Psalm 105:23-45, Isaiah 48:21, Psalm 78:1-32, and John 6).

Likewise with the inauguration of the New Testament there were many signs and wonders demonstrated, and miraculous and special gifts of the Spirit given to mark a special time in the history of the church until the full canon of scripture was produced and their necessity ceased. This is much the same as happened in the time of Moses.

Also the children of Israel had these signs for 40 years. Such as manna from heaven by which they were fed. Likewise in the NT Christ rose from the dead and ascended around AD30. In AD70 the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed. A period of 40 years, during which the NT church was formed and the Gospel had gone out to the gentiles. During this time the people of God were fed on the 'Bread of heaven' by the preaching of the Apostles and by those who then prophesied by the Spirit declaring the truths of the Gospel of Christ as laid upon their memories by the Spirit until all the scripture had been set to paper, and gathered together, not long after.

Prophecy preferred over tongues

In 1 Corinthians Paul discusses the gifts of the Spirit and their use in the gatherings of the church. In 1 Corinthians 14 he shows how the gift of prophecy is to be preferred to the gift of tongues. Why? Because tongues were beneficial to those who spoke in them as led by the Spirit, and only to others if an interpreter existed. How often today are there truly interpreters of those who speak in tongues? I daresay some would say there are, but if there aren't, as Paul says, those who speak in tongues would be better off being silent.

But Paul emphasises the preference of prophecy over tongues. Why? Because prophecy is intelligible and is beneficial to the whole church who hears it. It presents 'truth', it edifies, the secrets of the heart are made manifest in those who hear (1 Corinthians 14:25). Much like preaching does today.

But Paul states that all things should be done in order and that those who prophesy should do so by two or three (1 Corinthians 14:29), and that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (1 Corinthians 14:32).

Why is this?

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Well, at the time of the church at Corinth - the early church - the written New Testament didn't fully exist. Certainly those believers in the churches had very little of it. Each church might have had a letter or two from the Apostles but not the full canon of scripture and certainly not in the possession of each believer. So people couldn't 'preach' from the Bible. They had to do so from their memories of the truths of the Gospel which had been taught them by the Apostles, as they were led of the Spirit. This is described as 'prophesying'. And to ensure that what people in the church stood up and said was truly that Gospel, of the Spirit, and not error, Paul encourages those who prophesy to do so in twos and threes so that each man could testify to the truth of what the other had said. Also what they said needed to be subject to the prophets, meaning to be subject to what others in the church prophesied/preached and also to what the Old Testament prophets had written, and what was written in what that church had of the New Testament writings.

So this 'prophesying' by the Spirit was really preaching of the Gospel in a day and age when men couldn't preach that Gospel from the scriptures because of the lack of them (Some may think of the gift of prophecy as having more to do with foretelling of future events. Certainly there is that type of prophecy seen in the Bible, but the gift of prophecy mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 is connected with teaching the truth. This can be seen from the fact that the gift of a prophet given to the church is listed in Ephesians 4:11-15 alongside other teaching roles such as pastors and teachers. All these roles were given for the edifying of the body of Christ, just as prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14 was given for edification - 1 Corinthians 14:3). So, owing to the lack of written scriptures those who prophesied were led by the Spirit to bring truths from their remembrance which they had received from the Apostles, but they needed others to corroborate what they said as being true to the Apostolic Gospel, true to what they had been taught by the Apostles, true to the scriptures which they *did have*. And when the New Testament was completed it would be seen to be true to that as a whole.

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Since the establishment of the early church we now have the completed scriptures. These are widely available in the churches. Prophecy in the sense of 1 Corinthians 14 now continues as preaching without the need for two or three to preach in the same way in order to corroborate what is said. We can now compare what the preacher says with the Bible to see if he truly speaks of the Spirit, or is in error. Anything preached of the Spirit will accord with what is in the Bible and will not be a 'new revelation' outside of it.

Now that scripture is complete the necessity of special gifts of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues and prophesying by the Spirit (without written down scripture), has gone. Prophesying continues in the form of preaching by the Spirit from the word of God. The Spirit *always* prophesied in accordance with that word, at one time before it had been recorded, but now having been recorded still in accord with it. As it says in John 14:26 and John 15:26:

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:"

It is clear from these verses that those things the Spirit 'brings to our remembrance' are those things which testify of Christ which in our day are in accord with the scriptures - they aren't extra revelations outside the scriptures.

In the early church the Holy Ghost brought all things to the remembrance of the people of God by means of causing men of God to prophesy in the meetings, two or three of them confirming that what was said was true. Now, the Bible being complete, preachers 'prophesy' by preaching from that written word of God according

to how the Spirit leads them, but always according to that word, testifying of Christ.

So, during the time of the early church when the NT scriptures weren't complete the Spirit would cause men to prophesy truths of the Gospel regarding Christ which had yet to be set down on paper, but which were *being taught by the Apostles*. However, once those truths were all recorded in scripture then the need for such 'prophecy' had gone, and all further prophecy/preaching would be in accord with the completed Bible. The Spirit is still involved in this but He confirms the truths in the Bible, He doesn't add to them by further extra-Biblical 'prophecies'.

In the days of Israel's deliverance from Egypt actual manna from heaven was miraculously provided to feed the people. This ceased after they crossed Jordan, and the people were then fed on normal bread and food, physically. In the days of the early church there were miraculous signs and gifts given until the scriptures were complete. We feed on the "bread of heaven", Christ, as typified by manna (see John 6). In the early church that spiritual food, that bread, came by the preaching of the Apostles and also by prophesying by the Spirit. We are now fed by preaching from the written word of God, now that it is complete.

For the children of Israel the type, the shadow, of manna during their 40 years of pilgrimage was also their physical food. After that time they then ate normal food. They didn't stop eating, but *how* their food was provided was changed, the *administration* of food changed. Likewise the way in which 'spiritual food' is provided in the New Testament age started off as being by Apostolic preaching and also by prophesying by the Spirit until the scriptures were complete, but now continues as preaching from the word of God. It is still feeding on the Bread of Heaven, but the way in which that is *administered* is now by preaching from the word, not by prophesying 'apart' from the word (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Hence, whilst the Spirit's gift of prophesying continues to this day the form of that prophesying has changed – it is now the preaching of the

word of God from the scriptures. Yet it must be emphasised that *it is by the Spirit* that the scriptures are preached from – we are no less reliant upon the Spirit and His revelation of God’s truth than those in the early church were. Indeed, without the Spirit’s leading into truth the Bible remains a closed book to men, they simply cannot understand it except the Spirit opens it up to them (see 1 Corinthians 2:7-16).

The inner work of the Spirit contrasted with that which is outward

Manna, the pillar of fire, the pillar of cloud, and water from the rock were all 'miraculous' signs and provisions which God used during Israel's 40 year pilgrimage after being delivered from Egypt. In terms of what they represent they show forth the Lord's presence amongst the people, His guidance of them and His feeding and watering them. But God only used the outwardly miraculous for a relatively short time (Of course these signs also have other spiritual significance too – manna typifying Christ, the Bread of heaven, the water from the Rock also pointing to Christ, in fact they all point to Christ in one way or another - but nevertheless they also had an immediate relevance to Israel through what they provided – guidance, feeding, watering).

Again, with the inauguration of the early NT Church similar miraculous signs and gifts of the Spirit were evidenced. Various 'signs and wonders' like miraculous healings by the Apostles were performed which showed the Lord's presence in a powerful outward way to demonstrably show God's work in the bringing in and establishing of the NT church. Likewise gifts of the Spirit such as prophecy and tongues were used to guide, edify and feed the people. There is a similarity here between these 'gifts' and the signs mentioned from the Old Testament.

Once the New Testament Church was established and the scriptures completed, the need for such 'outward' manifestations of

the Spirit's work had gone and God continued from that time forth to work by the Spirit in a more inward way through the preaching of the Gospel, leading to the resultant New Birth by the Spirit, the 'baptism' of the Spirit. This is no less miraculous a work but it is inward, not an outward thing. Such preaching results in men who are dead in trespasses and sins being quickened unto life by the Spirit, given new hearts and receiving the gift of faith to believe and rest in the finished work of salvation for sinners wrought out by Jesus Christ at the cross by His death. This is a powerful work of the Spirit but one which is essentially inward - within man - not outward.

Yet outward things appeal to men in the flesh. People like to *see* 'miracles'. Seeing 'miracles' with the eye doesn't require faith. They demonstrate the supernatural and provide proof of it, but don't require faith to believe in the supernatural. But Christians walk by faith not by sight. Faith believes in things that can't be seen with the natural eye, things which are 'hidden' (Hebrews 11:1). God uses outwardly miraculous signs at such times in history which indicate a great event in the work of God, such as the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and the start of the NT church both during the life of Christ and shortly after under the Apostolic ministry. This was to demonstrate to all who looked on, including unbelievers that God was at work in a particularly significant way (ie. Christ had come in the flesh!). But once this had been shown, and testimony to it recorded in the scriptures, then God continued to work by His Spirit in the more 'hidden' realm of men's hearts.

Prophetic guidance contrasted with the Spirit's teaching gift of prophecy

I have emphasised the nature of the gift of prophecy described in 1 Corinthians 14 as being that of teaching. Some may question whether all prophecy is of that nature and would claim that we read of various examples of prophecy in the New Testament, such as in the book of Acts, which are of a predictive nature – a foretelling of

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events. For example in Acts 21:10-11 we read of the prophet Agabus approaching Paul and warning him not to go to Jerusalem because the Jews there would persecute him.

It is true that such 'prophecies' occurred in the New Testament. However these sorts of prophecies are not what are described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 as being related to the Spirit's gift of prophecy. The context is very different and they also don't fall into the pattern laid down by Paul in that chapter.

By stating that 1 Corinthians 14 describes a form of prophecy which is primarily of a preaching and teaching nature I am not saying that this was the only form of prophecy there was in the NT. It is true that there are several instances of prophecy throughout the NT which are evidently of a predictive nature. During the Early Church days there were indeed prophets who prophesied by the Spirit in a predictive way and there were also those who prophesied in the gathering of the assembly by the Spirit to teach the Gospel of Christ to the church. These are two different forms of prophecy, both by the Spirit, which occurred during that time.

Most of the examples we may find of 'foretelling prophecies' in Acts however are simply occurrences of the Lord guiding people in specific ways, either through dreams, or by the Spirit. The Spirit's leading of Philip to approach the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch for example isn't prophecy, but a *leading* of the Spirit. Likewise the angel appearing to Cornelius, or the Lord speaking to Paul in visions. Other examples are those of specific prophets with a message from the Lord, for instance Agabus. However none of these examples are taken from gatherings of the church during a meeting where two or three prophets stand up in turn and prophesy and where the people 'learn' by these prophecies and are edified, exhorted and comforted. It could be argued that Agabus might have delivered his prophecy regarding the famine in such a context but that really isn't clear from the text. So none of these examples really fit with what Paul is encouraging in the gathering of the assembly in 1 Corinthians 14.

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What Paul is dealing with in 1 Corinthians especially in chapters 10-15 is the Body of Christ and how that is built up. It is no coincidence that the subject of the gifts of the Spirit such as tongues and prophecy is dealt with in the very same epistle written to a church which had fallen into such outward, fleshly, corruption where fornication and other sins went on unchecked, where the Lord's Supper was abused etc. etc. This was a church obsessed with outward fleshly things. And therefore also obsessed with those 'spiritual' things which had outward, supernatural, manifestations. The Corinthians thought it the height of spirituality to speak in tongues or to give prophetic revelations.

But Paul deals with this obsession with the outward not by outrightly forbidding the use of tongues or prophecy, but by gently guiding the church towards that which is best; that which will really build up the church. And that, ultimately is the Gospel of Christ. So we see a progression from chapter 12 where the Body and its members are described, through an emphasis on love in chapter 13 (the gift which if prevalent would ultimately overcome all the failings in the church), through prophecy being much preferred to tongues in chapter 14 (Why? Because by it the church is edified, encouraged and comforted because it is built up in the Gospel of Christ - it 'learns' by it), through to chapter 15 where Paul again discusses the Gospel and how the church should "*keep in memory what I preached unto you*" 15:2. This leads on to the truths of the coming resurrection of the dead.

The point here is that Chapter 15 emphasises what Paul *delivered* to the church. *The Gospel of Christ*. That which declares Christ to be "*the power of God, and the wisdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:24). This is what should be in their 'memory'. As 14:36 indicates, the word of God came to Corinth by Paul's preaching, from God, it didn't come out of them. What they should 'prophesy' in their meetings should be those truths, kept in their memory, which Paul taught them, which the Spirit then brings to mind in the prophets who would then speak as led by the Spirit in the meeting, by two or three. Paul "*received*" these truths from God and delivered them to the church

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at Corinth (15:3). Likewise their prophets should speak those things “revealed” to them (14:30) by the Spirit. The same truths that Paul had “received” of the Spirit and preached.

What truths are these? 1 Corinthians 15:3-11 tells us...

*“...how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according
to the scriptures:*

And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

*After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom
the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.*

After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

*For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an
apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

*But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was
bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than
they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.”

Thus we are led full circle back to what Paul emphasises right at the start of the epistle in chapters 1-4: *“But we preach Christ crucified”* 1:23. *“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”* 2:2. The focal point of the *whole* letter is *“Christ Crucified”*. The Gospel.

This is what the prophecy of chapter 14 regards – the Gospel of Christ. That is why Paul encourages its use. And in that sense it is still encouraged today because we preach and teach the same Gospel *from the scriptures*, by the Spirit.

However, as mentioned before, the more supernatural nature of prophecy along with other signs and wonders was required at the time of the Early Church for two main reasons:-

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1. To demonstrate in power the formation of the Church, that Christ had come, died, and risen again, and that the Spirit was now given to God's people in the church. Under the Apostolic doctrine the Church of Christ was established, as testified outwardly by such signs.

2. Prophecy by the Spirit was required in the absence of completed scriptures in order to build up the church in the doctrine of Christ. Once the scriptures were complete 'prophecy' continued as more normal preaching and teaching, from the scriptures as opened up by the Spirit. Such prophecy, such preaching is still very much a gift of the Spirit who ensures that the Gospel comes "*not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance*" (1 Thessalonians 1:5), but this *prophecy* is entirely based upon the scriptures, not outside revelations.

Once the Early Church was established, and the scriptures completed, the necessity of the more direct, supernatural gifts of the Spirit, signs and wonders, had ceased, as they had in the days of Moses. The Spirit continues to work but now in the more hidden, inward realm of men's hearts.

We still have preaching in the church of the Gospel of Christ, but not 'prophecy by the Spirit'. We also continue to be guided by God, by the Spirit, through various means, but not in the same way as the direct, supernatural prophecies seen in the NT (At least this is not the 'norm'. It may have been seen in the Early Church, but it is no longer required to the same extent now as God guides His people primarily through the word of God and the preaching of that word by His Spirit).

Other gifts of the Spirit

Of course there are various kinds of gifts of the Spirit, various 'charismata' and prophecy is just one of them. For example we read in 1 Corinthians 12:4-12 ...

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ."

All these gifts of the Spirit ultimately have one purpose – the edification of the body of Christ. There is one body with many members and there are diversities of gifts given to those members, but all the gifts are given that the body might be edified, strengthened, built up in the knowledge and wisdom of God. It is in this light that we must consider these gifts and the way in which they are manifested and used in our day. Are the 'gifts' we see exhibited in some churches today truly being used for the edification of the body through the truth, by the proclamation of the word, by feeding the body upon Christ, or do they rather draw attention to man rather than Christ and excite the flesh rather than direct the gaze of faith towards the Saviour?

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I believe that any continuation of 'prophecy' today will be in accord with the written word of God, which is now complete, as there is no new revelation given today beyond the scriptures. That doesn't mean that we can rule out the continuation of all gifts of the Spirit – not at all - but it is clear that the more outward manifestations of gifts have served their purpose during the time of the Early NT Church. So the same principles set forward here regarding prophecy can also be related to other gifts of the Spirit such as healing for example. Yes, there is a gift of healing which continues to this day, but in keeping with the inward nature of the working of the Spirit upon the heart through the Gospel, which so characterises the ongoing work of the Spirit in our day, I believe that the gift of healing we see today is that which is edifying to the body of Christ. This is a gift of healing which comes through the preaching of "Christ Crucified" and which provides true healing for the souls of God's people, which brings them to peace with God, which washes them clean from their sin, and which brings them into unity with their brethren. How often do we see disunity and wounds appearing between brethren? How wonderful then that God still provides the gift of healing to His people to heal those wounds and to strengthen the Body of Christ in the midst of its ongoing spiritual warfare with the many enemies which are set against it.

Is there the word of wisdom granted by the Spirit today? Yes, certainly. The word of knowledge? Yes. Faith? Most assuredly. Gifts of healing? Yes, but of an inward, spiritual nature to the edification and healing of the body of Christ. The working of miracles? Again, yes, in the inward sense, for it is true that the conversion of a sinner to new life in Christ Jesus under the power of the Gospel is indeed a miracle, and those sent to preach that Gospel can but stand by in awe and wonder at the mighty power of God in turning men from darkness to light. The discernment of spirits? Yes, indeed, this gift continues today for we must "test the spirits" and as we now have a completed canon of scripture we can also compare what men say with what is recorded in Holy Writ. What of tongues and the interpretation thereof? Well, as has been previously stated Paul

encouraged prophecy over and above the use of tongues and both gifts ultimately are a means of conveying the truth of the Gospel for the edification of the Body of Christ. This continues today through the preaching of the word as recorded in scripture.

But what of the outwardly miraculous? Well as has been already mentioned such things occurred at the inauguration of the New Testament church. The church having been established under the Apostolic ministry and testified by such outward demonstrations of God's power has no longer any need for such outward manifestations of the Spirit's work. The Spirit's work is to testify of Christ, inwardly to the hearts of men, and this He continues to do today under the preaching of the Gospel. A ministry *no less miraculous* than that seen in the apostles' days but one which concerns the revelation of truth to the eye of faith rather than the sight of men in the flesh.

Conclusions

In summary then if it could be shown that the manna given to Israel continued to be given from that time until the coming of Christ, or that Israel continued to be led by a pillar of cloud by day or of fire by night, then a precedent for the continuance in an outward, miraculous, sense of such gifts as prophesying (for example in the manner of Spirit-inspired revelations apart from the Bible) would be found. But I don't believe that that precedence can be shown, and therefore we can conclude that such outward gifts, signs and wonders ceased after the Early Church had been brought in under the Apostles, as prefigured by Israel of old. This seems only right too, considering that the bringing in of the New Testament church under the Apostles was of such great importance. Furthermore a survey of the history of the church from Apostolic times up to the present demonstrates that this indeed has been the case.

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May the Lord be pleased to give us that gift of the *discerning of spirits* in these days of much confusion that we might know what is truly of the Spirit of God and what is not. May we also recognise that there are diversities of gifts and differences of administration (for example between today and apostolic times) but nevertheless "*the same Lord*" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). May we be given faith to follow the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed by the Spirit in the Gospel of Christ, as recorded in the scriptures, and to seek that real, true, inward reality of the working of the Spirit in contrast to that false, outward, counterfeit religion which seems to be so popular in our day and which appeals to the flesh which is fascinated by the unusual, the supernatural, the superficial and the spectacular. May we be found amongst those who walk by faith, not by sight, seeking an heavenly country, not an earthly, who walk as pilgrims and strangers in this present evil world. May we run the race before us looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of Faith. May we be amongst those who have found that the power of God rests not in the outwardly miraculous but in the "Gospel of Christ" (Romans 1:16). And may all glory be given to the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the Spirit was sent to testify and to honour, through the proclamation of that very Gospel, which was, and is, the power of God unto salvation.

Amen.

Appendix B

Faith, Grace and the Love of God

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith” Galatians 5:22

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” Titus 2:11

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

IN the Bible we read of the love of God, the grace of God and also of faith in God. These three things are all involved in the work of God in the salvation of sinners.

God’s word tells us that God’s elect people are saved entirely by God because He loved them with an everlasting *love* which He set upon them, as seen in Christ, from all eternity. God loved His people whilst they were yet sinners. This love is particular to the elect and is not shown to the reprobate.

The elect are saved entirely because of God’s saving *grace* towards them. Grace is Unmerited Favour and Mercy and it is because of God’s grace towards His elect that Christ died for them and saved them, blotting out all their sins. Again this grace, shown through Christ’s saving work for sinners, and the application of that work to them in time by the Holy Spirit (*“the grace of God that bringeth salvation” – Titus 2:11*) is particular to the elect and is not shown to the reprobate.

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Also, the work of the Spirit in the elect is to quicken them into life, eternal life, granting them faith (saving faith) that they might believe the Gospel and rest in Christ's finished work for their salvation. The elect are dead in trespasses and sins by nature and have no true faith by nature. They may have some sort of 'natural' faith whereby they trust in certain things and hope in certain things and believe certain things, but by nature they *do not* and *cannot* trust in Christ's blood alone for salvation. By nature they don't truly believe the Gospel, nor their own particular interest in it (ie. that Christ's blood was shed for them particularly), neither do they trust in God alone for salvation, or even believe the truth, for such things are spiritually discerned and cannot be seen or believed by the carnal mind – such things are only revealed to the eye of faith. Yet *faith*, saving *faith*, is a fruit of the Spirit brought forth in all those elect children of God who are born again by God the Holy Spirit. Hence faith is given by God *particularly* to the elect and not to reprobates.

So we see that these three things, love, grace and faith are particular to the elect and not shown to, or given to, the reprobate.

However some 'theologians' and preachers today, whilst acknowledging by word the particular nature of these things with regard to those elect sinners who are saved by God, nevertheless see a general aspect to God's love, God's grace and also faith which they feel applies to all, both elect and reprobate. They feel that scripture speaks of a general love of God to all men, of God's 'common' grace to all men, and of a duty of all men to exercise faith.

But are these 'theologians' rightly dividing the word of God in making such claims? Does God's word really use these terms, love, grace and faith, to describe the concepts which these theologians attach them to?

Passages are brought forward to show that God grants certain blessings to all men, such as rain and sunshine, food and water. But does scripture use the words 'love' and 'grace' with respect to these

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‘blessings’ to all? Is it right to use the same words (love, grace) for these things as are used to describe those particular blessings granted to God’s elect people only? Or does this just breed confusion?

Certainly scripture *does* tell us that God grants rain and sunshine to all. See Matthew 5:43-48. There is no dispute about that. Certainly God IS good. He has shown goodness to all His creation, whether elect or reprobate. Any anger or wrath shown to man is a response of God’s perfect justice and anger at man’s rebellion and sin against Him. Yet man cannot point the finger at God and claim that God has been anything but good and fair towards him. No, the judgement which God will exact upon the reprobate is entirely merited by their own sin and wickedness. The law of God condemns them. Their own consciences condemn them yet they continue to sin and God judges them accordingly. But nevertheless God is longsuffering to the ‘*vessels of wrath fitted to destruction*’ (Romans 9:22) and shows them much good during their lifetimes on earth, giving them health, food, water, sun, rain and so forth.

All of this is true, but none of these temporal blessings granted to the reprobate compares at all with that eternal salvation, eternal life, eternal rest which is freely granted to God’s elect people whom He has loved with an everlasting love since before the world was created. Such eternal love brings everlasting blessing and everlasting forgiveness for their sins, which God blotted out by the blood of His own Son who died in that people’s place at the cross. This love is unique and particular to God’s people. Their salvation is an act of pure mercy, unmerited favour. In a word - *grace*.

But does the Bible ever refer to that temporal goodness shown unto *all* men (reprobate included) as *grace* or God’s *love* towards them?

I think not. Certainly the word *grace* is used in passages regarding the elect and their salvation, but is not used in passages such as Matthew 5:45 regarding all men and common blessings to all.

But are such blessings an evidence of some love of God towards the reprobate? Again, I'd say no, for it certainly isn't the same meaning of 'love' as is used elsewhere with regard to the elect. When God speaks of loving His people with an everlasting love, that love is shown by saving that people with an eternal salvation. Whatever temporal blessings are granted to the reprobate during their short sojourn upon this earth, they cannot be compared to these eternal blessings shown to God's people whom He *loves*. God's love is *set* upon His people always, but not upon the reprobate. The reprobate may receive good things for a short time in this world but their eventual destiny is an eternity of suffering under God's wrath because of their wickedness and rebellion towards Him. There is no 'love' shown to the reprobate in their eternal suffering, so whatever goodness is shown to them during their short time on earth should not be taken to mean that God 'loves' them.

It is true that God shows acts of love, of goodness, of loving-kindness towards the reprobate. But performing a loving act towards someone is *not* the same as saying that you love them. It is to *show* them love, but not to set one's love upon them. There is a distinction. It is better to speak of God's longsuffering or loving-kindness towards all his creation (reprobate included) and of His electing, saving love and grace towards His own people.

Believers are, however, called upon to 'love' their enemies. This fact causes some to conclude that God must also 'love' His enemies (all of them). Well God does love the elect who are His enemies before they are brought to saving faith. But does God love 'all' His enemies? Can that be concluded from the teaching of Jesus to His disciples to love their enemies? This exhortation is immediately expounded by teaching that we should do good to them that hate us. Romans 12:17-21 also speaks of returning good for evil. The result of which is what? The salvation of our enemies? No, not always, Romans 12 tells us that in so doing we heap coals of fire upon their heads, because despite our goodness towards them they are still evil towards us and God and are judged for that evil.

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Hence the meaning of ‘love your enemies’ in scripture is really related towards *showing* them loving acts; doing them good turns; returning love for evil; turning the other cheek. It does not mean that we ‘love’ them as we would love our brethren. The love the believer has for Christ and His people is far different from any love he ‘shows’ to his enemies. Likewise God ‘shows’ love to all men in that He shows His goodness and loving-kindness to all, and yet all rebel against Him. In the case of the reprobate this rebellion leads to their everlasting destruction because they are never washed in the blood of the Lamb of God in order to be saved. But this display of loving-kindness to the reprobate is *not* the same as the love of God shown to and set upon the elect, and really the use of the word ‘love’ should be watched carefully for the two things are distinct. Scripture clearly speaks of God loving His elect, and in John’s Gospel we clearly read that Christ loved His sheep but not the goats - not the world. He prayed not for the world (John 17:9). So whatever goodness and kindness He showed to others was not the ‘love’ shown to His own.

I freely grant that there may be some discussion about the usage of the word ‘love’ in relation to God’s general goodness to all. However I believe that if scripture is read carefully that one will see that the wording used for God’s love to His elect is generally different and is more clear than that wording used with respect to all men. Generally scripture speaks of ‘longsuffering’ and ‘loving-kindness’ with respect to all. Also scripture should be compared with scripture. Passages such as the Psalms which speak of God’s hatred of the wicked, or Romans 9:13 where we read that God loved Jacob but hated Esau, or exhortations elsewhere in scripture to not love the world, must be weighed against any impression of a general ‘love’ to all which may be given by the fact that God is long-suffering and good to all men. We must note the distinction. One may show love to those one does not ‘love’. One can be good to one’s enemies whom one hates.

As far as the word *grace* goes I think scripture is even clearer. Grace or ‘common grace’ is never used with respect to those general

'blessings' granted to all men. *grace* is used with particular reference to God's undeserved favour shown to His people in *saving* them eternally. Matthew 5 does not use the word *grace* with regard to the rain and the sunshine given to all. So we should refrain from using the term in that context as it merely confuses it with *saving* grace shown to the elect.

Likewise scripture invariably uses the word *faith* with regard to the faith of God's elect and that faith which is wrought in them by the Spirit through which they believe on Christ and rest in His finished work of salvation. Whilst there *is* a general call to all men to repent and believe the gospel, that belief is not a particular belief in Christ's blood being shed for the individual but a belief in the facts, the truth of the Gospel. All men *should* believe the gospel for it is *true*, it is God's word, and God is true. It is men's duty to believe that, just as it is their duty to repent of their sin and turn from it, but only the elect are granted saving *faith* to believe that Christ died for *them* particularly. Scripture speaks of faith invariably with reference to this saving faith, a fruit of the Spirit in those born of God. Hence it is wise not to use the word 'faith' with respect to that general belief in the truth of the Gospel which is expected of all who hear it. All men have a duty to believe God's word as being true. Even the devils believe and tremble. Yet not all men have a duty to believe *savingly* and to exercise saving faith. The devils can't believe that way as Christ never died in their place and neither can the reprobate for saving faith is a gift of God, a fruit of the Spirit, granted freely to the elect and to them only.

So, I believe we should be careful to be guided by the language of scripture and speak of faith as being that saving faith, that fruit of the Spirit in the believer, and of there also being a general call to all men to believe, demanding a natural 'belief' or consent to the truth. But it is best to use 'faith' in relation to that faith which is given to the elect which gives them spiritual sight and understanding and enables them to believe on Christ, to trust in Him alone for salvation, to rest in His finished work. Hence I disagree with the usage of the term 'duty faith' as real faith is a gift of God, not a duty

(...of course there is also the faith which Christ had and the truth of the Gospel is summarised objectively as *The Faith*).

Also, grace is a word used in scripture with regard to God's salvation of sinners. We read of "the grace of God which bringeth salvation". That grace has nothing to do with the common goodness shown to all men as spoken of in Matthew 5. For that we should use other terms such as God's loving-kindness or goodness to all. But grace, true grace, is shown to God's elect only.

The same goes for 'love'. Scripture clearly speaks of God's love being set upon His people whilst they were yet sinners (Romans 5:8); and that saved people are called to love the brethren and not the world. Christ says He loves His sheep and prays not for the world. God says He loves His people and hates the wicked – He loves Jacob and hates Esau. So whatever goodness or loving-kindness is shown to others should not be confused with the love of God to His elect, and it is best to avoid the use of the word 'love'. 'Loving' your enemies means you show love towards them, knowing that if they are reprobate then you heap coals upon their head by so doing, but if they are the elect then God will eventually reveal His salvation to them. But such 'loving' is not to say that you 'set your love upon them'. You don't love them as you love the brethren. Such true love is only set upon Christ and His sheep. One can hate the wicked whilst showing love to them by good deeds towards them, just as one can love a son whilst chastising him for his waywardness. If one chastises his son he does not cease to love him as his son. Likewise if you 'love' your enemy by doing them good that does not mean that you have set your love upon the wicked. The righteous man will rightly hate the wicked, but may nevertheless show them love by good deeds.

Another point about God's love is this. God hates the sins of His elect people, so much so that He judged those sins in the person of His own Son by pouring out all His righteous anger, fury and wrath upon Him at the cross. Yet God always loved His elect people. He loves them, but hates their sin. Likewise God hates the reprobate

and will condemn them for eternity because of their sin and rebellion. Yet God has shown goodness towards them during their lifetimes which they don't deserve, and which only heightens their condemnation as ungrateful creatures of the Creator. Nevertheless such acts of goodness towards all His creation does not mean that God's love is set upon all, including the wicked – for we read that "*Esau have I hated*".

So, in conclusion, I ask why then do some 'theologians' choose to use the words love, grace and faith with respect to all men? Why not be more distinct in their language? Why not draw a clear distinction between God's dealings with His own children and His dealings with the wicked?

Why not? I believe because such 'theologians' wish by ambiguity to blur the line between God's love of His own people and His hatred of the wicked in order to make their 'gospel' more 'palatable' to men. They wish to set forth a view of an all-loving God and dampen down the clear teaching of His hatred of the reprobate. They wish to be able to preach the 'gospel' in a manner which allows them to blur the distinctions between God's particular love and grace shown to His elect, and the faith granted to them by the Spirit, and those general blessings shown to all men. By speaking of those general things (rain, sunshine etc) and using the terms 'grace', 'love' and a general duty to exercise 'faith', the clarity of the Gospel is lost, the separation in the Gospel of sheep and goats, precious and vile, good and evil, light and darkness, elect and reprobate is blurred.

Hence a 'gospel' is presented which sets forth an all-loving God who shows 'love' to all, 'grace' to all, and demands 'faith' of all. It presents a God who 'desires' the salvation of all. By using the *same words* as those things which are particular to the elect (love, grace and faith), the hearer does not comprehend what is only for the elect and what is for the reprobate. He is left thinking that God just loves all, shows grace to all, and expects faith of all. The hearer is not left knowing a clear distinction between that love and grace

shown to the elect and that wrath which is set upon the reprobate. The alarm is not sounded clearly to warn the hearer to flee from the wrath to come because he is given the impression that God's love is upon all men – the hearer is not clearly brought to the point of crying out to God for *mercy*. Neither does he clearly realise that he can only exercise faith to believe savingly if *God grants him faith* as a result of God's causing him to be *born again*. No, such a 'gospel' leaves the hearer thinking that God just generally loves all men, shows all men grace and expects all men to exercise faith. Thus salvation simply lies in man's 'receiving' a Jesus freely offered to all, an act of believing supposedly desired of all, expected of all, and apparently achievable by all if *they* but will. Hence under such a scheme who is truly sovereign in salvation? God or man? ...Surely man?

This is a false gospel. I believe its presentation is a real danger and a real undermining of the true Gospel. Hence I believe we should keep to Biblical words and the correct usage of those words, in order to avoid the slippery slope which leads to an erosion of the truth, and we should seek to be *led by the Spirit* in how to rightly *divide* the word of God.

"Common Grace", "Universal Love", the "Free Offer of the Gospel" and "Duty Faith" all are interrelated teachings which centre upon taking particular words of scripture which have particular application and meaning to God's elect, and applying them to all men. These teachings blur the 'gospel' in such a way that it no longer divides. Rather than presenting the word of God clearly, as that sharp two-edged sword which divides asunder, even dividing bone from marrow and spirit from soul, instead a 'gospel' is presented by many today which muddies everything together, which presents an uncertain sound, gives the impression that blessings unique to the elect are offered freely to all and can be apprehended by all, and ultimately such a 'gospel' promises salvation to all but actually saves none.

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But as for me I'll say this – *“I am NOT ashamed of the Gospel of CHRIST for it is the power of God unto salvation” Romans 1:16. Why? “Because therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith.”* That is what gives the Gospel its power – the revelation of the righteousness of God, from faith to faith. Such a righteousness, such justice draws a clear distinction between the elect and the reprobate. The Gospel reveals grace unto the elect, and the wrath of God (Romans 1:18) to others. A division is made. The elect are saved because that Gospel reveals the righteousness of God unto their *faith*. What faith is this? A duty demanded of all? No the faith granted to them by the Spirit after He has caused them to be born again, as an act of God's grace. For the Spirit's work is to bring salvation, through the Gospel, unto the elect - to make known God's everlasting love for them unto them in particular. It is the *“grace of God that BRINGETH salvation”*. Yes, *salvation!* That is what true grace brings - not simply the 'common' things of life such as food, water, sun and rain.....

Oh, may we pay heed to such a Gospel – the Gospel of *Christ*. The power of God unto *salvation*.

Amen.

Colophon

Further Information

Most of the chapters contained in this book were originally written as articles for the website "Grace and Truth Online". Readers may be interested in visiting this website, which contains many more articles proclaiming the Gospel of Christ and God's Free and Sovereign Grace in salvation. The website also contains book reviews, scripture texts, quotations and a number of links to other Christian websites of interest.

Visit: www.graceandtruthonline.com

A couple of the chapters from this book have also previously appeared in print in the pages of "New Focus" magazine. This excellent publication is produced by GO Publications and is published bi-monthly. Copies and subscriptions may be obtained by writing to:-

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*"For the law was given by Moses,
but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" John 1:17*

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