

about the author and the book

The writer of this book is Geoffrey Bingham, an Anglican minister for nearly four decades. In all of those years he has especially concentrated on taking regular pastors' study groups, leading retreats for clergy, Christian leaders and workers. At the same time he has prepared a large amount of study materials on different themes and topics, as well as exegesis and exposition of the biblical text. He has also involved pastors and workers in teaching missions, evangelistic outreach, and in schools for teaching layfolk.

He has had ministry in some twenty-five countries and has been in demand at conferences of missionaries, especially with Wycliffe Bible Translators-S.I.L. He has had a ministry of counselling along with his teaching both overseas and in this country, and his series on counselling are well attended. His books cover a wide range of theological and devotional topics, these numbering over one hundred and fifty.

This present book brings together many of the materials given at the monthly Pastors' Study Group which he conducts, as also lectures given in yearly Pastors' Schools. It is thought that these could be of immense value to clergy and Christian workers and layfolk. Some of them are in note form-as originally given-and some are more expanded. Geoffrey Bingham is frankly of the evangelical conservative school, but his materials do not reflect rigidity and are not critical of other schools of thinking and practice. For this reason those who do not wholly follow his line of teaching would be foolish to reject this treasure-store of materials, especially as they are open to wide adaptation.

Many who have begun reading Bingham with a critical mind have been pleasantly surprised by his books. His volumes of fiction have brought delight to children and adults alike.

Geoffrey Bingham, who is the Executive Director Emeritus of the New Creation Teaching Ministry, resides at Coromandel East with his wife Laurel. They have six children and eleven grandchildren, and are both busy in Christian ministry. Geoffrey continues to teach and write prolifically.

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**For Pastors
and the People**

By Geoffrey Bingham

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Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind?
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Christ's Cross Over Man's Abyss
Christ's People in Today's World
The Day of the Spirit
God's Glory, Man's Sexuality
Great and Glorious Grace
I, the Man!
Shepherds of the Flock
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**For Pastors
and the People**

By Geoffrey Bingham

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Foreword

For Pastors and The People

For many years I have had the privilege of speaking regularly to pastors. This would cover a period of at least thirty-five years, and quite a number of countries. I count it as one of the richest facets of ministry, and have treasured the times of discussion, sharing and fellowship. Not all of these times have been pleasurable. Many of them have been painful as pastors have shared their amazement, puzzlement, bewilderment, anger, hurt and grief—elements which arose in the course of their ministry. Not all pastors have accepted the things I taught, and some have departed from the scene never to return. Others have returned to voice gratitude for what they have eventually been able to understand, accept, and use.

I know I made many, many mistakes in this form of ministry. One of these would be that I have insufficiently applied much of the material given in studies to the pastoral scene. My first principle was that if I researched the theological material I shared with the pastors then it was up to those who heard it to apply it. I have realized in later years that not all of us have the ability to do this, and so I have spent more time in application. I believe that we ought to develop our own skill, first of interpreting a principle, and then of applying it. I do not say we should not prescribe for ourselves and our people, but it still seems to me that mere prescription may lead us to neglect the principle, and to develop a 'what to do' and a 'how to do it' mentality. If we merely ethicize Christian truth we may do so without knowing the constraint and motivation that is the mainspring of true godly obedience.

The purpose of the following sections or essays is to put material into pastors' hands for theological understanding and practical use. I see no reason why our people should not know and use the same kind of material. If they do then it will lessen the areas of teaching that the pastor will have to cover, and will build up his elders and leaders into a useful ministry of teaching and pastoral care.

The variety of the themes may be too much for some. It does not matter: the book can be used for reference. Indeed it would be difficult to use it otherwise, for apart from the fully written essays many of the studies are in note form. This, too, may not be a bad thing. These notes can be useful for sermons, group studies, the making of study series, and for writing on themes which have appealed to the reader.

I, for one, would not expect everyone to agree with all that I have said, or even with much of it. Whilst some material may need to be more substantiated, at least it can be useful in opening up a given theme or subject. Many of the studies were given because of the current polemic surrounding some of the themes. I found it stimulating not to be contentious for the faith, but to contend for it. No man can achieve anything permanent except it be given to him by God, and so I have seen methods and modes come and go. Many of them offered much but were unable to deliver the goods. Enthusiastic innovations generally run out of 'puff' very soon. We may watch fashions come and go, learn what we can from them, but be infatuated by none of them. I am grateful for the different emphases with which I did not agree. They sent me back to the drawing-board, back to the blueprint of the word, and so I have been able to learn much.

Even so, 'much' is not really *much*. Alas! One has taken wrong paths, been beguiled into others, made multitudinous mistakes, and has so much to learn. Nevertheless it has been good being in the learning process. It has been good sharing with pastors and other teachers and leaders. I would not have missed it for the world. At this present time a group of pastors meets together on an early morning each week, and how good it has been to share with them.

I do trust that the miscellany of subjects, themes and doctrines may prove helpful to some. Finally, I am most grateful to those who have read, proof-read, edited, type-set and printed this volume.

Geoffrey Bingham

Section One

THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION

An introduction to The doctrine of creation

These four studies on creation represent a doctrine that is greatly neglected. Few people even think that God gives primacy to creation. It is what He is about in history, and history—though it may sound trite—is His Story.

If God does not prove to be ‘a faithful Creator’ (I Pet. 4:19), then He cannot be said to be faithful in any other work He does. Redemption figures largely in our thinking, because we know ourselves to be lost because of our sin. The truth is that redemption is not an afterthought of God, in time, but something which was planned before time. It was not planned merely to rehabilitate fallen man, but it was planned because redemption is cosmological—of the whole creation.

We will see in this series that humanity is suspicious of creation, largely fears it, is prepared to exploit it, or even make it its central object of worship, but none of these attitudes does honour to creation. Man himself is part of creation and therefore cannot know it essentially. In that sense he is a stranger to it—hence his fear, his suspicion of it, and even his anger against it.

What a rich prospect for a pastor to teach his people the meaning of creation, so that their fears of it may be dissipated, their appreciation of it may be born and grow, and their enjoyment of it in the now-time may be full and pleasurable. What a good thing it is for men and women to look forward to the new creation—that total regeneration or renewal of all things—which will be the habitat of the redeemed ‘new creatures’. It will not only prove the habitat, but the very being of all its creatures.

What joy it will be when the whole family of God glorifies Him, and vindicates Him as ‘the faithful Creator’.

What present confidence, delight, and assurance we deny to our people when we do not lead them into the green pastures of God’s holy creation.

1

Knowing creation for today's living

INTRODUCTION—THE VALUE OF THE BIBLICAL TEACHING OF CREATION

Why would we want to study creation today? Of what value would it be for our people, as also for us pastors? The answer is that the primary doctrine or truth of Scripture is that God is Creator. Whilst He is certainly Redeemer in history, He redeems in order to keep His creation true to what He created it to be. At the end of time we will see a new creation, but it will be the same creation renewed, and not an altogether different creation which God has made because the old is broken and obsolete.

Creation is an enormously important theme, because people feel insecure in creation if they do not trust God as 'a faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19). We would be surprised

at how insecure some of us are. Take, for example, the weather. So many people are superstitious about it, think some of it is 'luck', some of it 'foul', and much of it a disaster. They judge the kindness or grimness of the Deity by the moods of the weather. They are also afraid of creation—of a broken ozone layer, of uranium in the earth, of diseases and threatened disasters—a thousand such things trouble them. They believe these things are inherent in creation, and that creation contains within it hostile forces that might do them harm at any point in time. As Christian people we often ignore this fear in man, and do not realize how largely the whole subject figures in the thinking of those who do not know God. In any case, such thinking is not confined to unbelievers. Many who believe in God display the same fears. For this reason it is good for us to do some study on this theme of creation, increase our knowledge of it—as perfect initially and as disturbed by rebellion—and so be better equipped to broach the subject with others.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF CREATION— ITS BEGINNING, NATURE, AND GOAL

When it comes to the question 'What is creation?', who knows what it is? Whilst we have taken its existence for a reality, do we really understand it? Can we define it? One of our difficulties in knowing it is that we are a part of it, involved in it, and cannot stand back and look at it impartially. What we do know—biblically—is that it came into being through an act of God, for 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. If God created it,

then we can trust that it is right and proper in its being and not a threat to the creatures within it. It would be a great comfort to people if they could be reassured concerning it.

Hebrews 11:3 says, 'By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear'. What can be seen has been created from what cannot be seen, and the action of creation is by God's own word or command. Psalms 33:6–9 and 148:5–6 tell us that God simply spoke—or commanded—and the world came into being. So there it was—and is—as a result of His speaking. Of course, we receive this revelation by faith.

God Himself is ineffable, i.e. unknowable by direct human enquiry, and often in history He asks the question, 'To whom shall you liken me and make me equal, and compare me that we may be alike?' (Isa. 44:6–7; 46:5, 8–10). Of course, we cannot liken Him to anything, since He created all things. He cannot be compared with any created thing. For this reason we just cannot know Him. If He is a mystery to us, then so is His creation. It is fortunate that He does reveal Himself through many media such as His creation, His word, through angelic visitants, His law, His prophets, His covenant, His Son, and His people, but that revelation is another matter.

Creation came about by the combined work of the Father (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 33:6–9; I Cor. 8:5–6; Heb. 2:10), the Son (John 1:1–3; Col. 1:15–16; I Cor. 8:5–6; Heb. 1:2–3), and the Holy Spirit (Job 33:4; Ps. 104:29–30; Gen. 1:2). Because the Triune God created, we can be confident of the essential nature of creation.

Many today—as we have said—fear creation. The

Scriptures tell us that He created perfectly, and pronounced it ‘very good’, i.e. functionally good (Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 3:11; I Tim. 4:4; Isa. 45:18; 42:5; Jer. 10:12f.; 51:15f.; Ps. 115:16). These references show us that there is nothing of disharmony or chaos in His creation.

Creation is not purposeless but purposeful. The command to fill up creation (Gen. 1:28) suggests a time when a *telos* or goal will be reached. Passages such as Ephesians 1:9–11; 3:8–11; Isaiah 43:6–7; 65:17ff. and 66:22f. indicate the nature of that goal—absolute harmony and peace.

So then, we can trust creation because it is in the Father’s hands. We know there are some elements in it which puzzle us, but since the heavens declare the glory of God and His goodness (Ps. 19:1ff.; Rom. 1:19f.), then we can rest assured within it.

CREATION, THE FALL, AND THE CURSE

What we have said above is true enough, i.e. that creation is trustworthy because God the Creator is trustworthy, but, in fact, we do see many things in our world which make us afraid, such as cruelty, rivalry, inhumanity, wrong use of power—and suchlike. These things have come about directly by the fall of man. They were not part of the original creation. Let us look at what happened at the Fall, and the effects it brought about.

In Genesis 3:1–24 (cf. Rom. 1:18–32) we read of the fall of man and its effects. In particular, we see (i) the conflict between the serpent and humanity, so that for

ever we can expect Satan and his forces to be opposed to man; (ii) the effects in woman regarding childbirth and relating to her husband—that is, the husband will be lord over his wife, and she will have great pain in childbirth; (iii) the elements of the curse. The curse was—and is—that man will have to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. The ground will bring forth weeds, and there will be problems in production of the means of life. When linked with Romans 8:18–25, we see that the perfect creation—with its *telos*—has been subjected to futility and decay, so that in practice we often find things to be vain, purposeless and hopeless. Life brings a certain anguish to the human race, and even to other creatures of the earth.

Whilst the creation—celestial and terrestrial, visible and invisible—was one entity (e.g. Col. 1:15–17; I Cor. 8:5–6; Heb. 2:10; Rom. 11:36), and was a complete unity, and as such required the obedience of all creatures, yet there was not only the fall of man but also the prior rebellion of certain celestial creatures (cf. Rev. 12:1–12; Isa. 14:12–14; Ezek. 28; II Pet. 2:4). The rebellion of both has greatly affected the true working of creation. By this we mean that certain angelic creatures, given authority and power by God, defected from Him and form part of Satan’s forces. They are opposed to God and man. Hence we do feel some uneasiness in this world, but what we have to remember is that there is nothing essentially evil in what God created. He created nothing as evil.

We must see, also, that man’s rebellion against God has affected the direction of his vocation. Man—like fallen angelic powers—is out for himself. Hence he is in competition with his fellow creatures, and this makes for

dissension and division within the human race. We must be careful not to blame creation and the Creator for the confusion we find in history, in the affairs of men and of angels. There is no need for us to feel uneasy about the essential nature of creation, even if disturbances within the creation give us cause for concern.

Even though the curse is present, the statements that creation shows the nature and glory of God still stand. It would seem we are to differentiate between the *essential* (ontological) nature of creation, and the *provisional* nature of things. The latter is linked with sin, with the ambitions of angelic and human forces opposed to God. They would seem to greatly affect and influence history. The truth is that God's will will be surely worked out. If we can distinguish between these two—the ontological and the provisional—then we will see we do not have to be uneasy in regard to God, but only in regard to Satan and his forces, and, as we will see, the promise and fulfilment of Genesis 3:15 give us grounds for assurance and serenity.

THE PRACTICAL PASTORAL PROBLEM OF THE HUMAN VIEWS OF CREATION

As pastors and people we have to be aware of the grip that cultures and systems have upon us. We are deeply grounded in these, captured by them, and are unaware that many elements of them are hostile to God. The historical results of the Fall—the flow-on of man's rebellion—need to be recognized, and taken into thoughtful consideration. They are, as follows,

- *Sinful man seeks to deny the total creative power of God, and creation's essential nature because it all confronts him.* By this we mean that when we read Romans 1:19–25

we see how man refused to know God, denied true worship to Him, and became independent of the One who created him. He also turned to idolatry, because he had to worship something or someone, and so he 'worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator', i.e. he placed himself first.

- *Rationalized views of God and creation are found in many religions and philosophies.* We would expect that when man rejected God he had to make sense of God, creation, and himself, but to do this he had to devise another system. In fact he has devised many systems. Evolution is a concept which refuses initiation of creation by God, hence the reality of creation and the Creator do not confront man. By this we mean that man finds an explanation for the universe apart from God.

Man's claim to 'creativity' is a way of usurping the powers of creation. Many times we will see people claiming they are 'creative'. Since they cannot make something out of what is unseen, they are not really creative. At best they are 'pro-creative', i.e. can make something out of what is already there. This principle of man being capable of doing all things is seen in ancient and modern humanism. Monism and dualism are related forms which seek to rationalize evil in the universe, and take away from the transcendence of God, and blur the true nature of good and evil. That is, it is claimed that there is no actual evil, and no actual good, but these two things are essential, and ultimately they go to make the one, and this is called 'monism'. Again, idolatry is a distortion and fragmentation of the nature of God. In most cases it leads to the fear and confusion of animism, i.e.

human beings become superstitious and afraid of spirits which they think rule the world and give good luck or bad luck according to the way they are worshipped.

• *Man demands some kind of theodicy in the light of the presence of good and evil.* By this we mean that man demands an explanation for evil being in the world when it is claimed that God is good. How can He be good if things are not all easy and harmonious—i.e. if there are wars, sicknesses, deformed children, famines and plagues? This is often a denial of the validity, or even the reality of the curse, and an attempt to blame God for all things. God appears to have failed (cf. I Pet. 4:19; Isa. 45:18). In practice man is afraid of his world, and often fears its elements (I Tim. 4:1–3; cf. I Cor. 10:18–21), as in the current dread of uranium, and certain foods, and the phobias of ecological disasters. Christians often evidence fear of Satan and his demonic forces as though (i) Satan is very powerful and controls creation, and (ii) God has somehow failed, or scarcely exercises control, even in the face of the contrary claims of Romans 8:28 and Genesis 18:25, namely that God is sovereign, works all things for good, and rightly judges the earth and brings full justice to it.

**THE AEONS, THE KINGDOM OF GOD
THE AGE TO COME,
AND THE 'ENDS OF THE AGES'**

Can, then, creation be said to be good? The answer must be 'Yes, because God made it'. Why, then, is it like it is? The answer is that Satan and his powers, along with

rebellious sinful man, have combined to attack and fragment the harmony God brought through creation. Is there, then, no hope for the future? Yes, but we must know the plan God has for creation. It is a plan which slowly unfolds, but which will surely come to completion. Let us look at the following:

• Romans 8:18–25 shows the good ultimate outcome of creation, in conformity with the Old Testament prophecies of a good *telos* and the New Testament rationalizations of these (e.g. Matt. 19:26; II Pet. 3:10ff.; Eph. 1:3–14; 3:11; I Cor. 2:6f.; Rev. 10:1–7; chs 21 and 22).

• All the *aeons*, i.e. worlds or systems or eras, were created by the Son (Heb. 1:1–3), and are under him as the Messiah (Eph. 1:19–21), no matter what evil powers may exist within any given aeon.

• The Kingdom of God broke into the human situation of good and evil in Jesus the Messiah. See Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1f.; Matthew 4:23; 12:28 (cf. Luke 9:1f.; 10:1ff.). This can be equated with 'the powers of the age [*aeon*] to come' (Heb. 6:5). The actions of this ministry in Palestine by Jesus the Messiah were (i) to attack the powers of evil and defeat them through the word of God, by the Spirit of God, through the Messiah (Acts 10:36–38); (ii) to effect control of 'nature', and demonstrate God's power in this regard. *This action had an enormous impact on those who feared illness, demons and death.*

• The proclamation of the Gospel was attended with many of the signs and wonders which Jesus had done. These certainly gave evidence that the Kingdom of God

was active via the Gospel. This, too, reassured those who did not believe God was (is) a faithful Creator. (*Note: the demand for signs and wonders is always evil when it is seeking to make God prove Himself. God is sovereign, and does signs and wonders according to His own will and intention.*)

- We live in the tension of two aeons—one present and evil, the other good and coming—and this is evident from I Corinthians 10:11 and context. This rationalizes the groaning and convulsion of creation, as we see it in Romans 8:18–25 (cf. II Cor. 4:16–5:8; Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:10–11; 7:24; I Cor. 15:55–58).

- Because the Kingdom of God has not yet come—in the eschatological meaning of the term—we do not have pure Kingdom living or its fullest action. Hence we must have only those signs and wonders which the King (Messiah) will do through his servants, and we must not seek signs as do the (religious) Jews, or wisdom as do the (intellectualist) Greeks (I Cor. 1:22), because we live not by signs or wisdom, but by the word of the Cross—Christ crucified. All will depend on how we ‘hold to the Head’ (Col. 2:19), for life, growth, direction and action.

Our problems multiply when we seek by our own human powers and intelligence to set our world straight. Some of these methods are as follows:

(i) we try to overcome the kingdoms of this world by seeking to ‘operate’ the Kingdom of God; (ii) we seek to make the penultimate aeon as the ultimate aeon, e.g. no sickness, pain, suffering, sorrow and death—as in Revelation 21:1–5—thus seeking to perfect this sinful human scene. By ‘penultimate’, we mean ‘the one before the ultimate’. Doing this is a refusal to accept the tension of the two ages,

and so a refusal to walk by faith and not by sight In this way we refuse to take up the convulsive suffering and groaning which is spoken about in Romans 8:18–25.

It is not easy for us to live in this world which seems to indicate an imperfect creation. We wonder why we should have to suffer pain. This does not mean that the Kingdom of God is not seen, nor that it does not—in some measure—break through into this world, even in this aeon (I Cor. 15:24–28) in which we now live, but the Book of the Revelation (13:7–10; 14:12–13) shows us that in some sense we are a conquered people although we are not a destroyed people. So we must live and work by faith in this age, and through our weakness and dependence upon God be strong. We will ultimately conquer, and ultimately see the new creation which will show us that God’s creation—although invaded by evil—has always been trustworthy. It is the lie of Satan that God is not ‘a faithful Creator’.

SUMMARY OF OUR STUDY

This study has a vast amount of material in it. It needs to be taken quietly, thoughtfully, and slowly. It is meant to give us background to the actual creation, and the processes of history that have been going on—and are going on—in it. It is intended to show us that although there are problems within the movement and history of creation, these do not issue from any essential weakness or deficiency of the actual creation. Whilst it is not necessary for us to know all the materials we have covered in this first essay, yet it will be good if we can get a bird’s-eye view

of the act of initial creation, and the processes working through continuing creation. If we keep the successful end in view, then we can encourage one another with this reality and not be afraid of the creation.

We can see the enormous value this can be for our pastoral and community situation.

2

Seeing the significance of creation

In our last study we indicated that there is a purpose for creation, i.e. that God has set a goal or a *telos* for it. If there is no goal for creation then it is goal-less, i.e. purposeless, and so pointless. If creation is pointless then we may generally forget about it. Let us see, then, if we can find a biblical purpose in creation.

This is difficult to define. In Ephesians 1:3–14 we have God's purpose *in* creation, i.e. the redemption of man. In Romans 8:18–25 is included God's plan *for* creation, i.e. its release into the glorious liberty of the children of God, and in this we know that the *first* heavens and the *first* earth will pass away (Rev. 21:1–3), and there will be a *new* heavens and a *new* earth (II Pet. 3:13). Proverbs 16:4 says, 'The Lord has made everything for its purpose'. This is comprehensible. It fits

Genesis 1:31 and Ecclesiastes 3:11, i.e. everything created is functional. However, Proverbs 16:4 continues, 'even the wicked for the day of trouble'. This means that everything will have its right end, and God will put everything to its use. Evildoers can only expect this to be judgement.

The best we can say is:

- The present creation will give way to a new creation, i.e. the first creation will become the new creation, that is to say, a *renewed* creation. That is how God has willed it.
- The time of history is between (i) the initial creating of all things by God, and (ii) the final judgement of all things. In history man does not live in a world which is moving towards a good climax—in, and of itself—but in a climax which will *first* destroy this creation (cf. II Pet. 3:12) and *then* bring a new creation. Today most have a rationale of history as though history were inevitably moving to a good climax. Others see it as a catastrophic and deadly climax, eliminating everything, but this is a recent view influenced by the nuclear threat.

What, then, is the purpose of creation?

THE PASTORAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE PURPOSE, PROCESS, AND NATURE OF CREATION

- *What happens in creation is the outworking of God's will or counsel determined before time.* See Ephesians 1:3–14; Isaiah 43:6–7; 46:8–10; Ephesians 3:7–11.

Pastorally we can always place hope before the flock of God.

- *When we see that man lives between the initiation of creation, and the end-judgements, then we see that he will have no hope for the present time as having final perfection.* NOTE: As above, we see that (i) history does not of itself make a perfect situation; (ii) many systems seek to make that (utopian) perfection. Some of these systems are found in Christian theologies. Proverbs 16:4, and the prophecies of judgements, show that God accounts for evil in this present time of creation.

- *Man is under the curse*, the curse being that of (i) Genesis 3:17ff., and (ii) the direct wrath of God, as in Romans 1:18–32 and Galatians 3:10–13. Man under curse curses God as an imperfect Creator, calling His nature in question when His creation is imperfect. Yet it is through man that this provisional state of creation obtains, as against its ontological perfection. Pastorally this must be communicated to the flock of God. The relationship of husband and wife, the pain of childbirth, the curse on the land, and the body being doomed to death are not cancelled by Christ's salvation until this age finishes. Of course, the experience of God's love ameliorates them.

- *The creation is subjected to futility, i.e. it cannot fulfil its ontological function, but must live provisionally*, though in hope of ultimate release into the liberty of the children of God. Thus man has not been able to destroy creation in his rage against God. Pastorally we must show man's guilt at not fulfilling the creational mandate, as in Genesis 1:28ff.; 9:1ff.; cf. 3:17; 11:1–9. This pastoral insight is helpful to the obedient, and helps to explain the nature of present human rebellion and complaint against God.

• *Salvation history must be placed alongside creation history, or history will be misunderstood.* I Peter 1:18–21; Ephesians 1:3–14; 3:1–11; Revelation 10:1–7 and Isaiah 43:6–7 must be understood, i.e. that the Fall—only—of this present age is not God’s complete plan, and that He does not merely accommodate to the provisional for creation, but rather will bring it to its true ontological climax in the eschaton. Pastorally the flock should be continually taught this action of God. It will help to place the Fall and the curse in its right context, and give immense hope (cf. Rom. 8:18–26; Gal. 5:5; Rom. 5:5; I Pet. 1:13; II Pet. 3:10ff.; cf. Rev. 10:1–7). God is thus shown to be working in history, not merely tolerating it and allowing its evil to pass (Acts 17:30; Rom. 3:24–26). In the Gospels we see Christ righting much of the wrong (Luke 4:17ff.; Matt. 4:23f.; 12:28; Acts 10:38), but though the Kingdom is dynamic (i.e. the ‘age to come’ breaking through, Heb. 6:5), *it does not yet come in fullness.*

Salvation history is in and through all history. Grace works in many ways, i.e. through covenant in its varying forms, in Abel and his kind (I John 3:10ff., the patriarchs, Israel, and the church; cf. Heb. ch. 11), but *the climactic victory* is through the incarnation of Christ, the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension. This salvation victory is now being outworked in history (I Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 5:1—22:5). Pastorally the flock must know its present context in salvation history.

• *God as Creator must not be seen only to initiate and sustain creation, but to continually do new works in*

creation. (Isaiah 48:3–8 needs careful consideration. See especially verse 7.) These can come under the heading of ‘salvation history’, but His initiation of new and varied acts must be understood thoroughly, and not be seen as simply ‘cause and effect’. More is spoken regarding creation in Isaiah than in Genesis. For example, the word *bara* is used in Genesis eight times, and in Isaiah eighteen times. *Generally* each birth is a new creation of God (Ps. 139:13–16), and in every action He creates anew (Amos 4:13; Isa. 40:26; 42:5; etc.), but *especially and particularly* God has created Israel (Isa. 43:1f., 6–7), weal and woe (Isa. 45:7), salvation (Isa. 45:8), the fruit of the lips (Isa. 57:18), new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17), Jerusalem and her people (Isa. 65:18). In Isaiah there are new things created, and this means God is creating all the time, as He wills, and as the acts extend His covenant grace and fulfil His counsel. As we have seen, this *counsel* is His will, and His will this *counsel*. Pastorally this means that *God will do things we did not dream would happen*, yet God is not formed into new creative acts by our faith. Our faith must be on the heels of His promises and principles which He enunciates.

• *The immediate pastoral significance of the Gospel and the power of the Spirit must be known. This salvation history action is immediately dynamic and creative*, i.e. man is not simply passing time between creation and the judgement (as a squirrel in a cage), and is not simply enduring the curse (even in good hope), but God’s creative dynamic is now bringing men and women into new creation (John 3:3–15; Titus 3:4–7; I Pet. 1:23; James 1:18; II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; cf. Eph. 4:22–24; Col.

3:9–10; Rom. 12:2). Acts 20:17–35 should be studied closely, along with Romans 15:14–21. The Book of Acts describes (i) the acts of Christ as (ii) they work out in the acts of the Spirit, and so (iii) in the acts of the apostles, i.e. the church. Notice the conjunction of the word, deeds issuing from the word, signs and wonders given by God as attestations (Acts 14:3; cf. Rom. 15:18–19), and the power of the Spirit working to bring salvation and aid the flock of God (I Cor. 2:4–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12). All of this is of the New Man (Christ) in this present age, but it is with a view to the age to come. Christ has given gifts to his church (Eph. 4:4–11) which are distributed by the Spirit (I Cor. 12:4ff.) for action! He has also given spiritual weapons to fight evil, but the ultimate outcome is by a decisive act of God in Christ, when all evil shall be defeated. At best the church is Christ's people working with him. It is not an agency in itself, detached from Christ, working the age to fulfilment and perfection. It is not a political entity. Pastorally we must alert the church to its own nature and function, but we—the pastors—must avoid using the local flock as a personal pastoral possession, and the action of the church as a means of extending our own personal kingdom!

**CONCLUSION:
GOD'S CREATIVE ACTS GO ON
IN THE AGE OF THE CURSE AND DOOM**

Salvation history—God in action salvifically in His own, though fallen creation—is of immense importance pastorally. It resolves the puzzle sinful man has of

history, and gives present hope. God is not bound by creation but is its Creator. He is 'faithful Creator' in that He does not abandon it, but redeems it. He is not caught in its 'fixed order' (Ps. 148:6; Jer. 31:35–36) on the one hand, but creates as He wills, and He is not caught in the sinful—provisional—order on the other. His salvation purposes and actions ensure that He goes on working now in this age, and will complete that action in 'the age to come'. Man—especially believing man—is not caught between creation and judgement, but has true hope for 'the new heavens and the new earth' without the aid of the utopian and messianic humanism of rebellious and proud man, even man who is religious.

The doctrine of *faith* as found in Hebrews 11 seems almost identical with the doctrine of *hope*. In 11:1–3 we see that *faith is linked with creation*, and in 11:4–38 *faith is linked with salvation*. In 11:39–40 *faith is linked with the promise/s* of God, virtually making it hope! This same principle is seen in Romans 4:16–21, where Abraham has faith in God linked with the promise of God, so that 'In hope he believed against hope'. His belief was in 'the God . . . who *gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist*'. This has to be *the present creative action of God* which Isaiah mentions so powerfully, and which we see to be linked with salvation rather than creation for its own sake.

Pastorally these insights have to be worked through, the flock taught clearly, otherwise they will seek to have this penultimate age to be as the ultimate age, and will be distressed at its slow-coming or its immediate non-coming, and will seek to force it to come or to be transformed in the various ways they will try to employ.

If what they believe should happen does not happen, then they may become disillusioned with the Gospel that they think they know, and turn to despair or to other systems which may promise immediate results..

What we must also keep in mind is that *it is the word of God which is primary*. Creation came through the word (Ps. 33:6, 9; 148:5–6; Heb. 11:3; cf. Gen. 1:3; John 1:1–3; Heb. 1:2), salvation comes through the word (e.g. Isa. 55:10–11), and the new creation (redeemed man) comes through the word of Christ, the Gospel. Any attempt to use techniques to create new things (cf. gift-actions, signs and wonders, etc.) apart from the word must bring pastoral disaster in the long run. Matthew 7:21–23, 24:24, I Corinthians 13:1–3 and Revelation 16:13–14 show us this, as indeed the warnings of John 4:48, Matthew 12:39 and I Corinthians 1:22 indicate that faith-creative acts must spring from the promises of God, His own word, and the Spirit who works them in this present age.

We, then, must not seek to improve the world, or the lot of man, or achieve the Kingdom by our actions, lest we seek to be creative apart from the will of God. The incessant temptation to perfect the present evil age, or change it—the penultimate age—into the ultimate age is always with us. It accords with our perfectionist drives, and opposes the Scriptures which tell us we cannot have now in perfection that which can only come fully in the ultimate. We must not seek to utilize (the powers of) the Kingdom of God to make the fallen kingdoms of sinful man into Christ's Kingdom. I Corinthians 15:24–28 (cf. Rev. 11:15–18; 12:10) shows us that Christ is doing this work in this present age. *Whilst we must be in and under*

Christ for this work, we must not seek to accomplish it in and of ourselves. So many natural powers are available to us by which we can accomplish tangible results, that we may think that we are actually bringing in the Kingdom of God, and/or cancelling the kingdoms of man! Even so, we must believe God's promises for our future, and the coming of the Kingdom, so that we will live in dynamic and encouraging hope, knowing that hope is being worked to its conclusion even in this present time.

So we realize that God is the Creator-Sustainer, the Creator-Redeemer, and the Creator-Recreator. Only in the light of this can we understand (John 1:1–3; I Cor. 1:30–31; Col. 1:15–17, 19; 2:2–4; Eph. 2:8–12) and know that we must live in faith, hope, and love.

3

***Living presently
in creation*****INTRODUCTION:
REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES—
CREATION ITSELF**

It will be good for us now to review the materials we have studied. They can be very helpful for us, pastorally and personally, so that we know how to live in creation at this point in history where we are. Already we have seen:

- (a) that creation is dynamic, brought into being as something in itself, and highly regarded by God;
- (b) that it is primary in God's esteem because He has planned to redeem and restore it;
- (c) that its history is therefore salvation history, redemption not being an expedient prompted by a contingency;

- (d) that creation, whilst having a 'fixed order', is not static but dynamic. This is shown (i) in its universal praise of God; (ii) in the fact that it is always moving towards its end, has a sense of this movement, and so lives in hope; (iii) in that whilst God sustains His creation and redeems it, He does works within His creation which would seem to be miraculous, and each is a new work of creation, though seeming not to conform to some 'natural fixed order';
- (e) that creation lives in hope, not only that it will be released from its bondage to corruption, but that it will fulfil that destiny planned and promised to it before time by God, who is redeeming it and glorifying it through Christ.

**PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS
OF THE ABOVE REVIEW**

Whilst man was in innocence and enjoyment of creation he knew the truth of creation, but the Fall spoiled that situation. Man came to live in dread both of present living and coming death. Guilt distorted his view of God, whilst his conscience exercised tyranny over him. The pastor has to recognize this, both for liberating man from these wrong views and fears through the action and power of the Gospel, and also for assuring him—as a believer—that God is good, God redeems, God keeps His children in life, and God will ultimately glorify them.

When a man becomes a ‘new creation’, he can live in the creation via salvation, for God proves to be ‘a faithful Creator’. That is, God ensures that believing man will be part of the new creation, when all will be perfect and complete.

The believer lives in this ‘present evil age’ whilst being a true citizen of ‘the age to come’. This living in two ages causes tension, for (i) the believer may think that the things of sight have cancelled the reality of the things of faith; (ii) the constant presence and experience of sickness, disease, evil and the endless conflict with powers of darkness may dishearten him because he believes that the ultimate age *ought to be extant now*. We have seen that if he tries to make it to be so, he will inevitably fail. Living in the intersection of the two ages he must learn to live at present by faith, hope, and love.

The pastoral ministry will, therefore, emphasize the promises of God in His word, and assist the believers to live in them, not only by faith, but by obedience to—and participation in—God’s plan. This will especially be in the works of Christ, by proclaiming the saving word of Christ, using the gifts as the Spirit directs, being God’s agent in signs and wonders when God moves this way, and using the spiritual weapons as they are supplied.

In all these things the pastor must:

- (a) believe God is a faithful Creator;
- (b) live and work in the *love* of God, thus being constantly free in union with the Father and the Son, and being constrained to accept and obey the word through this living love;

- (c) live by *faith*, knowing that within Creation God has liberated him;
- (d) live in *hope*, knowing that the plan of God—God’s true counsel from before time—will be fulfilled, and the triumph of God as the Creator will be seen. Pastorally we are in the same situation as those members of the flock. When we see what it is all about, we can then help them.

GOD ACTING NOW WITHIN HIS CREATION

We have seen man’s dilemma, namely that the things of sight seem to deny that God is acting in creation, yet God has done signs and wonders in creation, both in Israel and the church, and this especially when Jesus of Nazareth was in Palestine. He defeated darkness wherever he went because he was Messiah, and with him the Kingdom of God came in power. He told his disciples they would do greater *works* than he had done (John 14:8–14), and promised power to witness to him when the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. Note that whilst all signs are works, yet not all works are signs. It is doubtful whether the apostles did greater *signs* than Jesus did, but certainly their *works* were greater in that they now had the good news to tell, not only of the Kingdom, but of the saving acts of Christ (cf. Acts 20:20–27).

It is clear from the Book of Acts that all this happened. Paul also speaks of these creative-redemptive works in Romans 15:18–19. All of this is part of God’s faithfulness as a Creator, for such faithfulness is shown by, and in,

salvation. Pastorally the pastor is able to encourage the flock to press on to the promised end. Again, in Romans 4:16ff. Paul speaks of the principle of faith being dynamically active now, creating miraculous operations, knowing that these are based not upon some separate law or principle—which the spiritual man can abstract from the word and utilize on his own—but upon faith in God’s promises, which are one with God’s nature and His plan for creation. The flock must be brought to understand this.

When we point to what we have called ‘creative-redemptive works’, we are not thinking merely of unusual and dramatic events which happen in the course of proclaiming the Gospel. We have discussed the fact that some people seek after signs, and so demand signs, and that both of these actions are wrong. We are simply saying that whilst God has a fixed order in His creation (cf. Ps. 148:5–6; Jer. 31:35–36) yet God is not caught into it, or locked out of it. He moves as it pleases Him, and in this sense the creational-redemptional works which He does are one. He makes His moves as are fitting to His plan.

A PROBLEM IN UNDERSTANDING THE WAY OF GOD’S ACTIONS

In II Corinthians 12:1–10 Paul appears to show that *the way of weakness is the way of true power*. He discredits the way of power without love, in I Corinthians 13:1–3 (cf. I Cor. 12:31). Yet we have seen the power of Christ, the Spirit, and the Kingdom in the Gospels. Are we now not free to carry on ‘Kingdom action’ as Christ and the apostles carried it on? The answer must be, ‘Yes’. There

need be no qualifications to this if we really understand what we are saying. Thus we need to check what we believe is the way of the Kingdom. Yet even this will not be helpful unless we come to terms with the fact that we (i) are not living in the ultimate age, (ii) have no promise that possessing the Kingdom now (cf. Luke 22:28; cf. Acts 14:22; Matt. 5:3–11) we will bring in the Kingdom in this age by proclaiming the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, by signs and wonders—and so on. The times of the Kingdom are in the Father’s hand (Acts 1:7). We are simply to proclaim the Gospel and God will do the rest, i.e. *He* will bring it in, in His own time. We need, then, to know what God is doing (e.g. I Corinthians 15:25–28), and what are the principles by which He works. Notice that when we feel obliged to summon up every effort to utilize the power of the Kingdom for accomplishment that we may fall into ‘the Elijah syndrome’.

The Elijah syndrome

I Kings chapters 17–19 give us a picture of the prophet. Being God’s prophet, he was trained meticulously by God to bring His word to Israel, and to destroy apostasy. This *long* training prepared him for Mount Carmel, where a great sign and miracle was performed, destroying eight hundred and fifty evil prophets. Elijah ran twenty-six miles from Carmel to Jezreel before the king’s chariot. He might be said to have been on a spiritual ‘high’. He was at his peak of ministry—something for which God had patiently prepared him over many years.

The idolatrous queen—Jezebel—threatened to destroy him and he was shattered. God watched over His servant but Elijah complained that he was no better than his fathers, and whilst he had done everything possible he was the only faithful one left, and now was in danger of being murdered. God informed Elijah that He had 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Our problem is (i) we try to get power into our hands to use, i.e. ‘Kingdom power’; (ii) we work according to the rules which we *think* are the rules, but do not achieve what we desire; (iii) we then strive harder and weary ourselves like the prophet; (iv) even if we have success (as did Elijah) yet we grow angry with our brethren, thinking we are the ones alone who work this way, so that others must be slacking! (v) Wearing ourselves out, we tend to think (a) that God is not with us, and (b) that the principles we have worked out and made operational are not, in fact, effective. God has to show us it is not in the outwardly dynamic operations that we achieve true goals, i.e. not by the earthquake, the terrific winds, or even by fire (the fire had worked before!) but in and by ‘the still small voice’. By this we come back to sensibility, resting on the Lord, and following His commands.

**Note on the matter of signs, the word,
and the coming of the Kingdom**

For those who get into a sense of panic and frustration when they try to ‘bring in the Kingdom’, it is good to look at the matter of signs, the word, and the coming Kingdom. Pastorally we can minister and share peace when we see that God is about His business and it will

not matter if we do not strain ourselves up to the highest pitch. The following may be helpful:

In John 20:30–31 (cf. Acts 2:22) the writer say that the signs (seven of them) have been written so that the reader may believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and believing have life in his name. The signs point to Jesus as Messiah. Signs do not save, but Messiah does. Signs point to him. When they point to him, they point through him to the Father. Signs are always called works, but not all works are signs—as such. Primarily one should believe the Son *because of the word he speaks*, for that word is from God, and in fact is God Himself communicating Himself. So the signs lead to Jesus, and thus confirm his person and word. The words he speaks ‘are spirit and life’. He is not just a prophet being God’s mouthpiece. He is that, but more! He is the Son of God speaking the words of God. This is a new category of proclaiming the truth. *His words are never without works, otherwise they are static.* However, demanding signs, i.e. special works, before believing, is not good enough (John 4:48; cf. 5:30). It is better to believe without them (John 4:46–54), *as indeed the centurion did, in Luke 7:2–9.* Where God chooses to give a sign, then that is His grace. It may well be that some will see signs and not read them as signs, but be attracted by them as miracles. They may never see past the miracles. In a way, demanding signs is seeking to walk by sight (I Cor. 1:22), whereas signs are to be read—by faith! Faith is certainly increased or aided by signs, but we do not *have* to have a sign—they are always from God’s grace. We do not have faith in signs, but in God. Our summary, then, is that the word of God is primary. It should be believed, and the messenger—Christ—should be believed. The signs are with a view to the word, and not the word with a view to the signs. The signs lead to the Redeemer, the Messiah, the Kingdom and to salvation and eternal life. What he accomplishes is salvation, and this is greater than the subservient signs. Salvation is the greatest act of all, showing us that God is love (I John 4:9–10) because we experience and know the Person of God in the act of His regenerating word.

CONCLUSION TO LIVING PRESENTLY IN CREATION

One of the weaknesses of our studies up to this point is that we seem to be vindicating God by claiming that His creation is not in a mess, and that the seeming weaknesses, faults and deficiencies in it are of angelic and human rebellion, combined with the elements of the curse. Our rationalization—a true one—is that one day we will see the renewed heavens and earth, and then everything will be perfect. Our next study is on ‘Our Present Hope and the Future Creation’, and is one intended to encourage us to go on, stimulate us to hope, and help us to have a joyful anticipation of the age to come.

But what of now? What of the present in which we live? Given its imperfections, can we not have a joyful use of creation? The answer is a resounding ‘Yes!’. Time and again the writer of Ecclesiastes says, ‘There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil’ (2:24; 3:12–13, 22; 5:18). When creation is pronounced as very good, then ‘good’ means pleasurable. Paul says, ‘For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected’, and, ‘God. . . richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy’. He had told the Lystrians, ‘he [God] did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness’ (I Tim. 4:4; 6:17; Acts 14:17). Psalm 104 is a special description of God’s kindly and providential care for His creation.

When, too, we read the Sermon on the Mount, we are shown the loving providence of God, especially towards those who seek first the Kingdom of God, so that none

need be in need, but all may enjoy the fruits of the earth (Matt. 6:25–33).

Of course, the person with a guilty conscience, who is at enmity with God and is ‘hateful and hating’, will not enjoy what he receives or gathers in this life. As the writer of Proverbs said, ‘A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but passion [envy, jealousy] makes the bones rot’.

If, then, we trust the sovereignty and providence of God, we may enjoy creation in a rich and wonderful way. Naturally we will want to see the message of redemption go out to lost men and women, and will desire the Kingdom of God to come quickly and in power. If we can move by the leading of God’s Spirit, and not attempt to run ahead of God, then we can have rich ministry as well as enjoyable living—given in the groaning that is throughout creation (Rom. 8:22–23). Even this groaning is not in despair but in hope! If we can escape the Elijah syndrome, then we can profitably proclaim the Gospel of salvation and bring life and joy to those who have hearing ears, and who come to repentance and faith.

One of the richest elements of living presently in creation is that of worshipping God as Father, as Creator and as Redeemer. Worship is one of the most powerful expressions of our being truly human, and is the key to genuine serenity and fullness of life. We eat and drink, sing and sleep better when we worship Him.

4

Our present hope and the future creation

We have run the gamut of creation as it concerns us as human beings. Doubtless there is much more to it than we have covered in these four studies, but if we can realize that creation is the primary matter in God's consideration, and that His being as Creator involves His entire being as Father and Redeemer, then we will see that creation, far from being secondary to salvation, requires salvation to salvage man from what he has lost of creation and in creation through his rebellion and sin. Creation's primacy is what is in view. Pastorally, then, we need to convince men and women that God is 'a faithful Creator', and will see His creation through to its rich renewal in glorification.

Somewhere in man there is the need to know this. Somewhere in man is the longing for this.

Our wearisome examination of man's falling away from his true (ontological) creational state has been a necessary exercise. Secondly, we have needed to see the restoration that comes to him in new birth—via the Cross and the Spirit—so that he is, himself, a new creation, being fitted for the ultimate New Creation.

The pastoral and personal value of such an understanding of creation cannot be exaggerated. Redeemed man can presently live in and enjoy the creation without guilt and fear, and—as we shall now see—can live in wonderful hope of the outcome of the future. The future has not yet come. This is the penultimate and not the ultimate age.

THE REDEEMED WALK BY FAITH AND NOT BY SIGHT

This is how Paul describes the believer who now lives (II Cor. 4:16—5:8) with the ends of the ages having come upon him (I Cor. 10:11). Having been justified by faith (Rom. 5:1), he must go on walking by faith. Now 'we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God' (Rom. 5:2), and even though we presently suffer (Rom. 8:17–25; II Cor. 4:16), yet we are not ashamed to hope because we have already experienced God's love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), and this is the foretaste of things to come. The closest thing to 'sight' the believer experiences is the activity of the 'age to come' (Heb. 6:5; cf. Eph. 1:21) in the signs and wonders given by God, the action of the spiritual gifts which transcend the natural workings

of man. This ‘age to come’ really approximates to the Kingdom of God even now working in our midst. If we do not have natural sight of things, we certainly have ‘the sight of faith’. The reason we do not experience much more of ‘the age to come’ may be that we will disdain God’s plan for working in ‘this present evil age’ (cf. Jude 17–23; cf. John 17:8–26).

There is a seeing (‘sight’) of faith, for *the word of truth* is around us and in us, and is real to us, and the word of God is effectively God. Again, we presently experience God’s love and we must do all things in love (I Cor. 16:14).

THE REDEEMED WALK BY HOPE

Whilst we do not have sight in regard to the things which are unseen, the things of the future, yet hope and faith are one when ‘faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’. Paul says,

For in this hope we were saved [of adoption of sons in glory]. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Rom. 8:24–25).

Hope is substantial to us in a world that is seemingly irrational, subject to arbitrary calamities, criminal activity, disease and sufferings of various kinds—so much so that believers often ask God how it can be so, and how He can watch its convulsions and (seemingly) do nothing. How, then, can it be substantial? The answer is:

- (a) Since God is the ‘God of all hope’, then He can assist us to have hope;
- (b) God’s word, being one with Him, cannot fail. The promises of that word are wholly substantial;
- (c) God’s prophetic word—pertaining to the past—has been substantiated by its predictions and promises already having come to pass, especially as they have been fulfilled in Christ (II Cor. 1:20). One can believe that promises pertaining to the future will also be fulfilled.

THE ONTOLOGICAL AND SOTERIOLOGICAL THRUST TO THE FULFILMENT

So far in this series we have seen that the pastoral problem which confronts us is how we can claim—and proclaim—that we may trust our souls to a faithful Creator (I Pet. 4:19) *vis-à-vis* the world of sight, with its seeming contradiction of such trust. We answer that there are two powerful thrusts. *The first is the ontological thrust in man and nature*, for in the light of the Scriptures we cannot deny the functional nature of man and creation, and particularly as both relate to God’s law, His mandate for obedient action, and the glory which God has destined for His elect. That is, we say that man is innately creature, son and servant, designed to come to the completeness of himself. Innately he feels the thrust forward to his destined fulfilment. *The second is the presence of salvation*. For whilst we may understand what it is that man has been saved *from*, yet do we understand what man has

been saved *for*? He has been saved to fulfil that for which he was created. Salvation restores man to what he was created to be, i.e. fully man in time, and glorified man in eternity.

Hope, then, is not at all dependent upon sight. Those who must have signs and wonders to support them may indeed have these through God's grace, but 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe', yes, and go on in deepening hope!

HOPE FULFILLED

Presently the Spirit of hope keeps revealing the Father, the Son, their past works and their present working. What godly hope is waiting for is the purging of the things of sight, and the revelation of the things which will come—indeed are coming—to perfection continually, now both processively and progressively, and then into final perfection. Thus the great prophecies such as Isaiah 2:1–4 (cf. Micah 4:1–7; Isa. 11:1–9; 65:17ff.; 66:22ff.; I Cor. 15:42–57; I Thess. 4:16–17; Rev. chs 21–22) will be fulfilled. We may well ask whether the utter harmony of all things will pertain to the present creation, i.e. that literally the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, or whether such sayings are figures of peace to come. We may ask—in regard to II Peter 3:10–12—whether there will be a physical dissolution of the universe, or simply a purifying as symbolized by fire. It does not matter: we know that in the end all things will be filled up, unified, reconciled, and harmonized. Then we will see what God has been about in history in all His creation.

PASTORAL PRESENTATION OF CREATION

We have seen in past studies that men and women—even those who are redeemed—are afraid of creation, fearing that evil powers can effect terrible things; are not sure of God's personal love and providence; sense God as remote; and are not sure that all things will ultimately work together for good. Seeking to comfort them, calm their fears as to sickness, trouble and death will prove difficult—if not fruitless—until they come into assured hope. They must be shown the plan of God, as both creation and salvation are in His hands. The pastor or teacher should work ceaselessly proclaiming God as the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the One who was, and is, and is to come, so that they may live in assurance, and become eager to share in the outworking of His plan.

In short, what we must seek to do, by the word of God, and through the Holy Spirit, is to show them as far as is possible (I Cor. 2:10–14) the 'things to come'. What they see in the future will establish and strengthen their hope in the present, 'living hope' being very powerful. They must be shown the completion and fulfilment of each redeemed person as he or she is finally conformed to the image of the Son, having been raised from the dead—the last enemy, death, having been destroyed with all other enemies. To inhabit this holy place they must see they have been given the glorified body, being wholly glorified, inhabiting the heavens and the earth in the Holy City, sharing in the ultimate unity, fullness, harmony and reconciliation of all things. Week by week we need to show the ultimate glory of the church as the pure and

beautified wife of Christ, Christ the glorious Bridegroom, the Holy City as the centre of power and life as its gates are opened to the nations day and night and its tree of life for the healing and sustaining of the nations. Also they must see the people of God as 'kings and priests unto God', i.e. a people of glory ministering to all creation.

The greatest object of hope is, of course, the sight of the great throne, the Eternal Father and the Lamb seated upon it, and we—His people—seeing Him face to face! Then it is we will understand our evil in polluting His creation, and His grace in redeeming us, and renewing us and all creation

There can be no greater privilege than to be the proclaimer and assurer of these great things as we continually say, 'You can entrust your souls to the faithful Creator'.

**CONCLUSION TO
OUR CREATION STUDIES:
ALL THINGS ARE IN CHRIST**

Everything is in Christ

The pastoral need to show the place of creation—past, present and future—would be a daunting task. It seems from our studies that we would need to present mountains of material, and then not succeed. Doubtless this is true. The simple way to go about it—but yet the most difficult—is to so present Christ that the members of our flock see him in all his fullness, accept him in all his functional ministries, and come to know him as Saviour, Lord, Sanctifier and Glorifier.

By this we mean that he was the mediator of all creation (John 1:1–4; Col. 1:15–17; I Cor. 8:5–6; Heb. 1:2–3) and as such was, is, and will always be present to it. We cannot be part of creation apart from him, nor know it apart from him. He is the mediator of our salvation, and having achieved it for us intercedes for us, first to bring us to reconciliation with the Father (I Tim. 2:5; I John 2:2; Heb. 7:24; 9:24), and secondly to defeat the powers of darkness which daily assault us (Rom. 8:34). His Lordship over us is a Lordship which first defeated the powers of darkness so that we could be liberated from them (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15; Gal. 1:4–5) so that he could then be—by his victory—'Lord both of the dead and of the living'. The holiness we have is 'in him', i.e. in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:4), for he is said to have washed, *sanctified* and justified us (I Cor. 6:11). 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col. 1:27) tells us that he is not only made to us 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption', but also 'glorification'.

Again, all this biblical material may be so much wordy information unless the very person of Christ come and possess us. Paul said the love of Christ controlled him, and so it must be with us. We must receive salvation at his hands, personally, and become a new creation in him, personally. We must understand 'the love that drew salvation's plan', and be gripped, warmed and held by that love.

When this happens, then all that was the initial creation, all that is the contested creation, and all that is the ultimate renewed creation is ours, for it is present in him, and we are in him, and in him 'all things are ours'.

The pastoral ministry is ours

How do we communicate all this? The answer might first be that we come to know what we preach, and then we teach it, and that—of course—would have to be the case. Even more deeply, more richly, and more intimately, we must first know what we would tell. Our life in Christ can be no other than that told us in the Scriptures. His work can be no other than that which is revealed to us by them, but the knowing—the true *epignosis*, the deep and intimate knowledge—is a matter of every part of our being—mind, heart, will and emotions. If we have not met Christ personally, if we have not come to him as our Saviour and our Lord, and if we do not eat his flesh and drink his blood, then we have no life in us and our theology—impeccable as it may be—is lifeless and dehydrated. The revelation of the Son of God by the Holy Spirit may not be a dramatic unveiling for us all, but it must be no less a revelation for one than the other.

When we come to love him, because he first loved us, then it will not be difficult to communicate this rich and powerful truth of creation, for it is all *in him*.

Section 2**THE DOCTRINE OF
THE WORD OF GOD**

AN INTRODUCTION TO

The Doctrine of the Word of God

Because the following studies were given in various situations, the reader will find they often overlap, and there is a certain amount of repetition. Even so, it would be a pity to alter the studies in trying to avoid repetition. Each study holds together as an entity within itself.

There can be no more important subject for the pastor than the word of God. This is what he is called to proclaim. By it he feeds the flock. Without it he is left with man's word, and man's word is not God's word, nor can it be—of itself—the truth. The pastor needs to be 'an apt teacher'. To do this he must know the word of God. Paul enjoins Timothy to 'attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching'. He says, 'What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also'. He reminds

this spiritual son of his that 'All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work'. In the face of coming indifference and opposition to the proclamation of the truth, he exhorts Timothy to 'preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching'.

It is important, then, to have an understanding of the nature of the word of God. It is necessary that the word of God be first heard by the pastor, and then proclaimed to his people. Hearing the word of God, as we are reminded in Luke 8:4–21, is a matter of obedience to it. He who is obedient to the word will speak the word of God effectively, but not otherwise. The word of God is not merely a reciting of the text of Scripture, or even exhortation from its pages. John 3:34 gives us the principle of true preaching and teaching. Whilst it refers primarily to Christ, it also fits the case of the pastor, 'For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit'. Doubtless the Spirit was given without measure to Christ, and it cannot be said that we receive the Spirit in the same way, yet we are given that measure of the Spirit which is necessary and sufficient for understanding and teaching the word, as well as living by it.

The point that needs stressing is that Jesus spoke the words of God by the Spirit of God. There are no words of God that are spoken apart from the Spirit, for the Spirit is required in order to have true communication. Men of the word, then, must be men of the Spirit, and if they are

men of the Spirit they will be men of the word. It has often been said that the word without the Spirit is dead, and the Spirit without the word is ineffective. This is a strange way of speaking, since the word and the Spirit are inseparable.

There is no magic in regard to the proclaiming of the word of God, and there is no magic in that word. When God speaks, then what He speaks is truth. His servants must live in that truth to be able to proclaim it honestly.

1

The word of God**THE NATURE OF A WORD**

A word is a part or whole of an idea, intended to be an image in the mind of one person, generally with a view to imparting it to another—or others—by uttering it, writing it, or conveying it by signs and gestures. Man is so created that he receives and imparts words from God, fellow man or other personalities. Rational creatures understand words, and on receiving them may accept or reject them, or hold them in suspension.

THE SOURCE OF WORDS

God is the Author of all things, and in that sense the Author of thinking. Initially all words were pure, and so the ideas they expressed were authentic. Following the fall of man, ideas (words) may come (i) from God to man;

(ii) from evil sources to man; (iii) from man to man; (iv) from man to himself, for man cogitates and introspects. What is ontological is true, and what is not (i.e. that which is un-ontological, anti-ontological) is untrue, so that all words—always *only* intended for what is real—are used in order to claim ‘ontological’ being, i.e. basic reality. They are really stolen words, an example of which can be seen in Jeremiah 23:29–32. Because of the fall of man (Rom. 1:19f.), our knowledge of the essential order of things (i.e. the truth: Ps. 119:160; Prov. 30:5; John 17:17) can only come from God (the Scriptures) via the Man of truth (Jesus Christ: John 1:14; 14:6; 18:37) and the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit: John 16:12–15; I John 5:7).

THE ONLY TRUE WORD/S

God’s speaking is from Himself and His wisdom. If man speaks from God his words are true. If not, then they are not true. Isaiah 55:6–11 indicates that man’s thoughts are not God’s. This may mean (i) that God has a greater capacity for thoughts, or (ii) that the mind of fallen man is of another disposition. Whilst it is true that God’s capacity is greater than man’s, it does not mean man cannot understand what God is thinking and saying if God communicates. Without repentance, faith, and an affected will, man cannot hear what has been said by God. That the Scriptures constitute God’s word is strongly debated by man. This inscripturated truth—along with the present working of the Triune God—is our only means of knowing truth (John 17:17; Ps. 25:5; cf. II Tim. 3:16–17).

THE SUBSTANCE AND SUBJECT OF GOD'S WORD

Man created by God correlates to Him as a son (to the Father), a creature (to the Creator), and a servant (to the King). He can only know what God reveals. God is wise, and He has His own counsel. God's counsel is His will, His plan for history, and His acts in working out history (see Isa. 46:8–12; 48:3–8; Jer. 23:23ff.; Eph. 1:9–11; 3:8–12). Thus man can only discover counsel, i.e. wisdom, as far as is necessary for him to do so—by listening to God, and reading His acts in history. *If God were not to speak, there would be no communication from Him, and none to man.* Man would know nothing but his research into the phenomenological facts of man and creation. Apart from the inscripturated truth man cannot have an ontology of God, man and creation, i.e. his theology, anthropology and cosmology will always be deficient.

GOD'S MODES OF SPEAKING

God's word comes through many media, i.e. *creation* (Ps. 19:1–4); *theophanies* or manifestations of Himself (Gen. 18:1f.; Exod. 3:2f.); *angelic visitants* (Gen. 28:10–17); *the law* (Ps. 119; cf. Gen. 33:1ff.); *His own acts* throughout history; *the prophets* (Num. 12:6; Deut. 18:15ff.; Jer. 23:23f.); *Jesus Christ* the Logos (John 1:14); *the Spirit* (II Pet. 1:20–21; John 16:12–15); and *the church*—the proclaimers of truth. Note that the Scriptures, themselves, inform us concerning these media. It is not good enough to say that God speaks in words and deeds (John 14:10–14; cf. Rom. 15:18–19; cf. Jer. 23:23ff.). His words are His deeds, His deeds His words (see Study 3, para. 1, pp. 69–70).

THE WORD IS ALL

When we look at the various forms and modes of the word of God, and recognize that God and His word are identical, then we see that nothing happens without the word. This is because the word of God is powerful (Heb. 4:12) and effective (Rev. 19:13, 15), and as the word is never apart from the Holy Spirit, together they are one in action and power.

In practice this means we have the word of God for pastoral ministry. Primarily this is *kerugmatic* (evangelistic proclamation). This salvific word is also the word of true healing, and at the same time it is didactic *in the context of the church*, where it is ministered for the benefit of all so that it is pastoral in all aspects. The church itself is proclaiming the word to the world, both soteriologically and prophetically, and all of this in the context and operation of salvation history.

2

***The pastor
preaching
the word*****THE PRINCIPLE OF THE WORD**

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

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

Paul tells Timothy, ‘Preach the word [*logos*]’ (II Tim. 4:2). This

is the only word he has known (cf. II Tim. 3:14–17), i.e. the Scriptures, but then as they pertain to the Gospel, the word in which he was nurtured by Paul.

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

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

**THE PREACHED WORD IN
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

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

- 2:14 *Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem . . . give ear to my words [ta rhemata].* Peter speaks of the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28.
- 2:22 *Men of Israel hear these words [logous].* Peter speaks of the events of Christ, so that when they heard this word (2:37) they asked how they could escape judgement. Peter added other words (2:40). The word was effective for salvation.
- 4:4 *many of those who heard the word believed.* The word was effective.
- 4:29 *grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness.* This prayer of the church was answered: *they spoke the word of God with all boldness*.
- 6:2 *It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables . . . we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry [diakonia] of the word.* The result of this was:
- 6:7 *And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.* Note the phrase *the word of God increased* (cf. 12:24; 19:20; cf. 13:49), i.e. it is a living thing growing—reaching into the hearts of many—or the seed bringing forth a harvest.
- 8:4 *Now those who were scattered abroad went about preaching the word*, cf. 11:19, *those who were scattered . . . speaking [telling] the word*.

- The effects of the word are seen (i) in the Samaritans coming to Christ (cf. 8:14, Samaria had received the word), and (ii) in the new church formed at Antioch in Syria.
- 8:25 *Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.* Here is the effective preaching of the word of God.
- 10:36 *You know the word which he sent. The word which was proclaimed.*
- 10:44 *The Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.* The word was what Peter had preached, including the promise of forgiveness of sins. This was acceptance of the Gentiles by God (cf. Acts 15:8–9), *the Gentiles had received the word of God* (11:1).
- 12:24 *But the word of God grew and multiplied*, i.e. in spite of Herod's persecution and because of his death. The dynamic of the word knew no restriction by anything else.
- 13:5 *At Salamis they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogue of the Jews.*
- 13:7 *Sergius Paulus sought to hear the word of God.* Elymas the sorcerer was withstanding the word of God—unsuccessfully.
- 13:15 *if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.* This exhortation was requested in

the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. The exhortation becomes Paul's long sermon. So much so that *'the next sabbath almost all the city gathered to hear the word of God'* (13:44), but some jealous Jews opposed it so that Paul said, *"It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you."* . . . *The Gentiles heard that the Gospel was for them also and they were glad and glorified the word of God . . . and believed'* (13:46, 48). To glorify the word of God is simply to recognize and confess its innate glory: it is God's word—to be identified with Him.

- 14:3 *'the Lord . . . bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands'*, i.e. signs and wonders were *not* the word but attested the word, and God desired to do this. It is here called 'the word of his grace' (cf. 13:43, 'the grace of God'; 20:24, 'the gospel of the grace of God'; 20:32, 'the word of his grace').
- 14:25 *'when they had spoken the word in Perga'*, i.e. preached the Gospel.
- 15:7 *'by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.'* Self-explanatory.
- 15:35 *'Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.'* The word was not confined to initial proclamation but was also to the congregation.

- 16:6 *'forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.'* The word must only be spoken by God's guidance in the place God has for it at any point in time.
- 16:32 *'And they spoke the word of God to him [the gaoler] and all that were in his house.'* The situation had been prepared by God. The word was the Gospel.
- 17:2 *'he argued with them from the scriptures.'* The word is not mentioned as such, but it was the word he expounded, i.e. the Scriptures (cf. 18:4, 5).
- 17:11 *'they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily.'* The same word Paul had preached at Thessalonica—the Gospel—so 17:13, *'learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul'*.
- 18:11 *'And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them'*, i.e. using the apostolic Gospel in conjunction with the Scriptures.
- 19:10 *'all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord'*, i.e. heard the Gospel.
- 19:20 *'so the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily'*, i.e. was growing more and more and prevailing more and more, for it was capturing hearts, and defeating evil, especially the powers of the occult. See 6:7; 12:24; 13:49.
- 20:32 *'I commend you to God and the word of his grace'* (cf. 4:33; 20:24; 13:43; 14:26) i.e. the Gospel of the grace of God.

**Some observations
on the preached word in Acts**

Mode of preaching

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

Reaction and response to preaching

- (a) The Jews who refused to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah rejected it. Their rejection was often accompanied by attempts to persecute the apostolic band.
- (b) The Jews who recognized Jesus as Messiah believed, received salvation, and espoused the faith.

- (c) Gentiles who rejected the word did not greatly persecute the apostolic preachers, unless it affected their religion or trade.
- (d) Gentiles who accepted the Gospel and believed were strong in faith and proclamation of the same Gospel (cf. I Thess. 1:5–10).

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

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

THE USE OF THE WORD IN THE EPISTLES

Romans 9:6, the word of God cannot fail. 10:8 it is the word of faith, is immediately present, not having to be

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

sought after. 10:17 (*rhema*) brings faith to birth and action. 15:18 along with deeds and attested by signs and wonders the Gospel is effective.

In *I Corinthians* 1:18 the word of the Cross is God's power. In 14:36 it does not originate with (from) the Corinthians.

In *II Corinthians* 1:18 the word of God does not vacillate but is definitive. In 2:17 it is spoken in plain truth and not peddled (cf. I Cor. 4:1f.; II Cor. 4:1f.). In 4:2 the word is not tampered with by St Paul.

In *Galatians* 6:6 those who hear the word should support those who teach it.

In *Ephesians* 1:13 it is the word of truth, converting men as the Gospel of God (cf. James 1:18). In 5:26 the baptismal word (the Gospel) purifies the Bride of Christ. In 6:17 it is the sword of the Spirit (cf. Rev. 1:16; 2:12; 19:15; Heb. 4:12–13).

In *Philippians* 1:14 the word of God is not restricted to Paul's imprisonment, which itself is an incentive for others to be bold in proclaiming it. In 2:16 believers are to 'hold fast the word of life', i.e. hold to it, and hold it forth—proclaiming it.

In *Colossians* 1:5 it is 'the word of truth' and equal to the Gospel and it is growing and bearing fruit in all the world. In 1:25 proclamation makes the word of God fully known but involves suffering in the process. In 3:16 the 'word of Christ' must dwell in the heart. For 'word of Christ' note Romans 10:17. In 4:3 the word equals 'the mystery of Christ'.

In *I Thessalonians* 1:5 the Gospel is simply 'word' but is accompanied with power, and by the Spirit, and this word was received by the Thessalonians with dynamic

results. In 2:13 the word is the Gospel, and was received as the word of God and not as though it were from men. In 4:15 the 'eschatological word' had been previously taught, thus showing Christ's appearing is part of the word.

In *II Thessalonians* 3:1 the word in which they were established (2:17) is to be prayed for that it may 'speed on and triumph'.

In *I Timothy* 4:5 God's gifts are made holy by the word of God and prayer. The word of God declares all things pure, and prayer is an invocation on this basis.

In *II Timothy* 2:9 the Gospel and the word of God are the same, and Paul's being imprisoned does not put fetters on God's word. It is free, even in a prisoner, to do its own work. The word of God is the word of truth, needing to be rightly handled, i.e. proclaimed according to its true nature. In 4:2 this word of God must be preached on every occasion, even when it seems 'not in season'.

In *Titus* 1:1–3 the word is the truth which includes the hope of eternal life—all things promised from eternity and lately shown forth in this word. This in 1:9 is 'the sure word as taught'. In 2:5 the word of God is discredited when wives do not act in conformity with it.

In *Hebrews* 1:3 the word God speaks through His Son is both creative and sustaining, for it is 'the powerful word'. In 4:12–13 the word is alive (cf. 'living oracles', Acts 7:38), i.e. what was said in the past—in our reckoning—is as alive and dynamic as ever. It is sharper *than* any two-edged sword. The word is penetrative, discerning, unmasking man, so that he is seen as he really is. In 5:12 it is said that there are first principles formed from

the word. In 6:5 hearers are said to have ‘tasted of the word of God’, i.e. begun to hear and feel it. In 11:3 the creative power of God’s word is stated—as seen in the Old Testament. In 13:7 the leaders are said to be those who first spoke the word of God to the church.

In *James* 1:18 the word of truth causes new birth to happen (cf. I Pet. 1:23). In 1:21 things which are weeds should be put away whilst the ‘implanted word’ should be cultivated, allowed to take root and grow, for it is ‘the saving word’. In 1:23 it is shown that the person obeying (doing) the word will be blessed, and hearing without doing results in self-deception.

In *I Peter* 1:22–25 the word of God is ‘the truth’, and ‘the good news’, brings new birth, and itself is living and ‘abides for ever’ (as the Old Testament often says). In 2:8 men stumble because they disobey the word, i.e. the word concerning the true foundation stone—Messiah. In 3:1, though certain husbands do not obey the word of God, they can be won to it by the behaviour of the wives.

In *II Peter* 1:19 Peter says that the prophetic word (both of the Old Testament and Jesus) was reinforced by God’s speaking at the Transfiguration. The prophetic word is most significant. In 3:5, 7 it is the word which has created, and the word which will come with dynamic judgement on the present heavens and earth.

In *I John* 1:1 Jesus is ‘the word of life’ (cf. John 1:1–3, 14). In 1:8–10 the word is equated with truth—*the* truth. In 2:5 keeping (obeying) the word is the way of fulfilling love. In 2:7 the word is the word of commandment. In 2:14 the young men are strong because the word of God is in them, and so they overcome the devil.

THE USE OF ‘THE WORD’ IN THE REVELATION

In *Revelation* 1:2, 9; 3:8, 10; 6:9; 12:11 and 20:4 the term ‘word of God’ is used in all cases where it has been kept or held or witnessed to by those ‘who hold [keep, observe, proclaim] the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’. This entails suffering, but the word is primary. In 19:13 Jesus is called ‘the Word of God’ (cf. John 1:1f.; I John 1:1f.).

A CONCLUSION REGARDING THE WORD OF GOD

If we look at the word of God in the Old and New Testaments, then we conclude that it is God’s own word, identifiable only with Himself, dynamic in its utterance and surely accomplishing what He speaks. It is clear that there has always been ‘the word’, and although in some sense God’s revelation has ever been an unfolding one, it is also clear that it has not been contingent upon the things happening in time, but rather what happens in time is contingent upon what has been planned in eternity (cf. Isa. 46:8–13; 48:3–8; Eph. 1:3–14; 3:11). Even so, God foretells what will happen, though generally this is by way of warning, exhortation, encouragement, and making things clear (Amos 3:7–8).

Those, then, who are called upon to proclaim the word of God (e.g. ‘the word of the Lord came to . . .’; cf. Rom. 10:14) must first know God, hear His word, and then proclaim it under His Kingship, under the Lordship

of Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; I Cor. 2:4–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:10). The word of God—as we have said—is effective of itself, but God chooses to utter it through human beings.

THE DYNAMICS OF PREPARATION FOR PROCLAIMING THE WORD OF GOD

- We must be those who tremble at God’s word (Isa. 66:2; Phil. 2:12–13). That means we do not use our critical faculties as though our reasoning were the true assessor and monitor of the word of God. We are subject to the word, and not the word to us.
- We must not think we can utilize the word of God, i.e. to better our situations, fulfil our ambitions, manipulate or indoctrinate our people, exalt our preaching, or substantiate the word of God. For this reason we must not alter or rationalize that word by the use of eloquence, by importing other elements to the text of Scripture which do not belong to it, or even by importing substantiating elements from other parts of Scripture without acknowledging their true context. Whilst the Reformed hermeneutic is not popular today, yet the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture is really a fine one.
- We must be one with the word, i.e. one with God. Just as there is no grace apart from God and Christ, so there is no word that is apart from God. Grace cannot be said to fail, for it would mean, then, that God and Christ fail! Likewise the word of God cannot fail because God would then have failed. We may fail to tremble at the word, and

fail to live under the word, but the word itself is powerful. To live *under* the word is to live *in* God.

- We must recognize the power of the word to effect what God says (e.g. Isa. 55:10–11; cf. Heb. 1:2; 11:3; Ps. 33:6–9; 148:5–6) and what the word obtains for (II Tim. 3:15–17). Since the written and spoken word are never apart from the living God, then we must realize our need to abide in God, abide in Christ, and live in His Spirit.
- II Corinthians chapter 4 is a good passage for seeing what we ought to be in proclamation:
 - (a) refusing to tamper with God’s word (cf. ‘peddle God’s word’ in II Cor. 2:17), making it evident to any man’s conscience that it is the truth;
 - (b) having the truth of ‘the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’—i.e. the Gospel—in earthen vessels;
 - (c) suffering for the proclamation because (as) we ‘carry about in our bodies the killing of Jesus’ (cf. Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24), knowing that when the death is shown the life will be manifest and available to hearers;
 - (d) being strengthened in faith by the suffering that comes through being identified with Christ, we proclaim grace which results in ‘thanksgiving to the glory of God’;
 - (e) not fainting because of the cost of identification but *seeing what is unseen*, i.e. that *in which* lies our hope, and *which is* our hope (cf. I Cor. 2:6–10;

II Cor. 3:18; Heb. 12:2; Phil. 3:12–14, 21; Heb. 11:1, 3, 8–10, 24–27; cf. Eph. 1:17–19; Heb. 6:18–20; 10:23; Col. 1:27). Sustained by this hope we keep proclaiming the word, knowing that it will bring peace and joy (Rom. 15:13).

- The principle of ‘eating the word of God’ is seen in the eating of the scrolls, as in Ezekiel 2:8–3:11 and Revelation 10:8–11 (cf. Jer. 15:16), so that having digested the word we can utter it. In this sense it is ‘the word made [our] flesh’.
- Facing the truth that the word of God is—and will be—an offence to many, we must not rationalize it (see para. 3, p. 66), making it palatable to others. Nor should we use it as loaded against and directed towards those we wish to affect for our own purposes.

3

The word and its power

THE WORD OF GOD IS POWERFUL

Anyone acquainted with the Scriptures knows that they claim that the word of God is innately powerful. God cannot speak and His intention not be effected (Isa. 55:11). When we preach or proclaim we are often disappointed because we are not wholly effective, or even partly effective. We think, ‘If the word of God is powerful, how come we do not see the results which ought to follow?’. It may be because we are not truly proclaiming the word, and it may be that sowing and husbandry are lacking. It may be that when we are—seemingly—not being heard, that the word of God is being rejected. Being accepted or rejected is not the point (cf. Isa. 6:9–13; Jer. 2:31; Matt. 13:14–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39–41; Acts 28:6–7; Rom. 11:8; Acts 13:40–41; Rom. 10:16; 11:7ff.; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

In the Old Testament the word of God (*dabar*) is used about four hundred times. John Taylor says: ‘Yahweh’s word is an extension of the divine personality, invested with divine authority, and is to be heeded by angels and men’.* It is the word by which God communicates to man, and which cannot be divorced from Him any more than can His law. Thus ‘the word of the Lord came’, and ‘thus says the Lord’ are the terms used and they must be heard and obeyed. The power of the word polarizes its hearers. They either obey or disobey.

In the New Testament the words *logos* and *rhema* equal the *dabar* of the Old Testament, and are used synonymously in the LXX. Just as Yahweh’s *dabar* is identified with God and so is dynamic, so too *logos* and *rhema* are dynamic.

THE POWER OF THE WORD IN ITS MANY ASPECTS

What we will now treat is the word of God in its various aspects. God’s word is simply His speaking, but it relates to many things—as we would expect. We look, then, at the following aspects:

- *The word of God.* The Scriptures tell us God’s word is truth (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17; II Sam. 7:28; II Cor. 6:7; James 1:18), that it is eternal as the living (Heb. 4:12) and abiding word (I Pet. 1: 23, 25) and is never ineffectual (Isa. 55:11).

In fact God’s word is as God Himself, inseparable from Him. It is the word of His counsel which means His wisdom and plan will be fulfilled in the ultimate. We can say that God’s word relates to the ontological, and man’s word cannot be such, seeing he is fallen. In a later study we will see that the forces of evil (including fallen man) steal God’s word because it is innately dynamic.

- *The creative word.* See Genesis 1:1f.; Psalms 33:6–9; 148:5–6; John 1:1–3; Hebrews 1:1–3; 11:3; Colossians 1:15–17. God’s word dynamically creates, so that its enormous power is incalculable (Eccl. 3:11). Creation alone should be sufficient to make man worship and be grateful (Rom. 1:19f.), and if man were not fallen he would be immensely awed by seeing and hearing the word of creation.

- *The continuing creative word.* (i) God’s word sustains, i.e. upholds, and by it there is continuity in creation (Col. 1:17). This creation can be called ‘a fixed order’ (Ps. 89:36–37; 148:5–6; Jer. 31:36–37), and such a ‘fixed order’ brings security to man. It is really affirmed in the Noahic Covenant as promised in Genesis 8:20—9:7. (ii) On the principle of Romans 4:15 (see Isa. 44:26; 45:23; 46:10; 55:10–11; 59:21) we see His new acts of creation. God can and will do works which seem to be against the normative principle of the initial and sustaining word of creation.

- *The prophetic word.* This word is continuous in both Old and New Testaments, referring to every aspect of God’s will and counsel, namely creation, covenant, law, salvation, holy living, judgements, the day of the Lord, and

* *New Bible Dictionary*, IVP, 1977, p. 1337.

all things eschatological. Two classic passages are Deuteronomy 18:9–22 and Jeremiah 23:23–32. ‘Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?’ (Jer. 23:29). In prophecy God speaks through man (cf. Exod. 7:1–2; Num. 12:6–7; Amos 3:7–8; Acts 2:17ff.; cf. Rev. 1:3; 22:18–19). This word comes by God speaking face to face (Num. 12:6–7), and through dreams and visions (Num. 12:6; Isa. 1:1; 2:1; Jer. 23:15f., 31f.; Acts 2:17f.). Later we will see that the prophetic word is often related to the Spirit.

- *The enacted word.* By this we mean God is *the living God*, i.e. ‘the God who acts’. His acts reveal Him, portraying His nature. The kinds of things He does show who He is. See Psalms 105–107, especially 105:8ff. and 107:1ff. In the New Testament *the enacted word is the word of the Kingdom* (Matt. 12:28; cf. Acts 8:5–8, 14). The *enacted word* is also seen in the judgements of the Book of Revelation. In fact all history is the enacted word, e.g. ‘he commanded and they were created’.

- *The word of the law.* See Deuteronomy 33:1–5; Exodus 24:1–8; Acts 7:38; Galatians 3:19. We must warn ourselves against detaching the law of God from God. No one can create true law: no one dare initiate *torah*, which in fact means ‘instruction’ and as such shows ‘the way’ of God. There is only one way. See Exodus 34:28f. with Deuteronomy 4:13, 30:11 and 14. Psalm 119 has the terms ‘way’, ‘word’, ‘truth’, ‘precepts’, ‘ordinances’, ‘testimonies’, ‘works’ and ‘statutes’ as virtually synonymous. The law must not be subverted on pain of death (cf. Gal. 3:10),

but obedience to it is ‘sweeter than honey’, for it is a delight to meditate on His law (Ps. 19:7–11; 1:3).

- *The word of redemption—Old Testament.* This begins with Genesis 3:15 (cf. Gen. 49:10) and comes in covenant to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; ch. 15; 17:1–14). In the midst of the revelation of fallen man’s sinfulness and guilt, the redemptive word blazes with the revelation of God’s grace.

- *The word of redemption—New Testament.* This is the word of grace (John 1:14; Matt. 1:21; Titus 2:11. See also Acts 4:33; 11:13; 13:43; 14:26; 15:40; 20:32). This word of grace is also the word of faith (cf. Deut. 30:14f.; Rom. 10:8f.; 1:16–17; I Cor. 1:18). This salvific word contains in itself the regenerating word, as seen in John 6:63, I Peter 1:3, 22–23 and James 1:18.

- *The sanctifying word.* See John 15:3; 17:17 (cf. Heb. 1:3; 9:14; etc.). The redemptive word is also the word of judgement. Guilt and pollution are the two things which keep man in bondage when they beset him in the light of the holiness and wrath of God. His judgements set His people free, although they destroy the obdurate impenitent. Often in Isaiah God said, ‘I am the Holy One of Israel—thy Redeemer’. His holiness is always dynamic—opposing and destroying the evil that would destroy His people.

- *The eschatological word.* This is directly linked with the prophetic word. From Genesis 1:28 and 3:15 the word may be said to have been eschatological. This means man has always been informed of the fact—and

some of the nature—of the eschaton, the end time. Abel was the first prophet, and certainly Enoch was an eschatological prophet (Gen. 5:24; Jude 14). Since creation was with a view to the ultimate new creation, then there is a sense in which all the word is eschatological. God created 'by the breath of his mouth' (Ps. 33:6; cf. 148:5) and this term is also in eschatological use (cf. Isa. 11:4ff.; II Thess. 2:8).

More particularly the eschatological word is (i) that which informs us of the end time, e.g. eschatological prophecies of the last days in the Old and New Testaments, and particularized prophecies such as given by Christ (e.g. Matt. chs 13 and 24), by the apostolic preachers, and the Book of the Revelation; (ii) the word of Christ which actually effects the will and plan of God, that is, the sharp word which goes out of Christ's mouth and conquers all evil powers and smites the nations (Rev. 1:16; 2:12; 19:15).

We must not separate the eschatological word of God from its many other uses, but see them all as the one word. Notice that this word, 'the breath of his mouth', is also a synonym for the Holy Spirit. That is, the eschatological word is uttered by the Holy Spirit. As we have said, in one sense all use of the word is eschatological, but there is that deposit of prophetic prediction, exhortation and warning which is specially eschatological.

THE SPIRIT, THE WORD, AND THE POWER

Pastorally we do our best to make the word of God powerful. Paul warned against this on a number of occasions.

See I Corinthians 1:17; 2:2–5; II Corinthians 2:17; 4:2. Man redeemed still has to do battle with evil, including Satanic deception, human pride in achievement, the desire to be praised, and other such personal fleshly elements. Most of all he has to fight the desire to be thought wise, and to be able to reveal the truth from himself. He must be born of the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, and continually walk in the Spirit by being continually filled with the Spirit.

If he is not in the state of Spirit-control then he cannot preach the word of truth—God's word. He must be in that state of grace where his faith is strong. This is because there can never be a division between the word and the Spirit. I Thessalonians 1:5 demonstrates this principle: 'Our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction'. A vast study could be undertaken on 'the Spirit and the word', but it is enough for us to know that in the Old Testament the prophets spoke the word of God by the Holy Spirit. In Numbers 24:2ff. the Spirit came upon Balaam and he prophesied. In II Samuel 23:1–7 David, seized by the Spirit, spoke the oracle of God. In Hosea 9:7 the prophet is equated with 'the man of the Spirit'. Both I Peter 1:10–12 and II Peter 1:20–21 speak of the prophets of old being moved by the Holy Spirit—also known as 'the Spirit of Christ'. *It is safe to conclude that the word of God cannot be spoken in all its awesome and holy truth apart from the Spirit of God.*

At the time of the Reformation there were discussions as to whether the word of God was powerful in itself, or powerful through the Spirit. Both are mutually inclusive, and as one entity the word and the Spirit work, and work

with power. God is identical with His word, even if we call that word ‘an extension of the divine personality’. If we can visualize the word apart from the Spirit, or the Spirit working (soteriologically) apart from the word, then we have a strange and impossible situation.

What we ought to include under our present topic heading is ‘the word of grace’, but this, too, requires opening up, and we will leave it to a later study.

4

Stealing God’s word

INTRODUCTION: THE PROPHETS AND THE FALSE PROPHETS

The following passages should be read as a foundation for this subject: Isaiah 9:15; Jeremiah 14:13–16; 23:9–40; 27:14ff.; Ezekiel 13:2–17; 22:28. Deuteronomy 18 is the *locus classicus* of the meaning, nature and practice of prophecy. Moses was the classic prophet, having a sense of the destiny of Israel and the significance of covenant in the light of the wisdom and counsel of God concerning the nations. Revelation 19:10 (cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; Acts 26:22–23; I Pet. 1:10–12; II Pet. 1:19–21) shows that the law and the prophets have to do with Christ and God’s plan for and in him.

True prophecy relates to the truth. God’s truth is the ontological reality. Prophecy—the proclamation of God’s word both predictive and hortatory—is authentic because

it concerns the ontological. It *is* ontological. Hence it is dynamic. Therefore prophecy is necessarily dynamic, whether it be unontological or anti-ontological. Deuteronomy 18 indicates that false forms of prophecy, (e.g. divination and soothsaying) are also dynamic. True prophecy effects that which it is about (Deut. 18:22), and whilst false prophecy does not, it works in the same way upon those who wish to know the future. Knowing the future is part of being human, and so is dynamic. The first set of Scriptures cited above distinguishes between true and false prophets and prophesyings.

SPEAKERS OF GOD'S WORD

True and false prophets

Hebrews 1:1–2a says, ‘In many and varied ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son . . .’ The prophet, then, spoke the word of God. We have seen that prophecy has the two elements of prediction and exhortation. Either one or both of these elements would be present at any time. Hence prophecy was not always predictive, nor always hortatory. Whatever elements were present, the utterance was the word of God. Hence the statements, ‘the word of the LORD came unto . . .’, ‘thus says the LORD’, and so on. Prophecy constituted God’s main mode of communicating His word.

When God speaks His word it is necessarily dynamic. The false prophets recognized this dynamic. In one sense *any* utterance has a certain power to it. The prophets of

the Baals and the idols purported to be speaking for powerful deities, but they were seen to be mediums for their gods. From Israel’s point of view they were false prophets inasmuch as the only true word was Yahweh’s word. The one who spoke His word was a true prophet. In a contest between Yahweh and the false gods, the latter would always be defeated. Hence the people of Yahweh asked the following question,

‘Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods?
Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,
terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?’

Israel meant that Yahweh was more powerful than the gods of Egypt. Their word or their prophets were as nothing against Him.

The second set of false prophets were those who purported to speak in the name of Yahweh. These are the prophets mentioned in the references found in the first paragraph of this study.

The word of God and the prophets— true and false

How did the prophets gain the word they were to give? There were two ways: either God spoke to the prophet face to face (Num. 12:8; Acts 3:22–23) or He communicated his message by the means of dreams and visions (Num. 12:6; cf. Jer. 23:23f.; Acts 2:17–18). In Numbers 12:6–7 (cf. Exod. 33:11; Deut. 34:10; Hosea 12:13; Exod. 24:10–11) these two methods are stated. If a man did not receive God’s word by one method or the other, then any word he spoke would be false, and not truly prophetic.

In Jeremiah 14:14 God said, ‘The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds’. In Jeremiah 23:16–18 God warned:

‘Do not listen to the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, and not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, “It shall be well with you”; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart they shall say, “No evil shall come upon you.”’

At this point the prophet introduced the idea of ‘the council of the LORD’. He said, ‘For who among them has stood in *the council of the LORD* to perceive and hear his word, or who has given heed to his word and listened?’. Again, in Jeremiah 23: 21–22 God said,

‘I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood *in my council*, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.’

In relation to prophecy, what, then, is God’s council? Israel believed God had a council of supernatural beings. For this, see Psalm 89:7, ‘. . . God feared in the council of the holy ones’, Psalm 82:1, ‘God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgement’ (cf. I Kings 22:19–22; Job 1:1–22; 15:8; Isa. 6:1–13). Whatever the council was and is, it appears that the prophet was admitted to it, but the false prophet was barred. The true prophet was given the mind of God for his proclamation of the truth. This being so,

the prophetic word must be pure as against the false prophetic word which is evil. It is an awesome thing to proclaim the word of God.

The Hebrew word for *council* (Jer. 23:18, 22, *RSV*) and *counsel* (Jer. 23:18, 22, *AV*) is *sod*. In Amos 3:7 the word ‘secret’ (*RSV*) or ‘plans’ (*JB*) is also *sod*. The word *sod* can mean ‘a sitting, session, or assembly’, and so we take it that the assembly is there for the counsel or wisdom of God, and this counsel is communicated by the prophets when He desires it, even if the prophet does not actually stand in the midst of the holy ones who constitute the *sod*.

THE CHURCH THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY

The gifts of ministry outlined by Paul in Ephesians 4:7–11 show us that the new community—the church—is a teaching community. Apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers are all in the work of teaching. The original apostles must be regarded as unique, since they brought the true corpus of teaching to the word, i.e. the apostolic proclamation (*kerugma*) which, by nature of the case, is immutable. The prophets must abide by this apostolic teaching, as also must the evangelists, pastors and teachers. No new or innovative teaching may be made, and the apostolic teaching is unique. It is the interpretation of the Old Testament truth in the light of the events of Christ already predicted and in Christ’s incarnation fulfilled. It is also the events of Christ interpreted in the light of Old Testament truth.

Where, then, does prophecy figure in the New Testament? The primary answer is that the church is the prophetic community, just as it is the priestly and royal community, i.e. Christ, who is prophet, priest and king, works out his offices and ministry through his body the church. Acts 2:17–18 makes it clear that at Pentecost this *prophetic* community came into being.

‘The testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit?] of prophecy’, and this is the message of the apostolic church. If we notice the continual reference to ‘witness’ and ‘testimony’ in the Books of the Acts and the Revelation, then we will see that issuing from Acts 1:8 the ministry of the church is primarily witness, i.e. the witness *of* Jesus, as also the witness *to* Jesus, for these, virtually, are the one. For a detailed development of this see my book, *Is Prophecy For Today?** There can be no doubt, then, that the church is the prophetic community. Whilst certain men and women may have the office of prophet (Acts 11:27–29; 20:10–12; 13:1; 15:32; 21:9; Eph. 4:11), many have or exercise the charisma of prophecy (I Cor. 12:10; 14:1, 24). It is in this context that Peter enjoins, ‘. . . whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God’. On this hinges much we now need to discuss.

STEALING GOD’S WORD

The passage of Jeremiah 23:9–40 (cf. Isa. 9:15; Jer. 14:13–16; 27:14ff.; Ezek. 13:2–17; 22:28; Deut. 18:15–22) is most important. In essence it is as follows:

* NCPI, 1982.

- The prophets of the northern kingdom were evil and ungodly for ‘they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray’. The condition of Judah was even worse, for:

‘in the prophets of Jerusalem I [God] have seen a horrible thing; they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah’ (see vv. 9–15).

- The prophets of the southern kingdom speak ‘visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD’. They speak comfortably to those ‘who despise the word of the LORD’. (see vv. 16–17).

- These false prophets have not been sent by God for they had not ‘stood in the council of the LORD’, therefore they could not know the true word of God, the word which would have turned God’s people ‘from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings’ (see vv. 18–22).

- The prophets—so-called—use the dreams and visions of the true prophets. They know they need the authentication of these and so they pretend to the true prophets’ visions, or manufacture some of their own. They know the word of God—the prophetic word—is authentic (ontological) so they use it, shaping it up to their own ends. God says He will differentiate between the wheat and the chaff. His word is fire and He will devour the chaff. His word is a hammer and will break the hard, rock-like hearts of the false prophets in pieces.

‘Behold, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who use their tongues and say, “Says the LORD.” Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the LORD’ (see vv. 23–32).

- God castigates the false prophets when they claim to know ‘the burden of the LORD’, telling the prophets their words are not His ‘burden’, i.e. oracle or prophecy. Their burden (prophecy) is their own. God tells His people to tell these false prophets, ‘You pervert the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God’.

Our conclusion in this section is, then, that *it is possible—either from delusion or by deliberate choice—to steal the words of God, and to seek to authenticate ourselves by means of them.*

THE MINISTRY OF STOLEN WORDS

As pastors we have to decide whether we are uttering our own words, or speaking the word of God, and whether it is possible we are stealing the words on which God alone has copyright. Peter’s injunction, ‘. . . whoever speaks as one who utters oracles of God’, is essential for proclaiming the truth. Within the scope of this study it is not possible for us to do a full survey of the use of the word of God in the New Testament—let alone in the Old Testament. It is clear, however, that in the Acts the apostolic church was proclaiming the word of God. In the Epistles certain references are made to ‘the word of the cross’,

and to the power of the proclaimed Gospel, and many warnings are given against wrong uses of God’s word. In the Book of the Revelation are numerous references to ‘having’ or ‘holding’ the word of God.

The authentic word

The Holy Spirit brought the truth of the Gospel to the church on the day of Pentecost (John 16:12–15; I Cor. 2:12–13; Acts 2:42), and so the apostolic truth was known and formulated. Only apostles could claim authority for this formulation of the truth: others taught what they had formulated. In Acts and the Epistles they insist that they teach the word of God. Paul spends almost two chapters of Galatians in setting out his apostolic authority so that his readers will believe his word against that of the Judaizers who were perverting apostolic truth. This authentic truth was always via the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; I Cor. 2:1–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12).

The false word

In II Corinthians 2:17 Paul claims, ‘For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ’. In II Corinthians 4:2 he says, ‘We have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways; we refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God’. In I Corinthians 1:17 he had said, ‘For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel,

and not with eloquent wisdom lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power'. To this he added (I Cor. 2:3–5), 'And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God'.

These statements are of immense importance. He is saying that we can peddle God's word, that we can practise disgraceful and underhanded ways in the proclamation of the Gospel, and that we can use cunning, and we can tamper with God's word. We can also use eloquence and plausible words of a wisdom which is not God's wisdom, and we can even make men to stand in such false wisdom, rather than in the power of God. All of this should cause us much heart-searching.

The Old Testament prophets had stolen the dreams, visions and words of the true prophets. As we have suggested, they recognized in some measure the ontological way, the way of truth and hence of authentic power, and they wanted to use the true things in order to gain credibility and power. Everything false is only an imitation of the true, but by nature of the case it cannot genuinely succeed. As Jeremiah states, it will be burned in the fire of the true word, and smashed by the hammer of the same word. Moreover, God is against those who steal His word. He will by no means allow them to get away with it. Judgement is inevitable.

In II Timothy 4:3 Paul says that 'the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from

listening to the truth, and wander into myths'. He tells Titus (1:9) that an elder 'must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it'.

Without doubt the early church was beset about with many who did not know the apostolic truth. Galatians, Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles refer to such happenings. John's Epistles warn against current heresies, and Jude (3–4) says,

I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

AN EVALUATION OF OUR OWN WORDS

We have a number of things to take into consideration when we seek to evaluate the word we proclaim and the manner of our proclamation. Is it the word of God or is it merely quoting the Bible, the giving of biblical information? Do we preach without power and without fruitfulness? Are we afraid of our hearers, and so seek to satisfy them? Do we seek the praise of men more than the praise of God? Does money and comfort occupy our minds more than the word itself? Do we have presuppositions (critical and otherwise) which mean we do not really believe the Scriptures? Do we have a form of godliness but deny its power (II Tim. 3:5), and is the Kingdom of God words and not power (I Cor. 4:20)?

Some of us use other men's sermons and other men's thoughts. There may be nothing harmful in this, or there may be the admission that God does not speak directly to us through His word. In the last study we talked about the word and its power. Do we really know that power in truth, or is it simply an academic fact for us? Are we men and women of the word of God and His Spirit, or are we using human wisdom, tacking our sails according to the wind, using mores and wisdom that smack more of man than of God?

These are not the only questions we need to ask of ourselves; all of them ought to be asked with the principle of stealing God's word—and words—in mind.

5

The word in the parish

THE PASTOR AND THE WORD

We have already seen the nature of the word of God, its power, and those who seek to use it illicitly. We would all agree that the pastor must know—and increasingly know—the word of God. It is surely a principle that all ministry springs from the proclaimed and taught word of God—the Scriptures. We will look at the initial proclamation of the word more fully in my next study, but here we are thinking of the use of the word that follows the saving proclamation—not that there is a distinct difference between the *kerugmatic* word and the prophetic, didactic and pastoral word.

THE CONTEXT OF THE PASTORAL-PAROCHIAL WORD

If we are parochially minded we will minimize the true operation of the word. Each church (parish or circuit) is in the wider context of the church of Christ. This context is the *kerugmatic*, prophetic, priestly (worshipping) church in action as the agent of the Kingdom of God, under its head, Christ. Any ambition for the local church is destructive and repressive to the witness of the church in the world. In addition, no local church has all the gifts which can be contained within itself. If it has certain ministry gifts (such as those of apostle, prophet and evangelist—which themselves are often itinerant), the local church must give to and receive from such ministries.

The local church is a witnessing church. It has the witness of the word of God and of the life of its *koinonia* (fellowship) and *diakonia* (ministry, servanthood, and *didache* (teaching), as well as those gifts which cannot be contained within itself. Signs and wonders are not solely for the local church, even if often they come via it.

When we say the local church is the witnessing church, we must also recognize and keep in mind the fact that the church of Christ is the new temple (Isa. 2:2–3; 56:6ff.; I Cor. 3:16–17; I Pet. 2:4–10). Worship is rich witness, and fulfils the deepest emotional needs of man. There should never be the worship without the word, nor the word without the worship. Both constitute the one entity.

Another factor to be considered is its denominational polity, i.e. whether it is congregational, presbyterial, or hierarchical. Its sacramental pattern must also be understood.

These elements determine the ecclesiastical authority of the preacher.

At the same time we must see that in the local church there are unconverted people, those who have little biblical knowledge or sense, and many who are in states of confusion, who lack the knowledge and sense of justification, who are awry in doctrine, and who have problems with marriage and children, with understanding Christian morality, especially as they struggle amidst the changing mores of contemporary society. We must also recognize the growth in maturity of those in the congregation who are competent to teach and to preach the word of God.

THE PASTOR AND THE WORD

We use this term, not simply to designate the pastor ministering only from the pulpit, but in whatever situation he speaks the word of God, such as in church services, in study groups, in his study to persons, to the church leadership, and to counselling both in his study and in members' homes. This speaking of the word has to minister to, and in, all these situations.

As I see it, most—if not all—ministry should spring from the proclamation of the word, whether that of the pastor or the word which congregational members have heard or read from others. If questions are asked following genuine proclamation of the word, then proper contact and interaction are established. As we have seen, members of the congregation are in various states of mind, and of understanding. They are also in various states of need. If, then, their response (or reaction) comes from the word, then it will be the word which will be necessary to answer their queries.

This, then, means that the pastor must be well-versed in the word. Prior even to entering this pastoral ministry he should work out for himself the matter of the authority of the word of God, and his own authority in proclaiming it, as also the consequences which may come from its proclamation. If—for example—he thinks the word may cause unwanted repercussions, then he must be honest with himself. If he considers the authority of current thinking determines the value of the word of God, then he must act accordingly, for such things will determine the way in which he preaches, as also the content of his preaching. Every pastor must work out this matter, and evaluate the thrust of his ministry, and hold fast to that until experimentation in the same determines a change or otherwise in his manner of ministry, as also its content.

One thing the pastor must study is whether his ministry is primarily evangelistic, prophetic, didactic, hortatory or pastoral, i.e. with a view to caring for the flock in all their needs and God's demands of them. If evangelistic, then he must invite the help of others in relation to the other elements of teaching and preaching. Even so, a worthy pastor may find it possible in his preaching to be prophetic, didactic, hortatory and comforting, according to the particular occasion.

The pastor must determine his personal role in relation to the word of God

Every pastor—as a shepherd—must 'feed the flock of God'. The word of life is also the bread of life. Some

pastors say, 'I am no preacher. Preaching is not my thing. My thing is visitation'. Some see organizing or praying as their role. The proclamation of the word must be primary. This does not mean eloquent, knowledgeable or brilliant preaching. The word may even be stammered. Some great preachers have read their sermons word by word, with rich results. One is excusing oneself from study of the word by claiming one's role is different. How can one give pastoral wisdom and advice from one's lack of the studied word? A visiting pastor may be merely social or pleasant, or even a 'tea-and-sugar bushranger'! An organizing pastor may be taking the easy way out. Organization must be done in the light of God's word. Many a pastor has built large buildings, increased the size of the congregation, and achieved popularity as a person, without much recourse to the word of God.

The pastor is not called to be popular or even loved. He is called to guard the flock of God, to feed it, to train it, and teach the word of God to others that they may yet teach it to others also. His gifts for visiting, organizing—and the rest—may also be used, but only in the light of God's word.

The word is to, and for, all

In a presbyterial polity the pastor is the first among other elders, i.e. *primus inter pares*. He may be expected to be the primary preacher of the word. Even so, each elder is expected to be 'an apt teacher', as also to 'hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instructions in sound doctrine and to confute those who contradict it'. In non-presbyterial polities leadership

should be designed to assist the minister of the word and the sacraments.

In this paper we cannot cover all the pastoral situations as mentioned above, but when the pastor seeks to cover them it must be from the word, especially the wisdom the pastor has learned in the practical application of the word. This does not mean formal teaching, or the theological setting out of Christian dogma—although that has its place also—but it is showing how in any situation the guidance of the word can be received and applied (cf. II Tim. 3:15–17). Thus a pastor may be seeking to assist where one spouse is an alcoholic and even cruel and aggressive in his drunken states. Other situations may relate to immorality, sexual deviations, poverty, emotional states that paralyse the person—and so on. In all these the word of God—with, of course, the guidance and enablement of the Holy Spirit—can assist the pastor who has studied it. By this we do not mean that the pastor will always open a Bible, or simply quote Scriptures, but that he will give to those who need it the wisdom God gives through His word. The pastor himself will be given the wisdom he needs for his own vocation, prayer, devotion, godly living and true pastoral operations.

6

The proclamation of the word

THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PROCLAMATION

A look at a Greek concordance will show that some six verbs are used regularly in the New Testament which have very much the same meaning, and are linked with the proclamation of the Gospel. They are *anaggello* (report), *apaggello* (bring tidings), *diaggello* (proclaim), *euaggelizomai* (bring good news), *kataggello* (proclaim, announce), and *kerysso* (proclaim). *Ginomai* (come to be, happen, be) and *gnorizo* (to make known) are used only once. What is common about all of them is that they constitute something, i.e. a message, which has authority and demands attention, evaluation and decision on the part of the hearer.

For the preacher who is announcer and proclaimer this has

significance. His proclamation is not from himself. It is from God, and through the preacher God demands a response. The proclamation, truly given, is always effective, i.e. either for acceptance and obedience or for rejection and (so) disobedience.

THE AUTHORITY FOR PROCLAMATION

This is seen clearly in Matthew 28:18–20:

And Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth *has been given to me*. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age’.

In Luke 24:44f., Mark 16:16f., John 20:20–23 and Acts 1:8 much the same claim and information is given. In Acts 1:2 is a commentary on these passages, i.e. Jesus gave commandments through the Holy Spirit, and ended by saying (Acts 1:8) that when the Spirit came upon them they would receive power and witness to him throughout the world. The authority was Christ’s, but then that authority was under the Father. Thus the Christian proclaimer—whoever he or she may be—goes in the authority of the Father and the Son. Romans 10:15 asks, ‘And how can men preach unless they are sent?’. This Scripture shows that *none can go authentically until sent*: then *that one has full authority*, and must be listened to as he proclaims. One would normally conclude that *a person ordained to the pastoral ministry has authentically been sent*.

RESPONSIBILITY WITH AUTHORITY

All authority carries responsibility. When one is responsible for proclaiming the word of God then that is the greatest responsibility of all. Such a one must have the mind of God, and of Christ, and walk with the utmost humility, never deflecting from the words, and never inserting the word of man, no matter how attractive and wise it may sound. The following quotes show us how solemn and responsible a thing it is to proclaim the true word of God, the living truth as it is in Him.

Divine revelation is more than the disclosure of supernatural knowledge concerning the nature and purposes of God (R. H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*, p. 151).

Revelation is the self-bestowal of the living God . . . God in the act of imparting Himself (P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 10).

. . . we are now more aware that it is God Himself Who speaks in the proclamation. Preaching is not talking about God. It is allowing God to talk. The words of the preacher are simply the medium through which the Divine Word comes. It is God who speaks (Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 154).

Preaching is the immediate, powerful, personal self-communication of the eternal Word to men (C. K. Barrett, *Biblical Preaching and Biblical Scholarship*, p. 4).

Preaching has a single purpose, that Christ might come to those who are assembled to listen (Gustaf Wingren, *Predikan; en principiell studie*, p. 296, cited by Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 154.).

As the preacher proclaims the divine act of redemption, the barriers of time are somewhat transcended and that supreme event of the past is again taking place. God’s historic self-disclosure has become a present reality (Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 153).

Preaching does more than recount and explain the ancient event. The Spirit makes the ancient event in a very real sense an event now transpiring, and the preaching is a medium of the Spirit's action in doing so. In the preaching, when it is truly itself, the event is continuing or is recurring. God's revealing action in Christ is, still or again, actually taking place (John Knox, *The Integrity of Preaching*, p. 92, cited in Mounce, op. cit., p. 153).

Preaching is the Gospel prolonging and declaring itself (P. T. Forsyth, op. cit., p. 3).

Only authentically biblical preaching can be really relevant; only vitally relevant preaching can be really biblical (John Knox, op. cit., p. 27).

... there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot (Jeremiah, 20:9).

... you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (Paul, I Thess. 2:13).

THE MODE OF PROCLAMATION

If we keep in mind that the proclamation is not only the word given by the proclaimer, but is in the context of the whole church in its witnessing role as the *kerugmatic*, prophetic, priestly, and royal community, living in love and fellowship, endowed with the gifts of ministry and the other gifts (charismata), then we can see, again, that there is a context in which proclamation is made. Not only are those addressed by the word expected to respond,

but they are invited into the holy community—Christ's body, the church.

We have a good picture of the apostolic mode in Romans 15:14–21. In particular let us look at verses 18–19:

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit . . .

From this we can see the order: (i) word and deed; (ii) the power of signs and wonders; (iii) the power of the Holy Spirit. We do not have time here to go into this subject, but see my book *God and Man in Signs and Wonders*.^{*} Briefly we can say that when Paul preached, deeds accompanied that proclamation, that is:

- (a) Paul and his companions lived in godliness and love, suffered without complaint, and 'adorned the teaching';
- (b) others heard, responded, were saved and formed a new church, showing the same spirit as the proclaimers who had come to them;
- (c) on many occasions—if not all—God attested to the word proclaimed by doing signs and wonders (e.g. Acts 14:3) which thus showed (i) the power of God, and (ii) the authentic ministry of the proclaiming team;
- (d) all of this was through and by the power of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the word, the deeds, and the signs and wonders.

^{*} NCPI, 1989.

Down through the history of the church there have been times when Paul's mode has been reproduced, especially in revivals, and more often in revivals or the initial preaching of the Gospel in the Third World. Even so, we should have faith and expectancy that God will attest to our proclamation, and that it will be proved fruitful.

THE POWER OF PROCLAMATION

Whilst we have partly dealt with this subject in Study 3 of this section, we have to see that terms such as 'gospel', 'word of the cross' and 'the word of grace' all insist on the innate power of the word. Whilst in I Thessalonians 1:5 Paul says, 'Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction', he is not inferring that 'word only' means the word lacks power, but that the word was not preached apart from the Spirit. The word cannot really be preached authentically apart from the Spirit, for they constitute the one act of proclamation.

It is also interesting to notice 'the word of grace', for grace was (i) the saving word (Acts 15:11; 18:27; 20:24); (ii) the word which kept them living in the new life (Acts 13:43; 20:32). 'Grace' and 'the word of his grace' were identical; thus when anyone was 'commended to the grace of God' (Acts 14:26; 15:40), this was the same as being 'commended to the word of his grace' (20:32; cf. 14:3). This means that there is no difference between 'grace' and 'the word of God', for God is both Speaker and Doer—grace never being absent from Him. Thus 'the word of grace'

and 'the word of God' are one, as can be seen from Romans 1:16–17; I Corinthians 1:18; I Thessalonians 1:5; I Peter 1:12 and Hebrews 4:12.

A NECESSARY ATTITUDE TO THE WORD OF GOD

We can see that if we are not convinced of the word of God, and do not stand in awe and trembling before it (Isa. 66:2, 5; Ps. 119:120; Jer. 5:22; Ezra 9:4; 10:3; 10:9), then we will not be under the word and so will not speak with authority or true effect. If we seek to induce the same results that would accompany the preaching of the word by means other than the word, then those results will not stand. We will have to continue to use human methods, human words, and human exhortation. Whilst we can get fairly calculable results from human planning, they cannot be said to come from the word of God.

For these reasons we need to return to the word of God, live in it, and proclaim it in truth.

7

***The living word—
today*****INTRODUCTION:
WHAT OF THE WORD OF GOD—TODAY?**

There are those who find the Scriptures somewhat dull and static. In a world which is constantly full of action a book such as the Bible seems unreal. Doubtless Karl Marx's *Das Capital* was similarly just a book, yet the fruits of that book have changed modern history. Some of our distaste for the Scriptures may have arisen because of the non-dynamic background and context in which we have heard the Bible read or expounded. If we have not had Christian regeneration it would be natural for the Bible to be unappealing. First let us look at the nature and effects of the word of God in its various aspects.

**THE POWER OF THE WORD
IN ITS MANY ASPECTS**

In Study 3 of this series we saw that the word of God can be seen in its various aspects: being the word of truth, the creative word (in relation to both the initial and continuing creation), the prophetic word, the enacted, living word, the word of the law, of redemption, and of sanctification, as well as the eschatological word. It would be useful for us to go back and note these elements, but what we must see is that because the word had had its effects in the days of its utterance, this does not mean that utterances for those days—or even days to come—are irrelevant for us, today. God is timeless and immutable, and so His word does not age, any more than it can be called 'new' as against 'old'. Paul told us things of the past were written as warnings for us. We are expected to study all the Scriptures, and to store up God's word in our hearts.

WHAT IS GOD'S WORD FOR TODAY?**The word of Christ as it was his word
and the word of the Father**

In Romans 10:8–17 Paul makes it clear that the apostolic word was present in the world, among men, and to be heard by them. This apostolic word was known as 'the word of Christ', at which we will look. What we need to see is what Christ thought of his own word:

- (a) 'I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as my Father taught me' (John 8:28; 5:19; 14:10; 17:14; cf. John 17:17, 'thy word is truth').

- (b) The word is the truth the Father has shown him (John 3:34; 5:19; 8:40).
- (c) Jesus lived only by the word of God (Matt. 4:4; cf. Deut. 8:3).
- (d) The word of Moses was one with his (Jesus') word (John 5:45–47; Luke 16:29).
- (e) His own words were eternal (Matt. 24:35).
- (f) His word was life-giving and life-changing (John 5:24; 6:63; 6:68).
- (g) Christ brought the word of God to Israel (Acts 10:36f.; cf. Isa. 52:7; 53:1).
- (h) The word of God—which he preached—cannot be broken (John 10:35).

**The word Christ gave to the apostles
as his word for the Church and the world**

- (a) The Gospel of the Kingdom (Isa. 57:2; Mark 1:14–15) was the Gospel to be believed when Christ preached it.
- (b) This Gospel the apostles were to preach (Matt. 28:20; Mark 16:16; Luke 24:46–49; cf. Acts 10:35–43, esp. v. 42).
- (c) The sermons in the Acts give the content of the word of Christ, i.e. *kerugma* and *evangel*—virtually the one.

- (d) Paul is a good paradigm of one commissioned by Christ with the word of the Gospel (Gal. 1:11–16; Acts 26:16–20).
- (e) Paul—as the other apostles—had *the apostolic word* (Rom. 1:1–3; 1:16–17; Acts 20:20–27). As set out in Acts 20:20–27, we have the content of the word.
- (f) This word is virtually a command (*kerugma*), as is seen in Acts 6:7; 5:32; Rom. 10:16; II Thess. 1:7f.). See 'obedience of faith' in Romans 1:5; 15:18–19; 16:26; compare with John 3:36.

**The apostolic word,
the word given by Christ**

The apostolic word—the given 'word of Christ' (see Rom. 10:8–17)—*was the events of Christ interpreted in the light of the Old Testament, and the Old Testament interpreted in the light of the events of Christ*—a third thing embracing both. What they preached has been called 'the gospel of the grace of God', 'the gospel of our Lord', 'the gospel of God', 'the gospel of his Son', 'the gospel of peace', 'the gospel of Christ', 'the gospel of your salvation', 'the word of truth, the gospel', 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God'.

In the Book of the Acts 'the gospel of grace' (20:24) and 'the word of his grace' (20:32) are equivalents, i.e. this Gospel is powerful to redeem and also to keep, i.e. feed and maintain a believer, as it does all the church. This was why people (newly converted, and Christian workers) were commended to the 'grace of God' and

‘to the word of his grace’: Acts 13:43; 14:26; 15:40; 20:32. Likewise ‘great grace’ was upon the church (Acts 4:33; 11:23), and the Lord witnessed ‘to the word of his grace’ as Stephen, ‘full of grace and power’, did great signs and wonders, and spoke to the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:8ff.).

At this point we should note that ‘grace’, ‘great grace’, ‘the word of grace’, and ‘the gospel of the grace of God’ are all one and personal, i.e. Christ working in his grace in, to, and by means of his body to his people and to the world.

The word of Christ which we preach today

What is the word we preach today? It can be none other than the word nominated above. It must, of course, be preached in purity and by the Holy Spirit.

The word of God is powerful

Anyone acquainted with the Scriptures knows that they claim that the word of God is innately powerful. God cannot speak and His intention not be effected (Isa. 55:11). When we preach or proclaim we are often disappointed because we are not wholly effective, or even partly effective. We think, ‘If the word of God is powerful, how come we do not see the results which ought to follow?’. It may be because we are not truly proclaiming the word, and it may be that sowing and husbandry are lacking. It may be that when we are—seemingly—not being heard, that the word of God is being rejected. Being accepted or rejected is not the point (cf. Isa. 6:9–13; Jer. 2:31; Matt. 13:14–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39–41; Acts 28:6–7; 13:40–41; Rom. 10:16; 11:7ff.;

Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).*

It may be that when the word does not seem powerful that it is not, in fact, the true word of Christ. It may even be the false word.

The false word

In Study 4, ‘Stealing God’s Word’, we included a section on ‘The False Word’, and the reader is advised to turn back to that study at this point of our discussion and re-read it. The constant temptation to give the false word is with us, and sometimes we believe that if we can insert human persuasion in the interest of the Gospel then that is legitimate. Paul was afraid to do this, ‘lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power’ (I Cor. 1:17; cf. 2:1–5).

CHRIST AND THE PROCLAIMED WORD TODAY

We now have to see what is the action of Christ in the world today, especially in regard to where he will be in that proclamation. It has been suggested that he will be *where he was* in the days of his flesh, and doing what he then proclaimed he would do, i.e. as in Luke 4:18–19 (cf. Isa. 61:1). It is even said that ‘He is out there where human beings are hurting, where their condition is pitiful, where men and women are victimized, and are being done injustices’. Whilst this may be true (or not true) the Gospel is primarily a Gospel for sinners, structured to save them and not simply to pacify them in their various

* This paragraph is also found in Study 3, ‘The word and its power’, p. 69f.

suffering states. We need to see,

- *To whom were the apostles (and so the church) sent?* Answer: Into all the world, to all nations, to make nations into disciples, to preach the Gospel to every creature.
- *What was the message they were to preach?* Answer: The Gospel of salvation, demanding repentance, faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and obedience to the Gospel and him.
- *What did a believing person receive as a result of the Gospel proclamation?* Answer: The gifts: first of repentance and faith, then the gifts of forgiveness, cleansing, justification, purification, regeneration, adoption, the love of God, and the Holy Spirit. This meant—in effect—the saving and healing of the person. It touched every part of him, and where doubt remained as to the renewing of the whole person, then it called for further revelation, continued teaching of the word. Nothing ought to be done which is not of the word of God.

What happened consequent to such believing? Answer: Those responding were incorporated into Christ's church, becoming members of Christ—in his body—and, being invested with gifts, began the corporate life of the church. In this corporate life there was further proclamation of the Gospel, and also prayer, praise, mutual acts of love and fellowship, and participation in Christ's plan—the fulfilling of the Father's will.

- *Where, in all of this, is Christ today?* Answer: He is present in and with his church as it proclaims the Gospel throughout all the world, in accordance with

Matthew 28:19–20. He is present in and by the person of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 16:7; cf. Eph. 3:16). He is absent from his church as was shown in Acts 1:11 (cf. John 14:1–10), even though he may appear in visions to his servants.

- *What is Christ doing today?* Answer: All that we are told in I Corinthians 15:24–28 and Revelation chapters 5 to 22, i.e. putting all enemies under his feet, subduing the kingdoms of this world until they become the Kingdom he hands to the Father, that God may be all in all. He is involved in the judgements against evil powers and finally impenitent sinners.
- *How—i.e. by what means—is Christ doing his work today?* Answer: (i) he is the head of his body the church, the members of which are his disciples, his servants, his friends and his brethren. They are working with him to bring the nations to 'the obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:25–26); (ii) he is doing this work by means of the word of the Gospel (of the Cross, of grace), for this is the word that smites the nations (Rev. 1:16; 19:15). This word is likened to fire which destroys evil (Rev. 11:5; 20:9; cf. Jer. 23:29; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12–13).

THE EFFECTIVE PROCLAMATORY AND PASTORAL WORD

The immediate pastoral concern we have is considered in the following. Is the proclamation of the word in itself effective? Do we not have to follow this up, counsel, assist people at the point where they are, and help them with what wisdom we have?

These questions may have dubious origins, and so be difficult to answer. The fact is that we must examine (as we have partly done so, above) whether what we proclaim and preach is indeed the word of God. We must seek to know whether we are one with Christ *when* we preach, for *what* we preach is really *who* we preach, i.e. Christ Jesus as Lord.

If ministry *arises from the preached word* (cf. Acts 13:43), then it must be followed by further utterance of the word of God, remembering that Christ is present in his word—there is no word of God apart from God! Whilst it is true that often signs and wonders accompanied the word and attested the word (Acts 14:3), they were not *per se* the word. It is true that events happen from the word and are part of that word, but the mere happening of events—however remarkable they may be—are not necessarily the word or its fruits. Rejecting as we must a merely informational, repetitive, and academic word (none of which is truly the word), we must not make the mistake of trying to support the word, substantiate the word, justify the word, or infuse elements of persuasion, relevance and acceptability which we believe will help hearers with the word. The word is not magical, alchemical, and does not produce fruits just because we quote it, or pontificate upon it. Knowledge of the word may not mean knowledge of Christ the Lord, and brilliant preaching may not be the word at all. What has been called ‘bibliolatry’—a non-existential preaching of the word— must be avoided, but then so must a critical human analysis of it, and certainly any attempt to work it out humanistically or politically in contemporary society.

We have seen above how we can ‘peddle the word’. We need to recognize when it is that we are utilizing it, and trying to get certain fruits, to increase church numbers, or are seeking to justify ourselves by what we can accomplish—*using the word!*

The way in which we must proclaim the word—whether *kerugmatically* or pastorally—is by being one with Christ, so that he is proclaiming through us. In this respect II Corinthians 4:7–15 is a key passage. We carry about in our bodies the killing of the Lord Jesus, the result of which is ‘death in us and life in you’. In the light of this we append other statements which pertain to true preaching of the word. These speak of the union of the preacher with his Lord, and his reverence for that word.

THE PREACHING OF CHRIST IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Under the heading above, ‘What is God’s Word for Today?’, we saw it is the word of Christ, under the various meanings which constitute that word. We need to recognize his present *absence* that obtains until his eschatological appearing (*parousia*). We need, also, to recognize his *presence*, now, by the Holy Spirit (e.g. Eph. 3:16; Rom. 8:9–11). With this, then, we recognize his active presence *with* us (Matt. 28:20), and *in* us (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27; Phil. 1:21), and we are also *in* him (Eph. 1:3–14), and *abide in* him (John 15:1–11) and he *in* us (John 14:23; I John 3:14; 4:12, 16). We also recognize that everything we do is in Christ, as he is our Head, and our High Priest. Thus he directs us in all things (cf. Acts 16:6–10)

by his Spirit.

In this way we are one in Christ as we preach ‘the word of Christ’ (*herematos Christou*; Rom. 10:17). We have seen that this ‘word of Christ’ is (i) his word as it was the word of the Father—the word given to him by the Father, and which concerned his Father; (ii) the word he gave to his apostles as his word for the church and the world, the word of the Gospel which he himself formed by his saving work; (iii) the word which he gives the world today through the church, his apostolic community. He is never *absent* from the preaching of the word (Matt. 28:18–20) but is present to the proclaimers by his Spirit, and in his Spirit.

In seeing the paradigm of apostolic preaching we take this principle unto ourselves in our preaching. We can call this, therefore, ‘the preaching of Christ’, the genitive serving in both subjective and objective senses.

THE APOSTOLICAL PREACHING OF CHRIST

Romans 10:1–21

In this passage Paul is saying (vv. 1–4) that Israel has not understood the true word of righteousness, mistaking the use of the law, in that they make it their instrument of self-justifying righteousness. Since Christ’s work justifies (Rom. 3:24), then he ends the use of the law as a way of justifying oneself. In the passage that follows (vv. 5–21) this then obtains; that is:

Just as the word of the law was to be (the way of) life to the believer in Israel, and did not require anything more than to be believed

since *the word was present*, so now, the word is near, i.e. ‘*on* your lips and *in* your heart’, then all that we are required to do is to believe it, and so confess Christ with the *lips* and his resurrection with the *heart*, for that—i.e. believing—will bring salvation! Everyone may now call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. Yes, but they cannot call on him if they have not heard of him. This important thing, then, now obtains: (i) the only way they can hear is by a preacher, and (ii) there can be no preacher unless he is sent. This is seen by Isaiah 52:7, where the preacher has been sent to publish good news—the word of salvation, the word of the King! Even so, having heard the Gospel they have not all believed the Gospel—as is shown in Isaiah 53:1—for *faithful* hearing alone is efficacious. Faithful hearing comes when the word of God (the word of Christ) is preached.

Finally Paul asks whether this Gospel—this word of Christ—has, in fact, been preached. His answer is, ‘Yes, for their sound has gone out into all the world’, i.e. the Gospel has been proclaimed universally, yet Israel—for the most part—has not heard it. That is, Israel has refused to hear it.

II Corinthians 4:7–15

This passage reveals that when the Gospel is preached it will bring an inevitable backlash, and cause the proclaimers to suffer. If the proclaimers do not ‘carry about in their bodies the killing of Jesus’, i.e. if they do not confront men and women immediately with the Cross of Christ, then this constant suffering will not attend them. The word of the Cross is a scandal to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greek (I Cor. 1:18–23) so that a reaction to apostolic preaching must be expected. Whilst the *form* of the Gospel can be preached, yet its *reality* (substance)

cannot come through without the constant carrying about in the body the killing of Jesus.

If the proclaimer is faithful to this mode of preaching then his faith will not lessen with suffering, but rather will live and flourish in the reality of the proclamation. By this means grace will spread to more and more, to the praise of God (v. 15). Rightly enough we ask, 'Who will preach in this way?', the answer to which is, 'There is no other way to preach!'

Acts 4:29-33

In this passage the believing church prays that God will (i) embolden His servants to preach the Gospel—even in the face of opposition and persecution, and (ii) stretch forth His hand in doing signs and wonders by Christ. This prayer means that when the proclaimer proclaims without trying to save himself, then the proclamation will be aided by signs and wonders—when and where they are necessary—and these signs and wonders will be done by the hand of Christ (cf. Acts 2:22; 14:3) and by God Himself (Acts 19:11f.).

Romans 15:17-19

For a fuller explanation of this passage see the later study, 'By the Power of Signs and Wonders' (pp. 384-396), but what concerns us here, immediately, is that Paul says the action of proclaiming the Gospel was 'by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, and by the power of the Holy Spirit'. He says, 'This is *what Christ wrought through me*', i.e. although he—Paul—was proclaiming the Gospel, it was Christ himself who was working, i.e. working through Paul.

A CONCLUSION TO 'THE LIVING WORD—TODAY'

We must conclude, then, that Christ is preaching his message today through his servants whom he has sent, to whom he has given the apostolical word, the Holy Spirit, and the gifts enabling them to proclaim. He proclaims through them. There is no sense that they—or we—can 'get where he is', or 'preach what he would preach', or 'do what he would do'. There is nothing that is primarily imitative of Christ. Christ inhabits his preachers, and speaks *through* them because he has first spoken *to* them (cf. Gal. 1:15-16). It is his Gospel for which he became incarnate, anointed with the Spirit, ministered, gave his life, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. The word today is alive as Christ himself. This is why it can be called 'the word of Christ'.

8

***The word
and the worship*****WORSHIP AND THE WILL OF GOD**

The will of God and worship are closely linked. When Paul said, 'For this is the will of God, your sanctification', we might say he was speaking of God's particular will as it related to the holiness of a believer. This will is seen in passages such as Ephesians 1:3–4; I Peter 1:2 and II Thessalonians 2:13. God particularly wills His people to be pure. There are many other particular things that God wills (cf. Rom. 1:10; I Cor. 1:1; 4:19), but what is primary is God's will for His creation, a matter we will examine below. Two passages directly link worship and God's will, namely Romans 12:1–2 and Ephesians 5:17–21. In the first Paul says that as we worship we are transformed and test out the will of God, and in the second that we should be wise, knowing the will of God,

and then being filled with the Holy Spirit we will truly worship. At this point we will not examine these two references. We will proceed to looking at the will of God for His creation.

GOD'S WILL FOR CREATION

The celestial creatures and elders worship God, saying, 'Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things, and *by thy will* they existed and were created'. It was God's will to bring all creation into being. However, before He created God had planned that all things would happen according to His will. This planning or wisdom is called 'the counsel of his will' (Eph. 1:11) or 'the eternal purpose' (Eph. 3:11). It is linked with a passage such as Isaiah 46:8–13, and in particular with verse 11, 'I have purposed and I will do it'. In Isaiah 48:3 the same principle is stated.

In the Ephesian Letter Paul speaks of 'the mystery of his will'. This will is 'his purpose which he has set forth in Christ', namely to head up all things in Christ (1:9–10). This will is also that both Jews and Gentiles should be to the praise of His glory (1:11–14). In 3:1–11 God's will is 'the mystery of Christ'. Thus Paul can speak of 'the plan of the mystery'. All of these statements bring us to see that from creation onwards God has been working out His plan, i.e. 'the counsel of his will'. In other words, all history is moving towards that climax which God has planned for it. This is clearly seen in Revelation 10:1–7, where the mighty angel announces that

‘in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, *the mystery of God*, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled’. We conclude, then, that the plan of God—‘the mystery’, ‘the mystery of his will’, ‘the mystery of Christ’, ‘the counsel of his will’, ‘the eternal purpose’—is that purpose God has ever had for His creation, namely (i) its creation, (ii) its redemption, and (iii) its ultimate glorification.

THE REVELATION OF GOD’S WILL IN HISTORY

Revelation 10:7 speaks of ‘the mystery of God as he announced to his servants the prophets’. Daniel 9:6 and 10 are Daniel’s confession that Israel had not listened ‘to thy servants the prophets’. Amos 3:7 states plainly that ‘Surely the Lord does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets’, and of course the prophets told it to the people. Indeed, ‘Where there is no prophecy the people perish [cast off restraint]’. In Zechariah 1:6 God says, ‘But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers?’. Paul avers that the ‘mystery of Christ. . . was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit’. All this mystery is to be fulfilled at the blowing of the seventh trumpet, and certainly, in Revelation 11:15–18 this is what happens:

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he

shall reign for ever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying,
‘We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.
The nations raged, but thy wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints,
and those who fear thy name, both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.’

All of this tells us that God’s plan for the ages issues in the triumph of Christ, and the defeat of the kingdom(s) of this world. It results in the defeat of God’s enemies, and the enthronement of Messiah. Creation is saved from destruction. God’s holiness is vindicated. As Paul points to the will of God it comports with the Book of the Revelation. Indeed I Corinthians 15:24–28 is really a précis of the Book of the Revelation. In Ephesians and Colossians Paul shows the mystery of Christ—the plan of God—is to head up (sum up, unify) all things in Christ, to fill up all things, and to reconcile all things. What God did at creation by the word, and through the Word (the Logos), i.e. the Son, He now recapitulates through the Son. This has always been His plan.

Within that primary will of God are all the things that He has willed. For example: He has willed the prophets to reveal His plan; He has willed the coming of the Son, the passion, death, resurrection and ascension; He has willed the birth of the church; Paul speaks of being an apostle by the will of God; and so on. He—God—has willed the eschatological (ultimate) things such as the glorification of man and the creation.

Worship takes place where the action of God obtains. It is in this action that we see the true nature of worship.

ALL HISTORY IS SALVATION HISTORY

‘Salvation history’ (*Heilsgeschichte*) is a term used by theologians to assert that God’s work in salvation is that which happens—i.e. is rooted—in the events and course of history, and when seen from the biblical point of view of faith then all history is in some sense or another ‘salvation history’,* i.e. all history is God’s process of effecting salvation. If this is so, then it is simply another way of saying all history is the outworking of the will of God. Non-biblical presentations and interpretations of history differ greatly from the *Heilsgeschichte* view or system.

When, then, we say that all history is salvation history, we mean that all history is action. It is moving, as Tennyson describes it, in

One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

If history is forward-moving it is also fulfilled in ‘the far-off divine event’, i.e. in the *eschaton*. This means that God is ‘the living God’, i.e. the God who is always acting. For Him to be the One ‘who is and who was and

* There is another use of the word as it is used by Karl Barth and his followers, who see the salvation events such as incarnation, and redemption ‘as taking place in a supra-historical sphere, inaccessible to secular historical research and only known to faith’ (A. Richardson, ‘*Heilsgeschichte*’, in A. Richardson (ed.), *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, SCM, 1969, p. 153).

who is to come’, He must be the One who always acts. His people, then, act with Him. Their very reason for being is that action. As they worship they thus ‘give worth’ to Him as the God who is always acting, and acting purposively. No moment of time is outside of Him, His will, His purpose and His goal. That is why His people are always purposeful. No action of theirs is pointless. *Their worship of God is always in the action: the action is the reason for worship, and the worship is also with a view to the action!*

WORSHIP AND ACTION IN HISTORY

Primal and antediluvian worship

Whatever was worship in the primal Eden must have arisen from creation. In Revelation 4:11 this fact of creation motivates the celestials to worship. Man’s action was to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth, having dominion over it. Worship vanished with a refusal to fulfil this action. Man became the centre of his own worship. Cain could not really worship God, but Abel could. He was a prophet, in the action of God. His offering ‘by faith’ was an act of witness. Many of the antediluvians worshipped by faith, ‘calling on the name of the Lord’, but others did not. Their worship was doubtless directed to gods and idols, and so was undoubtedly dynamic. The worship of *Noah and his family* was given in the constant of action by the living God—preparation of the ark, descent from the ark into a new life, and this with thankfulness (Gen. 8:20–21), and this very worship led to the

covenant promise that God would restore for always the rhythm of ‘seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night’.

Covenantal worship

When we come to *Abraham*, then we must sound the note that God has encounters with man. Such encounters were—and are—not merely so that man might have pure worship, so much as God meets with His people with a view to further action. Abraham certainly responded in action. He left familiar surroundings and his known way of life to seek ‘a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God’. His was the action of covenant, and ‘as he grew strong in faith he gave glory to God’. Worship event succeeded worship event, and all in the context of covenant. So also with Isaac and even more so with Jacob.

Exodus 4:22 and kindred references show us that God desired the worship (service) of Israel. It was in regard to this worship that God did signs and wonders and eventually freed Israel from Egypt. They worshipped Him in the Passover, and when He freed them they worshipped Him perpetually in that feast. Indeed, the great acts of God—acts generally linked with the reality of creation—called forth further feasts so that Israel became a nation of worship—‘a kingdom of priests’.

Israel, worship and acts

The history of Israel is the heart of salvation history. Israel—the nation of worship—was the matrix of world salvation.

All its acts in history were significant for the nation. Its worship of God made it strong; its idolatry almost destroyed it. As the nations were and are judged by their relationship to Abraham, so the nations of the world are seen biblically in the light of their attitude to Israel. The idolatrous nations fall under God’s judgement—He demands true worship. Everything, then, pivoted around worship, that is, both acts and worship were inseparably interrelated.

The living tabernacle

The tabernacle in Israel signified that the living God dwelled with them, but then He dwelled dynamically. The tabernacle was also designed for movement, for journeying, for pilgrimage. It was the Tent of His Presence, and the Tent of Testimony. We miss this significance if we read back into Israel’s history a regular, traditional worship, much the same as we may have on any or every Sunday morning! In this later worship our acts may be by rote, be a ritual, be a prepared and planned programme, and so be static for the most part, not anticipating dynamic action in the time of worship, or as preparation for dynamic action beyond it.

Not so with Israel. The feasts were acts of memory and rituals of faith-anticipation. They remembered with realist-dynamic memory the great acts God had done. They composed many a hymn and psalm around such acts. They vivified their living by the assurance that He was—and is—‘the God who acts’. The Passover was not a dead event to their memory. Pentecost was linked with the harvest, but not prosaically. The Feast of Booths—Tabernacles—

had the history of action behind it. Indeed, no sacrifice was merely a ritual, merely prosaic. All worship was linked with action.

The dynamics of memory and hope

Even in the Exile Israelites could live again in dream-memory the great days of the Exodus, the memorable days of Israel under its judges and kings—the glorious kingdom of David and of Solomon. Yet such were not mere memories. They linked with the great prophetic promises when the Davidic kingdom would be restored, when it would have a splendour not hitherto known. Just as the law came with splendour (Deut. 33:1–5; cf. Heb. 12:18–21), so the new and eschatological worship would come with even more brilliant splendour. Israel was always between dynamic memory and powerful hope based on the promises of God.

Christ, the Kingdom, and the new worship

Just as God appeared to His servants the prophets, priests and kings, giving them visions of Himself, but commanding them to actions, so in the New Testament worship and action were joined together. It was so in the birth narratives relating to Mary and Joseph, Zechariah, Elizabeth and John, Simeon and Anna; in the worship of the shepherds and the Magi; in the baptism brought first by John and then by Jesus. If the worship in temple and synagogue lacked the dynamic it ought to have had, this staid equanimity was disturbed by the ministry of Christ.

His worship to his Father in secret brought its powerful fruits before the people in the proclamation of the word, in loving healings, strong exorcisms, and denunciation of false worship and service. Symbolically he cleansed the temple at the initiation and completion of his ministry. He had no worship apart from action, and no action apart from worship.

The church, its worship and action

We have said much about the new worship of the Spirit brought about by redemption through Christ. We see the worship of the new people of God break out at Pentecost and begin the action of God. Nothing remains static. Whilst they worship at the temple they are proclaiming the word, disturbing the *status quo* with their gospel of grace, their proclamation of Messiah and his Kingdom. They do not deliberately incite their enemies to action, but it is an instinctive knee-jerk reaction. Persecution sends many off to preach the Gospel in other places. Prayer and worship ensue, and action issues from them. We have traced this worship and its outcome. We can also see that worship never becomes a merely static operation. It issues in service, as service itself is always linked with worship.

A feature of the worship in heaven is that it is never revealed as being an end in itself. As we have seen, worship is initiated by seeing the very nature of God, by His acts of creation, redemption, by His justice in history—vindicating His Being by the judgements He brings, by His defeat of Satan and all evil powers, and by avenging the blood of the martyrs and the saints. If we can talk

about 'the liturgy of marriage', then that celebration is one of the most powerful acts of history, and it—in turn—leads on to the opening of the Holy City to all the nations. In this City God and the Lamb constitute the Temple, as they also constitute the Throne—the place of all action and authority. Attending them are not only the worshipping celestial creatures but also the new 'kingdom of priests', i.e. the royal priests who are a kingdom of priests unto their God. It would seem, then, that eternity is all worship and service, that there is nothing that is merely repetitive in it. The whole creation—now regenerated and glorified—worships the living God.

The quiet worship

It seems undeniable that worship is not present without action, as action ought not to be without worship. What, then, of what we call 'quiet worship'? Is it not without action? First let us define 'quiet worship'. By this we do not mean dull, traditional, prosaic and desultory, any more than we would applaud worship which is not quiet but pitched high, is strained, loud, noisy, raucous, demonstrative, triumphalist, blatant and aggressive. By 'quiet' we mean calm, simple, and unmanipulated. We mean that it may be so quiet as to seem harmless and ineffective. This need not necessarily be the case. Such quietness may speak of genuine peace, love and faith. It may be a time when worshippers can contemplate God and His word. It may be a time of teaching, of spiritual feeding upon the truth, of inner transformation by reason of the Spirit's working. All kinds of things can happen.

This being the case, the worship will have come out of

an experience—or experiences—of God. The worship will certainly lead to action, if indeed it is not happening within such action. The sacrament of Baptism will be a strong reminder—an *anamnesis*—of the mighty event of the Cross and Resurrection, and will minister powerfully to faith. Likewise the Lord's Supper will be a present proclamation of the death of Christ, and of his coming again. Both sacraments may be conducted quietly yet they will speak powerfully. The grace of God will grip and affect the worshippers. Likewise the proclamation of the word will be as bread to the hungry, as water to the thirsty. By such worship the spirits of mortal beings grow strong.

Christ is in the midst of worshippers of the Father—whatever. He said he would be where two or three are gathered together in his name. The church is said always to be 'in the Father'. It is the present Holy Spirit who powerfully effects the *anamnesis*—'he will . . . bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you'. The gratitude and praise in the hearts of the devotees will well up in singing, however quiet or traditional it may be. It may sound strange to those of happy, hearty and hasty spirit. It may even sound dull, yet it may be the expression of truly mature devotion to God. It may be a witness to the steady faithfulness of God, and of a quiet heart in His people.

Doubtless we all have certain predilections when it comes to the matter of worship, certain understandings which we would make out to be ontological. We must admit other understandings into the range of true worship. Whether quiet or hearty, whether liturgical or non-liturgical, whether simple or whether highly adorned, we must allow

that others who worship in different ways may be as sincere as we are. We must, however, see that true worship issues from the word of God, and is linked with the action of God—His acts in this world.

THE PLACE OF THE WORD IN WORSHIP

The rediscovery of the book of the law in the time of Josiah—whatever ‘the book’ may have been—caused a radical reform to be carried out by the king. Not only had Israel departed into grievous idolatry, but the true worship of the temple had been missing. The book of the law spoke afresh to the people of Josiah’s time, i.e. the people of the covenant, and it spoke of the holiness of covenant, and of its true worship. At a later time Hosea (4:1–6) spoke of there being no knowledge of God in the land and that with terrible consequences. He stated, ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge’. Lack of knowledge can come from not having God’s word or law in possession, or—having it—from rejecting the word of God as it has been spoken, and of course, written. Life, worship and service are dependent upon true knowledge, and true knowledge can come only from the word of God.

In the New Covenant knowledge of God comes through His love and forgiveness: ‘They shall all know me, from the the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more’. Call it the word of the Cross, the word of forgiveness or the word of love, it is

still *the word*, and it brings true knowledge to man, i.e. knowledge of God.

Worship—we observe again—was born afresh by the Spirit at Pentecost, but it was worship which came with the word. Firstly it was the one hundred and twenty on whom the Spirit came who spoke and worshipped, telling ‘the wonderful works of God’, and then it was Peter who gave the Pentecostal discourse. It was so when the man was healed at the Gate Beautiful, and then when the apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin. When the apostles were put in prison the angel released them, saying, ‘Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people *all the words* of this Life’. The apostles recognized their call to give themselves ‘to prayer and to the ministry of the word’, and Stephen also addressed the Sanhedrin with a long sermon.

In reporting the above comments on the word, we are not making out a case for the use of the word in worship, for either it is the case or it is not. What we are saying is that worship was born of the word, and the word was an integral part of the worship for the reasons stated above, i.e. knowledge of God came through the word, and only those who have this knowledge can give ‘reasonable worship’ (Rom. 12:1, *logiken latreian*).

Just as Jesus was asked to read the lection in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–30) and so to give his commentary upon the set passage, so Paul—by invitation—followed the lections of law and prophecy with the word of teaching (Acts 13:13–41). We have good reason to believe the early church would have used the Scriptures in this way. Even so, *the use of God’s word was a charismatic one*.

When we say that the use of God's word was a *charismatic* one, we mean that there was no utterance of the word—whether *kerugmatic* (proclamatory), didactic (teaching), *paraenetic* (hortatory, i.e. exhortation), or worshipful—which was not given by the Spirit. Paul's statement of I Thessalonians 1:5, 'For our gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction', does not imply that the Gospel can be delivered without power, the Spirit, and full conviction. Paul would say that if ever such a thing happened then it would not be the Gospel. There is not a gospel that is true without the Spirit. In fact in Paul's reckoning nothing is authentic without the Spirit. He tells the Thessalonians, 'when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God which is at work in you believers'. This true word of God is dynamic—it is 'at work in you believers'. Thus in Acts the word grows, increases, multiplies and expands. In Colossians 3:16 the worshippers are urged, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, [as you] teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and [as you] sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God'. In Ephesians 5:18–20 we have the same sequence of worship, but in this latter case the heart is filled with the Spirit. Thus the heart filled with 'the word' and the heart filled with 'the Holy Spirit' are equivalents. In I Corinthians 2:1–5 the *kerugmatic* word is delivered only through the Holy Spirit, and in I Peter 1:12 the *kerugmatic* word is preached 'through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven'.

We are driven to conclude that no authentic act or word of the apostolic church was apart from the Holy Spirit, any more than it was apart from the word of God. Surely, then, all this is summed up as being the new worship in the Spirit (John 4:20f.; Phil. 3:3). This, however, is not to say that such worship was absent from Israel. The psalms and songs in Israel's history were the source of teaching and learning, of worship and praise, and undoubtedly arose from the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit.

According to chapters 12 and 14 of I Corinthians, the word of God came through in 'a hymn, a lesson, a

revelation, a tongue or an interpretation'. In Ephesians 5:18–20 psalms and hymns and spiritual songs were addressed to one another, so that they, too, were *the word of teaching*. Note also that the ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher—all of which were delivered during worship—were 'word' ministries. It seems it was impossible for worship to be without the word. As we have seen in our rubric above, Paul advised, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly [as you] teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and [as you] sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God' (Col. 3:16).

If to the above we add all the occasions when teaching took place, then we have a considerable use of the word. In his Letters Paul often refers to what he has already taught his readers. We know he taught at great length in Ephesus and Corinth. We know that Timothy and Silas taught the Thessalonians, as Epaphras did the Colossians. For the most part the Epistles were read in the churches (e.g. Col. 4:16), and Revelation chapters 2 and 3 surely endorse this custom. The Book of the Revelation was to be read aloud (1:3), and the very reading would be a source of blessing to the reader, let alone to the hearers. In the pastoral Epistles Paul exhorts both Timothy and Titus to constantly teach the word of God. We know, too, that the elders were to be 'apt to teach', and the deacons to 'hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience'. Holding the mystery, then, they could scarcely refrain from teaching it!

We must, of course, understand that 'apt to teach' does not necessarily mean what we would today think it meant. It would not be just theological reasoning, the

impertation of dogmatics, or even exposition of portions of Scripture. The rabbinic commentaries on the lections were intended to be practical, related to the lives of the hearers and good instruction in the way of living. So, too, the elders would have followed the apostles in showing the word of God to be His message for them for the moment. As Paul put it, this word was ‘profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work’ (II Tim. 3:16–17). Paul’s purpose is stated in:

...preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths (see II Tim. 4:1–5; I Tim. 2:1–2).

THE RENEWAL OR REVIVAL OF WORSHIP

Vitalizing attempts to renew the church

Much has been researched, written and practised in regard to worship over these past few decades. Some have thought that a revival of the church might come through renewed or revised liturgies. It is certain that liturgies teach as they are used, but the question is one of the source and origin of such formulated worship. Doubtless liturgies have grown out of spiritual fullness, out of the word of God, and out of the fellowship and the

proclamatory action of Christ’s people. In some cases they are used too formally, and in others too haphazardly, and even with the unfortunate fraction of their complete form. It is doubtful whether liturgies, of themselves, could effect a revival of faith.

Others see a renewal in worship by the use of ‘body-worship’, i.e. involving all members in some form of worship participation. From having only one leader in all things there are often many leaders in many things. The service is often parcelled out in a democratic distribution. Some congregations have a sharing form of service, either in a typical ‘encounter’ format, or in more intimate ‘house church’ gatherings. The present charismatic forms that worship takes—and they are many—encourage the use of the gifts of the Spirit, and provided these are genuine and the use of them does not become an end in itself, this form of worship can be quite stimulating. Again, it will not necessarily lead to a revival of the church, although it is often claimed that this is the revival of the church. Leaders of this kind of worship know how much can be done by skilful leadership, rather than by the worship being—of itself—spontaneous.

Authentic renewal or revival of the church

In the light of what we have discovered, i.e. that worship springs from and leads to God’s action in history, then the church must be in the stream of such to be vital and alive. The question is, ‘How many congregations understand the nature of salvation history? How many comprehend the action of God in (i) election; (ii) “the plan of the mystery”, “the mystery of his will”,

“the counsel of his will”, “the mystery of Christ”, “the eternal purpose”, “the mystery of God”; and (iii) the glorification of man and creation?”. Should they not, then, be tutored in these things, since the writers of Scripture certainly had this view of Him ‘who is and who was and who is to come’, i.e. the God who controls all history and shapes it up to its destined end? If congregations do not know the destiny of creation, then from what source can authentic hope spring?

The first step must be to teach along such lines. The Thessalonian church began with such teaching (I Thess. 1:10). It would seem that all churches were so tutored. They were given the biblical world-view and time-view, and worked within that framework of Divine thinking. They had some comprehension of apocalyptic. Even with such comprehension there must be the understanding that proclaiming the Gospel is the life and purpose of the church, that it is the witness to Christ, and the fulfilling of the plan of God. The mere *rationale* of proclamation will not be enough to move the church to action. It will take more than that. Redeemed men will want to redeem men. The miracle of salvation will bring its own constraint to save others.

All truth comes to us today from the word of the Scriptures, opened to us by the Spirit (cf. Luke 24:44; John 16:12–15), and comprehended in the historic stream of the life of the church. Therefore, a revival of the church—the worship-and-action, the action-and-worship dialectic—will not obtain without a reformation of biblical teaching, the personal experience of repentance and faith, the revelation of the immense grace of God, and the sense of need of that grace, as well as the appropriation of it.

The word of God in the revival of the church

In practice, what is the preaching of the word of God? Harmless homilies? Topical tidbits? Communication of information which is biblical, moral, social, and spiritual? Exhortation to good living, social justice and social action—including the present ethical issues? Or is it the teaching of the eternities—the proclamation of Christ, his redemptive and reigning Lordship, the great issues of righteousness, truth, holiness, goodness and love? Does it embrace the state of man and the need for repentance and faith? Does it speak of the new birth, of the new creation, of participation in God’s redemptive plan for the world? Does it portray the plan of God for history, the *schema* of God for winning the nations and defeating the massive evil which confronts us in our own generation? Does it envisage the triumphant *telos*—the victory of God at the consummation of the age? Is the great power of the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension so presented that men and women tremble before God and become regenerated in His sight?

Without these striking verities our worship will always be dull, and prosaic. It will be horizontal in its dimension, cut off from the vertical. When our worship is in the midst of these verities, the action of the living God, and when it is given to the redemption of man and the sharing of spiritual power with the nations, then the church will be revived. Then its worship will be on the truly grand scale. In times of revival a fresh flood of the Spirit and the Gospel breaks forth, and cities, towns, districts, villages and hamlets are inundated. Worship is at last a reality. It is the source and cause of action, as action is also

the source and cause of true worship. All God's acts—past, present and future; actual and sacramental—are vividly alive to the spirits of men and women. They are caught in a joyous and true worship of the living God.

Section Three

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN, WOMAN AND SEXUALITY

An introduction to

**THE DOCTRINE OF MAN,
WOMAN AND SEXUALITY**

One of the most sensitive issues in pastoral ministry is that of human sexuality, and the many matters that arise from and relate to it. It has been the object of much research, especially over the past couple of decades, and many studies have been published as a result. Sexuality has always been the most living issue for human beings, involving as it does all human relationships. Some of the studies and manuals which deal with this theme are deficient in their biblical understanding, even if helpful in their examination of the subject and their practical prescriptions.

The two rather brief—though detailed—studies in this section will help to open up the subject, and perhaps provide a better epistemological basis for pastoral understanding and practice in counselling. Because of the sensitive nature of the theme, all too little preaching and teaching has been given, and some pastors feel that it belongs more to medics and psychologists to give teaching and handle the issues of love, courtship, marriage, man–wife relationships, family relationships, divorce and remarriage.

It is imperative that pastors understand the biblical teaching, and see the issue in the wide framework of knowing God and knowing Man, and the problems which arise when a person is not in true relationship with God, and hence has inadequate human relationships. The pastor's family is always regarded with

interest, as people wish to see how relationships work out in that context. Pastors, then, need to know the matters of sexuality for their own marital and familial relationships. They also need to know how they can, themselves, be proof against some of the temptations and dangers that cluster around this area of human living, especially as they seek to help others who have problems arising from ignorance of sexuality and human relationships.

The two studies here presented need to be followed and supported by wider reading, and helpful titles can be found in the Bibliography at the end of the book.

1

The liberating truth of God and Man, male and female

GOD, CREATION AND MAN ARE GOOD

It is axiomatic that God is good, otherwise there is no true reality. All that God created was *good* (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25), and when creation was completed it was *very good*. (Gen. 1:31) Since *good* means 'of excellent quality, complete and full', *good* then means 'functional and appropriate'.

If God is good, then creation must be good. We note that because of the curse the appearance and action of creation it not wholly as it was *at* creation (Gen. 3:14–19; Rom. 8:19–23). Even so, its essential nature has not altered and will one day be revealed, i.e. in the new (renewed) creation (Rev. 21:1–3; cf. Matt. 19:28).

Man, too, must be essentially good, for it was when he was created that God said, of all creation, ‘It is very good’. Man is responsible for his own fall, and yet he too is *essentially* good, and that shall be apparent in his regeneration in the new age of the new heavens and earth (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 21:1–3).

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

The primal temptation to man was that he would be *as* God (i.e. innately good) and would truly know good and evil. This he could not do since, by his rebellion, his heart became evil (Jer. 17:9). The only way to know what is good and what is evil is through God’s word, for there the truth is made known. Man has to be regenerated, anointed by the Spirit, given spiritual sight, so that he can derive from the word of God the truth (II Tim. 3:15–17).

LEARNING FROM THE END TO THE BEGINNING AND FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE END

We would expect the truth as found in the Scriptures to begin at the beginning and end at the end, i.e. from Genesis to the Revelation, in which case we would be surprised to know that more is spoken in Isaiah concerning creation than in Genesis. Even so, the end or *telos* (climax) helps us to see what the beginning was about because we come to know its goal—having seen the movements of history.

If we use this method we will discover at the end that God is a faithful Creator, that His creation has been brought to fulfilment, that Man (man and woman) has come to his good end and fulfilment, and that the wisdom of God by which He planned all things is authentic. With this useful conclusion we can see ‘God is good’, i.e. a ‘faithful Creator’, and in this knowledge and experience we then come to good health.

THE TRUE REVELATION OF MAN, AND (SO) OF MAN AND WOMAN*

As we begin thinking of created man, note that we will now use the generic term for man (man and woman) with a capital: so ‘Man’. We will use ‘man’ for the male person and ‘woman’ for the female person. In Genesis 1:26–30 and 5:2 we come to the conclusion that Man was made in the image of God, and that entity—i.e. the male-female entity—was called ‘Man’. In Genesis 2:18–25 we see that man the male was first created, and woman was created by God from his side, and that together they are Man as a one-flesh entity.

In Ephesians 5:21–33 Paul speaks of the nature of marriage of the bride and bridegroom. He reveals, however, that he is not primarily speaking of man and woman as husband and wife but of Christ as the Bridegroom and the church as the Bride. This is sometimes said to be the

* To understand man and woman is to have that wisdom which can help us to aid (counsel) persons—male and female—in their problems and sufferings.

archetypal truth of which human marriage is an ectype, i.e. a derived product or copy working on the same principles as the archetype. The True Marriage, then, is the ontological reality of which human marriage ought to be a copy, and so—for the human scene—truly ontological. He makes it clear that he is not likening the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb to human marriage, but—to the contrary—is likening human marriage to that of the Bride and the Lamb.

The revelation of Woman as true Feminity

On this basis, then, if we can understand Christ's Woman, the True Bride, then also we can understand the truth of archetypal Feminity, and so of human feminity. In Revelation 12:4–6, 14–17 she is depicted as the Woman who brought forth the Christ-child, brought forth other children (the members of the Church) and was consequently persecuted by the dragon, so significant she was and is in her work and effects.

In Revelation 19:7–8 and 21:1–3, 9ff. (cf. Eph. 5:23) we have the Bride, who in Galatians 4:26 is 'the Jerusalem above', depicted as 'the mother of us all', thus linking with Eve 'the mother of all living' (Gen. 3:20) and even Sarah 'a mother of many nations' (Gen. 17:16). This shows in principle the vastness and power of feminity. Again the True Woman is depicted under the figures or realities of the Body of Christ, the Church and the Holy City. The Holy City has its gates open day and night and the nations pour into it, for in it is the river of life, the holy throne of God, and the tree of life for the

healing of the nations. What dignity and power she has, then, 'having the glory of God', and what holiness as she is 'clothed with fine linen, bright and pure . . . the righteous deeds of the saints'. This is the archetypal Feminity.

This Feminity is better understood by contrast with the unholy city Babylon, who is 'mother of harlots', rides upon the Beast, kills the prophets and saints, and seduces the nations. Hers is a false feminity, dominating, lecherous, bitter, angry and ambitious. If she is a 'helpmeet' to the Beast, then it is only to be devoured by him!

The revelation of Man as true Masculinity

The True Man is Messiah, the Son of God, the Warrior-King of all ages, the great Redeemer, Judge and Victor-King, to whom is to be the obedience of the peoples' (Gen. 49:10; Ps. 2:6–7; Isa. 9:6–7; Dan. 7:13ff.). This Crusher of the head of Satan (Gen. 3:15), this Great Prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18–22, and the Son of David, is the Bridegroom, the Husband of the Bride, the Head of his Church, the Lamb on the throne with God in the Holy City. He is the one who, having crushed his enemies, gives the Kingdom to the Father, reigning at His right hand.

The true Man and the true Woman together

This one's Masculinity is highlighted by the Bride's Feminity. As her Head he has cleansed her by 'the washing of the water and the word', aided her in the

preparation of her white garments ('the righteous deeds of the saints'), and his love is such that nothing can separate her from that love. There can be no expectation of eternity without the Bridegroom and the Bride, for they are one in their vocation.

We conclude that her Feminity is outlined by his Masculinity, his Masculinity by her Feminity. Their utter 'one-flesh' union tells us of the oneness of Man, the true humanity. When, then, we see the archetypal Man and Woman, and understand their union-in-vocation, we can go back to the creational accounts of Man—man and woman as a 'one-flesh' entity—and know what it is to be a man and woman, and to be Man as one.

2

Man and woman in sexual misery and recovery

SEXUALITY AND LOVE

The theological understanding that God is love, Man has been created in love, and that love is the understood commandment 'from the beginning' (cf. Gen. 1:1; John 1:1; I John 1:1; John 13:34; 15:12; I John 2:7–8; 3:10–11) arises from a revelation of the true nature of God, and so the true nature of Man, i.e. Man made in the image of God.

Whilst it is often supposed that sexual love is of another order than that of human affection and love to one's neighbour, yet the love which ought to be reflected

in all relationships is in fact the essential love of God (known in the New Testament as *'agape'* and sometimes called *'divine love'*).

MAN'S ORIGINAL LOVE

In creation the man and the woman were *'one flesh'*, and came together in that one-flesh union. The children that would have issued from so pure a union would have had a great advantage, for their parents in the *'one-flesh'* union would have reflected the full image of God. It is sometimes said that although God is not sexually masculine since He is spirit, yet the male human and the female human reflect elements of masculinity and femininity in God, and in God these are included under the masculine terms *'He'*, *'Him'* and *'His'*. Man is male-female as a race, for the man and woman together reflect the full image of God.

When woman was taken from man's side, the man said, *'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'*. So they were one, in love, but their love was not only sexual. Sexuality was related to their love, and expressed in their love, but love was not limited to biologically active sex. Sexuality is a term which should cover the whole of the man-woman relationship, and not be limited to the act of sexual intercourse. It can be a term which covers the whole range and matter of family and its relationships.

Christians often think in terms of *'the family of God'*, and not generally of *'the family of man'*. Both need to be taken into consideration.

In Adam all are brethren. Those who are in Christ are brethren in a richer sense. Even so, we must remember all are brethren even if not in the richer way of being members of Christ's body, the church.

ALL FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS DERIVE FROM GOD THE FATHER

Ephesians 3:14–15 says, *'... the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named'*. This is capable of meaning, *'the Father from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name'* (*NEB*), *'his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name'* (*NIV*), *'all fatherhood everywhere derives its name'* (J. A. Robinson). It really means that wherever family (*patria*) or fatherhood (*pater*) is found, it derives from God the Father. This is reinforced in Ephesians 4:6, *'one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all'*. When God *created* man, He gave true family relationship out of His Fatherhood. In *redemption* He renews this (John 14:6; Gal. 4:4–6).

In I John 3:10–11 and 4:19–20 it is clear that not to love God is sin, and not to love one's brother is not to love God. To hate a person equals murder.

THE BREACH OF TRUE LOVE AT THE FALL

The account of the Fall involves God and Man. Man in innocence trusted God, had a sense of *telos*, and lived in

genuine vocation. The man and the woman were one. This state was strong, but depended upon their trust in God's character, and so His word. Eve chose to distrust the word of God, trusting the word of the serpent. Adam listened to the word of his wife, and not God's word. Hence the relational 'death' (cf. II Cor. 5:15), the breach between Man and God.

The bliss was gone, for when Man (male-female entity) breached the relationship with God, then the man and the woman broke relationship (this is apparent in Gen. 3:10–19), and the effects of this were seen in the first child (Cain), and the consequent history of relationships throughout the human race.

GOD AND SEXUALITY

Some masculinists think of God only as masculine, and some feminists only as feminine. Some think of Him as Male-Female. This latter is because Genesis 1:27 says, 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created *him*; male and female he created *them*'. What we have to keep in mind is that God does not have sexuality as such, i.e. something corresponding to our biological sexuality. This is because (i) He is Spirit, and not flesh, and (ii) He is Creator and not a procreator. If, then, in God there are two elements which we would call 'masculinity' and 'femininity', these can in no way correspond to the two human elements of the same names. God is never *like* man, though man may be like God. We have no criteria by which to assess God, for He often asks, 'To *whom* [or, *what*] shall you liken me?'

All we know is that the masculine pronouns are used of God, and not the feminine ones. We must conclude that whatever feminine element may be in God, it is *subsumed* under the masculine, since He is called 'He'. This may be why the children of God are called 'the sons of God', and why in the new age all will be 'sons'. This is no disparagement of femininity—whether it reside in God or in Man—but only an indication of its ontological being and reality. God's masculinity is, of course, way beyond the human male's masculinity.

THE MISERY OF ASYMMETRIC SEXUALITY

When what—in the New Testament—is called 'divine love' (*agape*) is (was) lost to man through the Fall, then substitute forms of love are required. Hence self-love. The Greeks called altruistic love for others *eros*, and forms of genuine affection they called *philia*. The word *agape* was little used, but was christianized by the early church to mean 'God's love to us, and that love working in us and through us to others'. Today we talk about *eros*—erotic love—as relating to biological sexuality. This was not really the way the Greeks thought about it, and it shows us the shift in the meaning and use of words which can occur.

Sexuality is really the whole matter of man–woman relationships, and as such covers all forms of relationships—whether male to female, male to male or female to female. That each of us has gender is both a biological

and psychological fact. Whilst the question of biological sexual relationships does not always obtain—i.e. father with daughter, mother with son, brother with sister—yet the matter of gender is always present.

When our relationship with God is not true, and when a breach is made, then our essential sexuality becomes asymmetric. That is, when a child is out of relationship with one or both parents it has a deficient relational situation and develops wrong images of father and mother, and so male and female. These wrong images often develop aberrant and deviate forms of sexuality-approaches such as incest, homosexuality, bisexuality, and transvestite patterns. They can also produce frigidity in sexual intercourse, or what has been termed ‘over-sexuality’, i.e. undue sexual pressure and demand of the partner. Such undue pressure comes from belief in a satisfying sexuality, frustration at not achieving it, and an assertive attempt to do so, all of which may enlarge the frigidity of the other partner.

Whilst we tend to see human (biological) sexuality as a category in itself—missing as we do its wider connotation—then we seek to treat sexual problems within the category of biological sexuality, missing its wider framework which is the whole of human relationships. Only when we treat the wider problems of parent to child, child to child, and person to person relationships can we even envisage healing.

What we must see is that Man’s misery is not simply from his failure to achieve ideal or satisfying sexual goals, but that his misery derives from wrong, twisted, and deficient relationships, first with God and then with his fellow mankind.

TOWARDS A HEALTHY SEXUALITY

Again, when we say ‘sexuality’, our emphasis is not primarily upon the biological aspect. All of us have sexuality—whether married or not. We could almost coin a term—‘*relationality*’. That would fit. Within relationality we may or may not have biological sexual acts. If we are single we may never—and need never—have biological sexual action. If we are married then we will normally have sexual action. However—as we have pointed out—all relationships are affected by our relationship with God—whether good or bad.

The first move towards proper sexuality is to be reconciled to God through the Cross. This destroys our enmity of the past, both with God and others. Reconciled to God we take the second step because we are reconciled to all others, even though some of those ‘others’ may not accept our new attitude of reconciliation. Sons and daughters of parents will be renewed in all areas of relationships when they are reconciled to parents and to other members of the family, then with friends, neighbours, and—so-called—enemies. Our second step, then, is to effect in practice the reconciled relationships, whether this is accepted or not.

The third move is to recognize the ontological-functional nature of true sexuality. If we are angry at not being married—blaming God and others for that fact—then we should recognize that although in God’s (ontological) order biological sexuality is limited to marriage, yet basic sexuality—i.e. *relationality*—is not limited to marriage. Outside of marriage the man-woman entity operates in rich relationality as the true race of humanity presses on to

fulfil the will of God. The range of operations here is vast, the opportunities many, and all of it most rewarding and fulfilling. For this reason we should see our anger deriving from asymmetric sexuality as borne upon the Cross, so that we are cleansed from it. We are thus free to live in healthy sexuality.

THE CLEANSING OF UNHEALTHY SEXUALITY

Sexual guilt seems to be the most powerful of all in its effects upon the person. Doubtless this is because sexual impurity is one of the deadliest operations humans can undertake. True love which is directed wrongly brings tragedy. Just as God does not tolerate the worship of idols, and calls such 'fornication' and 'idolatry', so wrongly directed sexuality (biological or otherwise) is attended with deep guilt feelings. Some hide or suppress their guilt feelings, but the damage is going on in the secret heart (Ps. 51:6). The human spirit is made for true love.

The question is, 'How can we be rid of such guilt, and so be free to have true relationships?'. The answer is, 'The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin', i.e. the person who comes to the Cross for cleansing grace can be free for ever of the past sins and failures. A grace-chastity is given to the believer: 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow'. In this new purity marriages can be healed. True marriages can be undertaken. Also the unmarried who have sinned in this area can be free to live richly in the state in which they now are.

THE FRUITS OF TRUE SEXUALITY

Where true human relationships obtain there will be security between husband and wife, parents and children, children and children, as also with others. This of course has to be worked at in this present evil (sinful) age. The powers of evil will still seek to destroy or distort this most powerful human element, i.e. sexuality in its proper forms and operations. Yet the foundation for true sexuality has been laid in the love of God and—so—love to others. Whilst temptations will surely come, yet the drive to wrong sexuality can be overcome by living in the satisfying norm of human sexuality. It is through this—as through the revelation of God in Christ—that the message comes, 'God is love!'

Section Four

**THE DOCTRINE OF
BIBLICAL HEALING**

An introduction to

**THE DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL
HEALING**

As in our other series within this book, we have not set out to outline a 'How to' prescription for healing. The whole subject has been a vexed one over many years, but at the same time, the matter of healing has always been at the heart of the church's ministry, whether or not it involves the care of doctors, hospitalization and the use of medicines. The line between 'the cure of souls'—i.e. ministering to the mind and heart of troubled people—and the cure of organic illness is not easily defined. Indeed these two things are intimately tied together.

Whilst we ought to have sympathy and compassion for the ill in mind or body—or both—we ought not to let those feelings blind us to the fact that, since God sometimes smites with sickness for chastisement, and even punishment, then we ought not to be hasty in our desires

and endeavours to heal persons who are not well. Sometimes our views of illness and healing are very simplistic. They lack a broad knowledge of the theme in Scripture, and we should seek to see the widest biblical perspective possible. If we do not, then we may do damage in pastoral ministry.

For example, if we lay all illnesses at the feet of Satan, and conclude that all sicknesses are *per se* wrong, and even evil, then we will set about in a certain way to bring cures. Since the Scriptures tell us clearly that God is the Wounder and the Healer, then it is clear that Satan takes a secondary place. It is to God we must go.

Again, if we insist that the person who is ill exercise all the faith needed to heal him or her, then when a person does not recover from illness they will feel the weight of their so-called 'lack of faith'. The matter is not as simple as that! When we realize that some people take good health and illness as indicating God's attitude to them, then an imposed guilt for sickness will worsen their condition.

It is good, therefore, to examine the Scriptures closely before embarking on the pastoral ministry of healing, and these notes should at least provide an introduction to the subject. They can be supplemented by some of the books mentioned in the Bibliography.

1

God the Wounder and the Healer

GOD'S CONTEXT OF WOUNDING AND HEALING

Sickness and disease seem to occupy human thinking more, almost, than anything. Man's thinking about God is greatly influenced by sickness, disease and disaster. Sickness is the largest of all industries in the Western world.

- In creation there is no sickness or wounding (Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 3:11).
- Pain, sorrow, guilt, broken relationships, alienation and curse come from man's fall into sin (Gen. 3:16–19; 4:7–9; 23–24; 6:5, 11–12; cf. Rom. 1:18–32).

• Teaching on wounding and healing are primarily linked with the Abrahamic Covenant:

- (a) Abram and Sarai (Gen. 12:15–20);
- (b) Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 20:1–7);
- (c) Jacob and the angel (Gen. 32:32);
- (d) Moses and circumcision (Exod. 4:24–26);
- (e) Egypt and Israel (Exod. chs 7–12).

• Christ's healings in the New Testament are linked with the Covenant and the Kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 12:28).

GOD THE WOUNDER AND THE SMITER

Exodus 15:26 is the heart of the matter. He is both Smiter and Healer.*

God is the Smiter and Wounder: the Old Testament

- (a) Deuteronomy 32:39; I Samuel 2:6; II Kings 5:7; Exodus 4:11; Amos 3:6; Isaiah 45:7; 31:2.
- (b) Israel, idolatry and sickness (Exod. 32:7ff.; Deut. 4:15ff.).
- (c) Israel, presumption and sickness: Miriam, (Num. 12); Uzzah (II Sam. 6); Uzziah (II Chron. 26:16–21); David counting the people (I Chron. 21:1ff.).
- (d) Israel, sin and sickness (Ps. 31:10; 32:3–4; 38:1ff. cf. Isa. 1:3f.; 24:4–5).

- (e) Disobedience and sickness (Lev. 26:14–22; Deut. 28:27–35, 58–62; cf. Isa. 1:3ff.). Note that disobedience and idolatry are often seen as the one, as in I Samuel 15:22–23.
- (f) Natural sickness. We find no special cause of sin, disobedience, or immorality linked with it: Elisha (II Kings 13:14, 20–21); Hezekiah (II Kings 20:1–11; cf. II Chron. 32:24–26). Note Hezekiah's continuing pride.
- (g) Other causes. Note God (above); Satan (Job chs 1–2; I Chron. 21:1).

God is the Smiter and Wounder: the New Testament

- (a) The Gospels: Matthew 9:1–8; John 5:1–14 (esp. v. 14).
- (b) The Acts: 5:1ff. (Ananias and Sapphira); 9:8–9 (Paul); 12:20–23 (Herod); 13:6–11 (Elymas).
- (c) The Epistles: I Corinthians 5:3–5 (cf. 11:32); 11:27–32; II Corinthians 1:8–10; 12:7–10; Philippians 2:25–27*; I Timothy 5:23*; James 5:13–16.
- (d) The Revelation: (i) *the seven seals* (6:1–17; 8:1–5): loss of peace, then famine, plagues, earthquakes, etc.; (ii) *the seven trumpets*: (8:7–9:21; 11:15–19); (iii) *the seven bowls of wrath* (16:1–21).

* Note that smiting, wounding and healing are linked with the Mosaic Covenant.

* Natural sickness?

GOD IS THE HEALER

- The fact that He is healer (Exod. 15:26; 23:25ff.; Deut. 7:15; 32:39; Ps. 103:3; Isa. 33:24).
- Healing is within the Mosaic Covenant (see above, and below).
- Further Scriptures referring to God's healing are: Psalms 6:2; 9; 30:2; 41:4; 107:17–20; 147:3; Jeremiah 33:6–9; (cf. Jer. 8:22; 30:12–17; 46:11); Isaiah 57:18–19; 58:6–9; Ezekiel 37:1–14; 47:12; Revelation 22:1–3. Note miraculous healings in Israel, e.g. by Elijah and Elisha.
- Healings in the New Testament. See Gospels and Acts.

Question. Where does Satan figure in all sicknesses? Does Satan control sickness, or does God? Does God use Satan to bring about sickness, and does He give the powers of darkness the ability and permission to afflict sickness? See Job 1:8ff. and 2:4ff.

2***Christ the healer—
then and now*****THE COMING OF JESUS
AND THE KINGDOM**

- John the Baptist announced the Kingdom, prepared people for it, and linked Jesus with its coming (Matt. 3:1–12; Mark 1:1–8; John 1:29).
- Jesus announced the Kingdom, calling for repentance and faith (Mark 1:14–15; cf. Luke 9:1–11; 10:1–20).

JESUS MESSIAH, THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND HEALING

- Jesus as Messiah announced healing in conformity with Isaiah 52:7; 61:1–2 (cf. Luke 4:17–21). Note John the Baptist's doubt concerning Jesus' Messianic ministry and Jesus' proof of it to John (Luke 7:18–23).

□ He carried out healing as part of the Kingdom ministry (Matt. 4:23; 12:28; Acts 10:38; Luke 9:1–11; 10:1–20; note esp. Luke 9:2, 11; 10:9). Whilst man may have given himself over to Satanic attack (cf. Eph. 2:1–3; I John 5:19; Heb. 2:14–15), Christ was liberating them. This was the wholeness of man achieved in and by the Gospel of the Kingdom, and linked with the Covenant. See Luke 13:10–17 (woman with a spirit of infirmity ‘a daughter of Abraham’) and Luke 19:1–10 (Zacchaeus ‘a son of Abraham’). His healings were only for Israel (cf. Mark 7:26–27).

□ From the above, we must understand Jesus’ reasons for healing, i.e. the Kingdom of God against the kingdom of Satan (cf. Luke 11:14–26; Acts 10:38; Matt. 12:28). His healing was delivering people from the thrall of Satan. It was bringing man back to creational dignity.

JESUS’ MODES AND METHODS OF HEALING

□ Most healings were instantaneous: Matthew 4:23–25; 8:16–17; 15:28.

□ Some healings were gradual: John 9:1ff. (a blind man, with clay and spittle); Mark 7:32ff. (a deaf mute, fingers and spittle); 8:22ff. (a blind man, with spittle).

□ Some healings were done at a distance: Matthew 8:5–13 (the centurion’s servant); John 4:46–54 (the official’s son).

□ Some healings were done by his touch: Matthew 8:3, 15; 9:29; 20:34; Mark 7:33; Luke 22:51.

□ He allowed others to touch him and be healed: Luke 6:19; 8:44; Matthew 14:34–36.

□ He healed by word of command: Matthew 8:3; Luke 7:14; Matthew 9:6.

Note the principle of healing in Matthew 8:6–17; cf. Isaiah 53:4.

JESUS’ HEALING—THEN AND NOW

• The gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:15) became the Gospel of redemption by virtue of the Atonement (the death and resurrection of Christ), so that the church (from Pentecost onwards) announced salvation. They also announced the Kingdom (Acts 8:5, 7, 12; 19:8ff.; 20:21–24; 28:23, 31). Thus healings were continued.

• Healings were continued, and done by Messiah, Jesus the Lord; i.e. he healed as ever, through the hands of the apostles (Acts 2:43; 3:12, 16; 4:29–30; 8:6–7; 14:3; 19 *passim*; cf. Mark 16:20).

MESSIAH HEALS TODAY AS THE KINGDOM IS PROCLAIMED

We recognize that ‘blanket healing’ as such was part of Jesus’ ministry in Israel but not in that intensity of degree in the apostolic ministry. Even so, the Kingdom was still

proclaimed in the same principle, and often there were healings. They were linked with the Gospel of redemption. We should, then, see healing today. Messiah is working, as ever, through His people. Church history shows us that healings have taken place when the Gospel opens up new areas.

Note that (i) faith and unbelief were (are) linked with healing and opposition to healing. See Matthew 13:58; Mark 6:5–6; (ii) we should not link Matthew 8:16–17 with the Atonement, although we should link it with Isaiah 53:4.

3

The cause and cure of sickness

MAN AND HIS ILLNESSES

- Man was created without illness, and without any of its causes (Gen. 1:31; cf. Eccl. 3:11; 7:29; Ps. 8:3ff.).
- The fall of man and the curse (Gen. 3; Rom. 1:18–32) brought about *the conditions* for illnesses: (i) death is part of man's penultimate era (see Rom. 8:10; 8:20–25; II Cor. 5:1–5); (ii) man's rebellion, anger, idolatry, sin, etc. set him up for sicknesses (cf. Prov. 14:29–30; Ps. 31:10; 32:2–3; 38:1–8 with Rom. 1:21ff.).
- In one sense sickness can be called 'natural' to man, i.e. not directly the result of sin. See II Kings 13:14, 20–21; II Kings 20:1–11; Philippians 2:25–27; I Timothy 5:23; cf. James 5:13–16.

THE CAUSE OF ILLNESSES

- Sin is the main cause of sickness. We must distinguish between (i) sin being the cause of sickness, and (ii) sickness which is not, of itself, sin. See Isaiah 1:2–6; 24:4–13; Psalm 32:2–3; 38:1–8; 103:3; Matthew 9:1–8. Note that guilt is forgiven (Ps. 32:5; cf. Jer. 33:8, *RSV*).
- God punishes *directly* by sicknesses in some cases. See Miriam, Uzzah, Uzziah, Ananias and Sapphira, Elymas, and those ‘not discerning the body’ in the Lord’s Supper.
- Some sicknesses are linked with Satan and the demonic forces of evil: Acts 10:38; Luke 4:17ff.; Luke 13:10–17. Paul shows in I Corinthians 10:19–21 that demons are linked with idolatry. See Deuteronomy 28:15ff. and 29:16–20, where sicknesses come upon idolaters because of demonic forces linked with idols (cf. Deut. 32:15–18).
- For the most part sicknesses come through the conditions of this age, coupled with man’s sin. Guilt is the problem of man. Even so, we must keep in mind the Book of Job, the corrective power and goal of affliction (Ps. 119:67, 71; Heb. 12:5ff.), and God’s manifestation of His works (John 9:1ff.).

THE CURE OF ILLNESS

Man cannot cure himself. Matthew 8:16–17 shows that something outside of man must come and help him, e.g. ‘He *took* our infirmities and *bore* our diseases’.

- Forgiveness of sins is the basis for healing, i.e. the removal of guilt and pollution by forgiveness and justification: Psalms 32, 103 and Matthew 9:1ff. This forgiveness is based on the Atonement.
- The power of ‘Kingdom action’, or the proclamation of the Gospel, heals: (i) through forgiveness by the Gospel, (ii) by the power of Christ acting through the church (Acts 3:12, 16; 4:29–30; 14:3; 19:11), and (iii) by defeating the power of evil (Matt. 12:28; cf. 4:23; Acts 8:6–7). These three are closely linked, and with them repentance, faith, forgiveness, justification, etc.
- The church has ‘gifts of healing’ (I Cor. 12:30) and a ministry of healing (James 5:13–18), and doubtless this is linked with the paragraph above.

4

The ministry of healing—then and now

THE PEOPLE OF GOD HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN GOD'S HEALING

Under the covenant with Israel there has always been healing, as we have seen in our previous studies. In the New Covenant, with the coming of the Spirit, the following have been the principles of God healing His people:

- There was a ministry of miraculous healing by Christ and the apostles. See Acts 10:38; Luke 4:17ff.; Matthew 4:23; Acts 2:43; 3:12–16; 4:29–30; 14:3; 19:11f. This healing attended the pure preaching of the Gospel

(see Mark 16:17; Acts 4:30; 14:3), and was not the primary ministry. The primary ministry was of the word. Where these conditions obtain today we should see similar witness by God.

- The proclamation of the Gospel in the power of the Spirit was (and is) also 'preaching the Kingdom of God', and that includes 'Kingdom action' which is often manifested in healing, signs and wonders. See Acts 8:5–8, 12; 20:20ff.
- The church had a ministry of 'gifts of healing' as in I Corinthians 12:28–30. We should understand that all gifts, when operative, were 'manifestations of the Spirit' and were intended to be used in love. These gifts should also be operative today, rightly understood. When 'new ground' is broken, church history shows there have been such healings.
- There was always the ministry of healing by the elders (James 5:13–18). The 'prayer of faith' had to be exercised. Such prayer and healing should take place today.

THE CHURCH SHOULD LIVE IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT, PROCLAIMING THE WORD AND BEING THE COMMUNITY OF CHRIST AND THE SPIRIT

What we have seen above is all dependent upon the working of Christ and the Spirit, and this presupposes the church as obedient under Christ's Lordship and led

and empowered by the Spirit. Healing is not ‘a thing-in-itself’. It was the Gospel which healed people, ‘bringing salvation’ (cf. Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7). We should, therefore, concentrate on the Gospel. We should also recognize from I and II Corinthians, Titus, Jude, and Revelation chapters 2 and 3, that when the church has error and sin, effective ministry is often hindered.

**TRUE HEALING
IS OF THE WHOLE PERSON
BY THE WHOLE GOSPEL**

- We must know and preach the whole Gospel.

- We must understand the holiness of God, the nature and deceit of sin, the power and effects of guilt, the anger and rebellion of man, and man’s total accountability for his own choices and actions. In the light of Ezekiel 18 man cannot blame heredity, environment, parental upbringing and circumstances for his state of being, although they must be taken into consideration.

- We must understand the effective regeneration of the person by the Gospel and the Spirit, as also the gifts given of love, forgiveness, justification, sonship and the Holy Spirit, and inform men and women of these.

- The church must be the community of love and power, and so, then, of healing, but having in mind that the church is primarily the proclaiming and worship-ping community rather than a therapeutic community, *as such*.

**THE PLACE OF FAITH
IN HEALING, TODAY**

We have seen from Jesus’ healings that he generated faith in many and they were healed through their faith. In actual fact Christ was the healer, but they saw God’s grace prior to their faith. This, too, is the order of believing for salvation. The prayer of faith must always be linked with the will of God, both generally as revealed in Scripture, and particularly as indicated at the point of prayer. See James 5:14–15 and Mark 11:20–25.

**CONCLUSION TO
A BIBLICAL EXPOSITION OF HEALING**

If any one thing is emphasized to the exclusion, neglect, or minimizing of others, then it will become unbalanced. We may have reasons for wanting healing, or seeking to heal, which are not necessarily biblical. We need, then, to proclaim the Gospel and live as Christ’s people, and as led by the Spirit we will effect the healings God requires and enables.

Section 5

**THE DOCTRINE OF MINISTRY
THROUGH GRACE**

An introduction to

**THE DOCTRINE OF MINISTRY
THROUGH GRACE**

The doctrine of grace is itself a vast one. In regard to Christian ministry it is all-embracing. Men and women are drawn into the Gospel by its grace. The grace of God is not a commodity but the action of God Himself, going towards man, always to do him good, though man deserves nothing of it.

Doubtless, covenant is best understood in the light of God's covenants—the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; with Israel via Moses; and with the world through the New Covenant, the covenant which was sealed in, and by, Christ's blood.

We often have a tendency to think that Christian ministry is something we come to after many years in Christian living,

and we are in danger of thinking that, by it, we do God and man some kind of favour. The truth is that ministry is given to us both by the mercy and the grace of God—as we will see. We will also see that we commence ministry from the moment of our conversion.

When we realize that everything is of grace—including ministry—and that we are weak of ourselves and only strong in the grace of God, then we will come to ministry humbly and gratefully, and those elements will truly enable us to have gracious ministry.

So much lies in grace—far more than most of us understand. It will be good, then, to use the following notes, tracing the references through. It will take much of the tension and human striving out of our lives as well as our ministries. It will bring us to being gracious with our fellow creatures.

1

The grace of ministry

THE GRACE OF CALLING

Romans 11:29 establishes that the gifts and call of God are without recall, though one can neglect such ministry (I Cor. 9:16–27; cf. I Cor. 3:10–15; II Cor. 5:10).

Paul makes it clear that all ministry is of grace. Galatians 1:15–16 shows that saving grace is (only) with a view to proclamation of the Gospel. There is, here, a parallel, in principle, with Jeremiah (1:4–12). His other references to the grace of ministry are (i) I Corinthians 3:10; (ii) Galatians 2:7–9; (iii) II Corinthians 1:12; (iv) Romans 1:5; 15:15–16; cf. 16:25–27; (v) Romans 12:3f., 6f.; (vi) Ephesians 3:1–11; (vii) I Corinthians 15:8–10; (viii) Ephesians 4:7–11; (ix) Colossians 1:25. See also I Peter 4:10–11.

THE GRACE OF MINISTRY SPRINGS FROM SAVING GRACE

- This principle is seen in Galatians 1:1–15, Acts 26:16ff. and Ephesians 2:8–10.
- Every aspect of the radical life-changing conversion complex is of grace, i.e. conviction of sin, the gifts of repentance and faith, the gifts of forgiveness, justification, purification, sanctification, sonship, love and the Spirit. For these, see John 16:7–11; Acts 5:31; 11:18; II Timothy 2:25; Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 1:29; I Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:4–7; Acts 13:38–39.

What we must see is that like Peter and John (Acts 4:26; 5:32; cf. I Pet. 1:8; I John 1:1–3), Paul could only tell what he had seen and heard (Gal. 1:11–16; Acts 26:16). Thus forgiveness had come to him (Acts 22:16; cf. I Tim. 1:15–16), and with it, justification. He had been filled with the Spirit (Acts 9:17) and (see above) had been given the grace of ministry. This principle is seen vitally in I Thessalonians 1:5–10.

THE ENABLING GRACE FOR MINISTRY

Within grace the exercise of ministry is not an option (II Cor. 5:11; I Cor. 9:16–18) but is commanded (Rom. 10:14–15; I Cor. 9:16; Acts 26:16ff.). The enablement of grace for ministry is seen in I Corinthians 15:10; Romans 12:3; Ephesians 3:1–11; I Peter 4:10–11. Perhaps II Corinthians 12:1–10 is also related to ministry.

Here we need to see that grace is something received,

and that it can be received ‘in an empty way’ (II Cor. 6:1–2; cf. Gal. 5:4 and related passages).

THE FORMS OF THE MINISTRY OF GRACE

These are: proclamation of the Gospel, caring for converts and new churches, pastoral ministry, commendation to ‘the word of his grace’, the teaching (feeding) of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. Thus grace covers ‘the whole counsel of God’. Note the summary of Titus 2:11–14, i.e. ‘grace instruction’.

2

***The ministry of
grace (I)******THE GRACE OF
WORSHIP***

- Creation is the basis of worship. Creation was God's action, and—rightly understood—His gift to man. Thus man and angels worshipped God for the very fact of creation (cf. Ps. 145:10; Job 38:7; Rev. 4:11).

Worship is giving God His worth, and being grateful to Him for it, i.e. the worth of His being. Man—when he kept that perspective—worshipped God in truth, and—of course—served the creation as he was required to do (cf. Gen. 1:28).

- In Romans 1:20–21 we see man refused to acknowledge the 'eternal power and deity' of God, and was unthankful.

This, incidentally, shows us that *acknowledging* God's true being, and *being grateful* for Him are the two prime basics of worship. Romans 1:25 tells us man 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the *creature* rather than the *Creator*'. Man was then compelled to create deities (idols) to take the place of God. He had to visibilize the Ineffable, i.e. the unseen God, and sought to do this by visible idols.

- When we wish to see what is pure worship we need to advert to the celestial sphere as we see it in the Book of Revelation. In many places we see God worshipped for Himself, His eternity, His holiness. Because of the Fall and the saving work of God, He is then worshipped for salvation, for His defeating the powers of darkness, and for His appropriate judgements upon all evil—whether of men or fallen angels.

THE OLD AND THE NEW WORSHIP

- Covenant and worship are closely linked in the patriarchs and Israel. With Israel worship is on the basis of grace (see Exod. 4:23; 20:1ff.), for worship was a gift (Rom. 9:4). Worship in Israel is always linked with God's law and His covenant love (Deut. 4:5–8; 10:12–16; cf. 30:6). There could be no true worship without love. The grace of deliverance from Egypt, and the grace of law, revealed the nature of God which would be otherwise unknown.

- Worship in the New Testament springs from grace (Rom. 12:1–2; Heb. 9:14; Rev. 7:9–15). The new revelation

of God through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:15; John 1:14, 18; 14:6; Matt. 11:27; Gal. 4:4–6; cf. Gal. 1:12–16; I John 1:1–3) brings with itself the gift of worship (cf. Rom. 9:4).

- Worship in the New Testament is always in, and by, the Holy Spirit ('the Spirit of grace', Heb. 10:29), as is seen from John 4:20–24, Philippians 3:3 and Romans 1:9. The Spirit brings true revelation of the Son and the Father (John 16:12–15; I John 5:7), and so reverses Romans 1:25, i.e. changes the lie into the truth, thus we worship in Spirit and in truth. At Jerusalem (Pentecost, Acts 2), Samaria (Acts 8) and Caesarea (Acts 10) true worship came with the anointing of the Spirit (cf. Acts 13:1–3).

- Worship in the New Testament is always in the new temple (Eph. 2:19–22; I Cor. 3:16; I Pet. 2:4–10; Heb. 13:15–16; cf. Heb. 12:28). The new temple is for all nations (Isa. 56:6–8; 2:2–3).

ESCHATOLOGICAL WORSHIP

By hope we are participators, in part, of eschatological worship (see I Pet. 1:13). In the Revelation we see the saints at worship (5:13; 7:15; 15:2–4) and know that that worship will be pure. Since worship comes from a revelation of God, and that future revelation will be perfect (by grace: I Cor. 13:8–12; Rev. 22:4), we realize how fully we will worship Him—both for creation and grace—in glorification.

3

The ministry of grace (II)

THE GRACE OF REDEMPTION

THE COMING OF GRACE INTO THE HUMAN ARENA

- Strictly speaking, nothing that happened prior to the Fall was grace.
- In the Old Testament grace was present both to the patriarchs and Israel. The two words *chen* and *chesed* cover the idea of grace. *Chen* carries the idea of receipt of favour (cf. Gen. 32:5; Exod. 33:13; I Sam. 1:18; Ruth 2:2, 10, 13; Job 9:15) and in English versions is

translated 'favour', whilst the Greek Old Testament (the LXX) uses the Greek word *charis*. *Chesed* is often translated by the Greek word *eleos* (mercy), and in English versions by the words 'loving-kindness', 'mercy', 'compassion' and 'grace'. The idea of grace is certainly present in the Old Testament, especially relating to covenant.

- Prophecy indicated 'grace to come'. See I Peter 1:10; cf. Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36: 24–28; Luke 1: 67ff.
- Grace came to the human scene in the person of Jesus Christ. See John 1:14; Romans 8:1–3; Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7.

THE GRACE OF GOD HAS APPEARED, BRINGING SALVATION

Christ's coming must be seen as the full advent of grace. His incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, must *all* be seen as grace. Note the order of the events:

- All was in 'the fullness of time' (Isa. 52:7; Luke 1:31–35, 68f.; Matt. 1:21; Luke 2:10; cf. Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4).
- The divine attestation at the baptism and transfiguration certified the authentic ministry of grace (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; II Pet. 1:16–19).
- Christ announced his ministry of grace (Luke 4:17–18; cf. Isa. 61:1–2). The four elements of grace-proclamation are: (i) release to the captives; (ii) sight to the blind;

(iii) liberation of the oppressed; (iv) proclamation of the (liberating) year of Jubilee.

- The action of grace was seen in the battle with evil (Luke 4:1ff.; 11:21–23; Acts 10:38; Matt. 11:28; John 12:31; 14:30–31; 16:11; Luke 23:35).
- Effective salvation (deliverance, healing, etc.) was given as Christ went (Acts 10:38; Matt. 11:28; 'your faith has made you whole'; cf. Luke 7:50; 18:42; 19:9–10).

SALVATION ACCOMPLISHED IN THE ATONEMENT

- Man was in the grip of sin, Satan, the world powers, the world system, law, death, God's wrath and the conscience by virtue of one thing only—'the guilt of sin' (Ps. 32:5; Isa. 6:7; Jer. 33:8)—as we see in John 8:34; Hebrews 2:14–15; Colossians 2:14–15; I John 2:15–17; Romans 8:5–8; Galatians 2:19; Psalm 143:2; I Corinthians 15:55–56; Romans 1:18; I Thessalonians 1:10; Hebrews 9:14; Titus 1:15. Man could not effect his own salvation because of his innate weakness and disposition (Eph. 2: 1–3; I John 5:19; 2:8–9; Rom. 5:6; Ps. 130:3).
- The Atonement (death and resurrection) was initiated by God (I John 4:10; II Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:32; Isa. 53:4–6, 10; Rom. 3:24).
- He effectively destroyed the guilt of mankind's sin (I Pet. 2:22–24; 3:18; Heb. 2:9–10; 9:26; 10:10–18; Gal. 2:20) and effectively defeated sin (I Pet. 2:24; Rom. 6:14), Satan (Heb. 2:14–15), the world powers (Col. 2:14–15),

the world (Gal. 6:14), the flesh (Gal. 5:24), death (I Cor. 15:55–56; II Tim. 1:10), God's wrath (Rom. 3:24) and conscience (Heb. 9:14).

**APPLICATION OF SALVATION-GRACE
IS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

See John 16:7–15; Romans 8:1–3; II Corinthians 3:17; I Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5–7.

Note that the Spirit is the 'Spirit of grace' (Heb. 10:29), and this can mean either 'Grace has given us the Spirit', or 'The Spirit is the Spirit of grace, i.e. he brings grace to the world, and, especially, to the church'.

4

The ministry of grace (III)

THE GRACE OF HEALING

**INTRODUCTION:
SALVATION IS HEALING**

Titus 2:11–14 is a powerful passage indicating what grace does (i) in bringing to salvation, and (ii) in building up God's people, bringing them to maturity. Note the use of *sozo* in its meanings 'to save', 'to deliver', 'to make whole', i.e. 'heal' (cf. Matt. 1:21; 8:25; 9:21–22; Luke 7:50; 18:42). Provision for physical healing may have been built into creation, but spiritual and moral healing come from grace.

GOD THE SMITER AND HEALER

Wounding and healing were linked with the fact of God's covenant with Israel in the Old Testament. See Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 28:15ff.; 32:39; I Samuel 2:6; II Kings 5:7; 6:18; Exodus 4:11; Amos 3:6; Isaiah 45:7; Hosea 6:1–3; Psalm 103:1–3. See also II Kings 13:14–21 (Elisha). For wounding related to the New Covenant, see Acts 5:1ff, and I Corinthians 11:27. See also the Book of the Revelation—the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath.

THE HEALING OF GRACE

- Jesus' announcement of healing: Luke 4:17ff. (cf. Acts 10:38).
- Jesus' action of healing: Acts 10:38; Luke 4:38–41; Matthew 8:14–17 (cf. Isa. 53:4–5).
- Jesus' healing of the paralytic: see Luke 5:17–26, with Psalm 103:1–3. Note that the Son of man has authority to heal, i.e. to forgive sins. See also healing at the pool of Bethsaida (John 5:1–14).
- Jesus' healing of the blind man whose sickness was not from sin: John 9:1ff.
- Jesus' healings were the actions of the Kingdom: so Matthew 12:28 (cf. Acts 10:38). See Luke 9:1ff. and 10:1ff.
- Salvation or healing are not always connected with

physical illnesses or Satanic oppression. See Luke 7:50 and 19:9–10 (*passim*). Note that there was no explicit call for repentance. Oppressed people were simply liberated as the five thousand, being hungry, were fed! This would appear to be grace.

SICKNESS AND SALVATION

The Hebrews expected good health, given in that they were obedient. They generally linked their sickness or the calamities that came upon them with sin and guilt of sin. See Psalms 31, 32, 38 and 103. Note the term 'guilt of sin', as in Psalm 32:5, Isaiah 6:7 and Jeremiah 33:8.

The *cause* of much sickness is sin, but sickness *is not* sin, as such. See Isaiah 1, verses 2–4 (*cause* of sickness, sin) and 4–6 (sickness the *result* of sin). See Isaiah 24:4ff., where the *cause* and the *result* are similar. This principle would appear to obtain in Matthew 9:4–6, I Corinthians 11:27–30 and John 5:14 (cf. John 9:1–3; Luke 13:1–5).

A state of mind that comes from refusal to repent and confess is seen in Psalms 31:10; 32:3–4; 38:1ff.; 130:1–3; Proverbs 14:29–30; Matthew 5:21f.; Hebrews 12:14f. We might speak of these as 'the deeper sickness'. True healing, then—for the most part—comes from liberation from guilt, inner purification, forgiveness and justification. These must all be seen as coming down to us from above (the vertical) and not from our (horizontal) forgiveness of others which—itself—can only proceed from the experience of (vertical) grace. Grace is only vertical.

Jeremiah 8:18f.; 6:13–15; along with Titus 2:11f.; 3:4–7; Hebrews 9:14; I Corinthians 6:9–11; Isaiah 53:3ff.; Matthew 8:17; Revelation 1:4b; Galatians 1:4; 2:20; 5:24; 6:14. We have to see that healing is total, but is by faith which rests upon prior grace, and so the continuing life of faith rests upon prior and continuing grace. To seek to know (or give) healing by sight is to deny that we are in the penultimate age, and to demand that the *ultimate* should be *now*. The Atonement and the Spirit effect present healing.

PASTORAL MINISTRY IN GRACE-HEALING

Recognizing the Kingdom ministry of healing as liberation from sickness and Satanic oppression, as also the gifts of healing manifesting the Spirit's action and the laying on of hands (with anointing) by the elders, we need to see that the primary healing is a salvific one, i.e. guilt of sin is primary, not sickness. It is to this that the pastor must direct his ministry (see next study, 'The Grace of Pastoral Ministry'). We must also recognize that all sickness is not directly from sin (Rom. 8:11; John 9:1–3; II Kings 13:14–21; 20:1–12; Phil. 2:25–29; cf. II Cor. 12:7–11).

We must, then, preach 'the word of grace', believing it is God's direct word to the hearer (I Pet. 4:10–11; cf. 1:12, 23–25). We are never mediators of grace. We must proclaim the total liberation of the Cross and not seek to be intermediaries of its application (cf. John 16:12–15; I John 5:7; 2:22–27). Thus our healing counselling will direct persons to Christ and his atoning work. Isaiah 53 indicates that this is sufficient not only for the guilt of sins but for 'griefs and sorrows and wounds'.

5

The ministry of grace (IV)

THE GRACE OF PASTORAL MINISTRY

THE CHURCH LIVING IN GRACE

We must recognize that the early church lived in grace and was conscious of this fact, as well as of the need for continuing grace.

- Acts 4:23–35: note the marks of grace: (i) unique unity; (ii) the sharing of all things; (iii) great power in proclamation.
- Acts 6:8: 'full of grace and power'. Grace was evident.

- Acts 11:23: grace was a visible and not abstract element.
- (i) Grace was the saving word (Acts 15:11; 18:27; 20:24); (ii) the word which kept them living in the new life (Acts 13:43; 20:32); (iii) 'grace' and 'the word of his grace' were identical, thus when anyone was 'commended to the grace of God' (Acts 14:26; 15:40), it was the same as being 'commended to the word of his grace' (Acts 14:3; 20:32). This means that there is no difference between 'grace' and 'the word of God', for God is the Speaker and the Doer. He is never absent from His word, so that 'the word of his grace' which is the Gospel is constantly present and constantly powerful (Rom. 1:16–17; I Cor. 1:18; I Thess. 1:5; Heb. 4:12).
- Titus 2:11–14: grace instructs, educates, teaches in holiness.
- Salutations of the Epistles: 'Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. Grace was always recognized as indispensable.
- I Corinthians 15:10; II Corinthians 12:1–10; 3:4–6: grace is essential for receiving vocation, and living it. (See Study 1, 'The Grace of Ministry', pp. 181–183.)

THE PROBLEM OF 'CLAYTON GRACE'

By 'Clayton grace' we mean 'the grace you have when you are not having grace'. See II Corinthians 6:1–2, 'We entreat you not to receive the grace of God in vain [in an empty way]'. Clayton grace is man trying to make

out that he lives under grace when in fact he is occupied with his own works, i.e. a cleverly disguised Adamic state.

Galatians is occupied with the problem of reverting *from* grace as the way of justification *to* law as the way of justification (or, grace *and* law for justification). See 1:6–9; 2:16–21; 3:1–5, 10; 5:4. The theological and ideological battle has always been between 'nomism' (legalism, salvation by works), and 'antinomianism' (refusing to live under law at all, because grace—supposedly—has freed us from any, and all, law).

Man's problem is always that his pride seems crushed by his inability to accomplish anything—of himself—in the moral-spiritual realm when he can do so much elsewhere. He is constantly trying to prove himself, hence he reverts to works-accomplishment time and again. The careful pastor will keep teaching grace and pointing to it, knowing that grace is always present. He will seek to fight Clayton grace, i.e. empty grace.

Linked with the above problems is making the Spirit of grace equal grace itself. Grace is the 'grace of the Father' and 'the grace of Christ' and cannot be separated from Them. People who wish to use power think of grace as power, and since the Spirit has, and gives, power, then grace as the unmerited loving action of God becomes simply a *work* of the Spirit, and even a work man can do via the Spirit! In these ways we seek to be independent of grace. The test of authentic living then becomes what *we* can do, i.e. success and attainment. The true pastor will realize that this kind of operator will be open to pride on the one hand and guilt-exhaustion on the other.

THE MEANS OF GRACE

This phrase is often misunderstood, i.e. as ‘the means *to* grace’ and not ‘*of* grace’. Thus folk use prayer, Bible-reading, worship, good works, giving, and the sacraments to obtain grace, which is a contradiction in terms. ‘Great grace’ is on the whole church and simply needs to be received. We never have to prompt God! People should be taught that grace comes from God through these means, but they are His means of giving grace, not ours of drawing from Him. Once we have seen this regarding the means, then the church can live truly in grace, and this grace will affect every part of its life. The ‘means’ then become rich and fruitful. When we know that ‘great grace’ is not merely a commodity which is available but the action of God which is never static, then holy confidence is born.

The pastor is the one who must constantly keep his people in the knowledge, understanding and assurance of grace. He will do this by avoiding purely human endeavours on the one hand, and quietism on the other.

Section Six

THE DOCTRINE OF PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

An introduction to

**THE DOCTRINE OF
PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL**

Proclaiming the Gospel is the first work of the church, both in time and priority of importance. Whilst it is true that the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, and that was a great event, yet no sooner had it happened than the apostles—and others—began telling the wonderful works of God, and setting out the nature of the Gospel, or, as some scholars say, proclaiming the *kerugma*, i.e. the announcement of God's saving work in Christ.

Many religious, social and political groups seek to evangelize, or make proselytes for their group. Such disciple-making is common to those groups which wish to expand. Christian evangelism may sometimes be caught up in this kind of thing, but proclaiming the Gospel is the

offer of salvation that God makes through His word, and by means of His servants.

There is no quick and easy way to evangelize. Those whose hearts are filled with compassion for the lost of this world will want to share the salvation God has given to the world in Christ. Today we seek by all kinds of means to evangelize those outside the church, and even those within it whose lives have not yet felt the power of God in conversion and new birth.

This series of studies takes certain aspects of the pastor at work in proclaiming the Gospel. He has a thrilling time, today, in which to do it.

1

The magnificence of mercy

THE INTENTION OF OUR STUDY

As a group of pastors we are dedicated to the principle of vivification of Christ's church through the Gospel of God, the present Lordship of Christ over his church and this age, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in bringing the action of the living God—as both Father and Son—to its intended eschatological climax or goal (*telos*). The powerful presence of humanism within the church directs us towards another ethos or system—one which is man-centred, and which constantly reflects, utilizes and depends upon current anthropological, sociological and religious insights. We are not hostile to, or critical of, such insights, for they may well be valuable, but failure to subject them critically to biblical criteria may direct us away from the Scriptures, and the traditional confessions

of the historic church—confessions which have purported to be biblical.

The biblical matter of God's mercy has received little attention in our age, and I suggest it both deserves and requires our study, not only as an antidote to present humanistic mercy—so called—but as a confronting of ourselves with the truth. We can scarcely be merciful to others in an authentic way unless we have come under—and continue to live under—the mercy of God.

THE LINGUISTIC MEANING OF MERCY

The word for 'mercy' (Heb. *rachamim*) is not used greatly in regard to God's covenant dealings with Israel, but *chesed* is used prolifically, and whilst in the *AV* it is often translated 'mercy', this is not so in the *RSV* (with the exception of Ps. 23:6), where it is always translated 'steadfast love'. God's steadfast love has a wide range of references, but is mainly linked with God's gracious dealings with Israel as the weaker covenant partner, no matter what she did. God's mercy is His compassionate deliverance of a person or people who are in misery. This does not mean God is automatically moved to mercy by the sight of misery, for such misery can eventuate from His wrath upon a person or people. A study of Exodus 34:6–7 shows that whilst God is merciful and exercises steadfast love, yet He 'will by no means clear the guilty' (cf. Num. 14:18; Nahum 1:3; cf. Job 10:14). His steadfast love does not override deliberate sin, sin with a high hand, or apostasy. Ezekiel 16 makes profitable reading as to the lengths God will go in judgement before He will

rehabilitate His covenant people. His steadfast love will ensure this, but the New Testament use of mercy—and perhaps something of its Old Testament use also—links mercy almost always with His wrath, and in His wrath He remembers mercy (cf. Hab. 3:2). It seems mercy in this case is somewhat other than *chesed* (O.T.) and even *charis*, i.e. grace (N.T.). It might almost be said to be stronger than both. Certainly *chesed* has a predictable element, as does *charis*, but mercy (Heb. *rachamim*; Gr. *eleos*) is an action of God which springs out of His love in a wholly gratuitous manner.

For this reason, 'I will by no means clear the guilty' needs serious consideration. It gives a dimension to God's action in grace which requires us to study afresh the nature of God, especially in regard to His holiness, and—so—His wrath. In Isaiah God often says, 'I am the Holy One—your Redeemer'. Today we have moved away from the dynamics of holiness, wrath and mercy, and have all but lost the theological and soteriological dimensions of the Cross. This is why our concepts of mercy have no depth, and why we are easily a prey to much current humanistic thinking. In applying our contemporary anthropological and sociological criteria to our showing of a 'mercy', we may well miss the true mercy of God and so cheat man-under-guilt of 'the everlasting mercy'.

GOD'S SELF-REVELATION AS MERCIFUL

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and

abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.' And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshipped.

This self-revelation of God—whose theme is repeated time and again in Scripture (e.g. Neh. 9:17)—was being given to Moses in the context of covenant, i.e. the covenant as given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and which was then being resolved with Israel by the acts of the living God—the acts which were bringing Israel out of Egypt, and placing her in the promised land. The questions we ask are: Was this revelation of God purely covenantal, i.e. was God disclosing His nature as it pertained primarily—and perhaps only—to Israel? Was God disclosing His nature as He deals with all the nations and history, or only as He was dealing with Israel? Given in that God's nature as disclosed is immutable, do the attributes such as mercy, graciousness, slowness to anger, steadfast love and faithfulness pertain only to Israel, or are they operative towards all men?

It is clear that God's self-disclosure to Moses was a revelation primarily for the covenant, and so for God's dealings with Israel. The universal nature of His covenant He had made clear to Abraham, a fact which Paul was to take up later, i.e. 'In you [Abraham] shall all the nations be blessed' (Gal. 3:7–9, 16, 26). Mary's Song (the Magnificat) certainly transcends the immediate covenant with Israel (Luke 1:46–55), and whilst Zechariah's prophecy (the Benedictus: Luke 1:68–79) points back to the covenant with Abraham—rather than with Moses—yet

it includes the Gentiles (v. 79). In any case, the Old Testament shows God as always having the Gentiles in mind.

We do not have time here to detail all the elements of God's nature in His covenant with Israel, since our subject is particularly His mercy. We simply note that the matter of His mercy was disclosed in a covenantal situation, and that it was linked with His long-suffering, steadfast love, and faithfulness. Indeed, mercy can only be understood in context with all these elements. We will need to return to discuss these associated elements, and the outworking of mercy with both Israel and the nations as described in the Old Testament.

GOD'S MERCY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

This section of our study requires an exhaustive treatment to do it justice, but we will be unable to cover it adequately. However, we will take some passages dealing with mercy, and examine them in order to adduce the nature or principles of mercy.

Ephesians 2:1–5

In this passage we see the dreadful state of humanity. By his use of 'you' (the Gentiles) and 'we' (the Jews), Paul shows this state to be universal. It consists of man being morally and spiritually dead—inert to God, but dynamically active in sin—energized by 'the prince of the power of the air', an inseparable part of his aeon (system), and *under the wrath of God*. From none

of these elements can man extricate himself—if, indeed, he wished to do so. The horror of this death is relieved only by ‘God, who is rich in mercy’. His mercy and His ‘great love’ act together to bring life—resurrection—to the humanity which is under the judgement of death. How fearful, dreadful and horrific this death is, none can measure. It requires ‘the riches of mercy’, and ‘great love’ to redeem man. At this point we need to ask ourselves whether this is the message we proclaim. Certainly we are reluctant to speak on wrath, so that we need to consider God’s wrath as a subject since mercy has no point apart from it (cf. Hab. 3:2, ‘in wrath remember mercy’).

Note on God’s wrath

The Pauline *locus classicus* of wrath is Romans 1:18 to 2:5. In this passage God’s wrath is His giving man up to his sin (vv. 24, 26, 28). Of this act Ernst Käsemann says,

Moral perversion is the result of God’s wrath, not the reason for it . . . The Creator divests himself of his directly perceptible sovereign right and becomes the hidden Judge, striking with corruption those who can live neither without him nor against him . . . Men have to endure what they wanted to attain—they are themselves their guilt and its cost . . . Despisers of God bring down God’s curse on themselves. In this judgement one may see plainly what the reality of mankind and the world is when it breaks free from God and is given up by him to immanence.

C. K. Barrett observes:

God’s judgement has already broken forth; only he has consigned sinners not to hell but to sin—if indeed these be alternatives.

C. E. B. Cranfield comments:

. . . this delivering them up was a deliberate act of judgement and mercy on the part of God who smites in order to heal (Isa. 19:22) and that throughout the time of their God-forsakenness God is still concerned with them and dealing with them.

Some commentators—like Cranfield—see wrath as a means to bring sinners to God’s mercy (Isa. 19:22). Hence the use of Isaiah 54:7–8, i.e. that God’s wrath is only temporary. Whilst *in covenant* this may well obtain, the question is whether it is valid to apply this to all mankind as a principle in the light of Romans 9:15, 19–24 and 11:28–32 where God’s wrath always remains on some. Certainly in Romans 1:18–3:26 Paul is showing that whilst God’s wrath is upon sinners, yet—through propitiation—He justifies sinners by grace.

We do not here enter into the wider question of God’s wrath which is linked with His holiness—the infringement of which engenders wrath (Rom. 1:18; Hab. 1:13). His wrath—which is not human, and must not be compared with human anger—is His implacable opposition to evil, and His unswerving intention and action to destroy it from His creation.

Romans 9:6–24

In Romans 9:6–24 Paul is speaking of two types of vessels, one being ‘vessels of wrath made for destruction’, and the other ‘vessels of mercy, which he had prepared beforehand for glory’. The first vessels are those made for destruction. They deserve wrath, and that is where the matter ends. The second set of vessels are ‘vessels of mercy’, i.e. (i) vessels on whom God has

mercy, and so (ii) vessels who need mercy. We see both sets of vessels *need* mercy but only one set *receives* mercy, which underlines the fact that mercy is a matter for God's (predestinating) decision, since God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. God can be called merciful when He has mercy, but may not be called 'unmerciful' if He does not have mercy. It ought to be noted that God desires to show *both* His wrath in regard to vessels 'made for destruction', *and* His mercy in regard to the vessels 'prepared beforehand for glory'. His wrath and His mercy are legitimate and ought not to be questioned.

Romans 11:13–32

Paul is explaining how it was that Israel was rejected by God and the Gentiles accepted. Israel was punished because of its unbelief and so met the 'severity of God', whilst the Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree because of 'the kindness [goodness] of God'.

If we link the two passages together—Romans 9:6–24 and 11:13–32—we see that 'the vessels of wrath' are those of both Israel and the Gentiles who deserve wrath, and will meet wrath, whereas 'the vessels of mercy' are both the true remnant of Israel and the elect of the Gentiles. When it is said that 'God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all', the 'all men' and 'all' obviously mean 'all who are His elect, upon whom He has mercy', for, by nature of the case, the statement—in the context of Romans chapters 9 to 11—cannot be universalistic or the whole argument loses its point. The view that God ought to have mercy upon all men,

i.e. universally, destroys the whole concept of mercy.

For our present purposes all that we need to see is that both the elect remnant of Israel, and those who are elect amongst the Gentiles are under terrible misery until God has mercy on them. They are exactly in the state of the persons described in Ephesians 2:1–3 and Romans 1:18–2:6. If their state were not horrific, then mercy were no mercy!

Note on 'mercy' in Romans

We have concluded that Romans 1:18–3:31 is an account of the mercy of God. Chapter 2:4–5 does not mention mercy—any more than it mentions grace—but it does point to mercy which has refrained from destroying both the sinful Gentiles and the disobedient Jews who refuse to be led to repentance by the riches of God's 'kindness and forbearance and patience'. Chapter 3:24ff. then goes on to show God's mercy in propitiation, since propitiation always relates to the wrath of God on sinners. Chapters 4–8 outline God's mercies (cf. 12:1) in justification, sanctification, and hope. The exposition of mercy in chapters 9–11 fits with the view that mercy rescues the covenant people out of a disastrous situation from which the Jewish (elect) remnant and the elect Gentiles could not extricate themselves. 15:8–9 states that 'Christ became a servant to the circumcised . . . in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy', and this accords with chapters 9–11 where there are 'vessels of wrath', and 'vessels [destined] for mercy'. In 12:1 Paul calls for the brethren to offer up their bodies as a living

sacrifice, and bases his appeal on ‘the mercies of God’, i.e. *the mercies which he has expounded from 1:16 to 11:36*.

I Peter 2:1–10; 1:3–5

In 2:1–10 Peter shows the community of Christ—the ‘spiritual house’—that they are the (new) true Israel, and that what was pronounced upon Israel in Exodus 19:5–6 now applies to them, i.e. those of the church who once were mainly Gentiles. The ‘wonderful deeds’ God has done in redeeming them are His mercies—‘you have received mercy’. He has taken them from their lost Gentile state and made them His people. Again, we see that they were delivered from an horrific state (‘out of darkness’) to one of God’s ‘marvellous light’. Mercy indeed!

The other statement—that of 1:3–5—is God’s act of ‘great mercy’ (cf. Eph. 2:4, ‘rich in mercy’) in bringing men to be ‘born anew to a living hope’—a hope of life—through Christ’s resurrection, along with the hope of ‘an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven’ for the elect. This really parallels the passage of Ephesians 2:1–5 for, in both, men are dead until ‘born anew’, and life comes through Christ’s resurrection. To survey ‘the charnel-house of the dead’, and see its dead members come to life, indicates ‘great mercy’ indeed.

Titus 3:3–7

Here Paul describes what we were as we lived in a state of sin (cf. Rom. 1:18–32 and Eph. 2:1–3), and

contrasts this with the state into which mercy brought us:

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

In this case we note that the mercy is shown (i) in retrieving us from our last state by ‘the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit’, and (ii) in that it was *with a view to* our being justified by his grace and becoming heirs in hope of eternal life. Again, God’s action of mercy has taken us out of a terrible state, and brought us into the rich state of grace.

There are many other references to mercy in the New Testament, such as in Matthew 5:7; 17:15; Luke 6:35–36; 10:37; 16:24; 17:13; Philippians 2:27; I Timothy 1:13, 16; Hebrews 2:17; 4:16; Jude 23. These, too, deserve our closest attention.

CONCLUSION IN REGARD TO MERCY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

R. C. H. Lenski, in commenting on Ephesians 2:1–10, says,

‘Grace’ is this love as it is extended to us sinners in our *guilt* and unworthiness and pardons the guilt for Christ’s sake in spite of our unworthiness. ‘Mercy’ goes out to the *wretched* and miserable. Grace deals with the cause, the guilt; mercy with the consequences, the wretched death in which we lie

. . . Having described us in our pitiful deadness, mercy is applied in order to remove this consequence of guilt; it is the mercy of love with its full knowledge and blessed purpose.

On the same passage Markus Barth comments,

Mercy (*eleos*) is the LXX and NT translation of the OT term *hesed*. The RSV rendering of this noun is ‘steadfast love’ and suggests that *hesed* is the stable and loyal way in which God keeps the covenant. The KJ Version ‘loving-kindness’ may still be preferable because it conveys the meaning ‘undeserved mercy’ or ‘prevenient grace’.

Barth does not here deal with the Old Testament word for mercy (*rachamim*), but gives *chesed* something of the meaning of mercy, thus retaining something of its gratuitous element.

Doubtless we need an understanding of mercy in the Old Testament in order to fill out our understanding of it in the New Testament, and doubtless, too, we need to understand the meanings of such Old Testament words as ‘steadfast love’ (*chesed*, loving-kindness), ‘goodness’, ‘love’, and ‘faithfulness’, since all are words pertaining to God’s covenant dealings with His people, and as such are linked with ‘mercy’. At the same time we need to see and understand the existential state of man’s misery—both in the Old and New Testaments—in order to understand the action of God’s mercy.

Man under God’s wrath: human existential anguish

Again, the subject widens here, beyond human comprehension. We cannot assess the nature of sin, the nature

of holiness, the anguish that comes to man when he violates God’s holiness and seeks to be free of Him. Ultimately it requires grace to understand the misery of man alienated from God and living under judgement. The passages we have briefly noted above come together to make a frightening account of primary human suffering. By ‘primary human suffering’ we mean the existential anguish man knows through his own rebellion against God, i.e. his denial of himself as a true existent, a basic creature, a created son and subject of God who is awry from himself, dislocated, dysfunctional and distorted as unontological and anti-ontological. Whilst he suffers from being abandoned to (his own) sin, yet the personal nature of the Divine wrath upon him, and judgement of death which has come to him from sin—‘Man fears death not so much because he *has* to die, but because he *deserves* to die’ (Paul Tillich)—is what keeps man in constant pain and *angst*.

The place and action of mercy in the face of Divine wrath

The place of mercy is significant to the highest degree because man is unable to extricate himself from his sin and guilt—let alone give himself relief from his self-wrought suffering. He has certainly tried to deal with his own case—hence his multitudinous religions, and many self-justifying techniques—but he is shown, biblically, to be impotent in this respect (e.g. Rom. 5:6; Jer. 10:23), so that his attempts are mainly cosmetic, taking him to even deeper despair. His refusal to acknowledge his guilt, his pride—even in alienation—makes his suffering yet more

terrible. This is man under wrath.

Far from being inordinately angry with man, God exercises great forbearance, long-suffering, and patience—whether he be in covenant, or ‘alienated from the commonwealth of Israel’. Grace and mercy are no ‘right’ of man, nor is God prompted to such. The marvel of His mercy is that in the incarnation, life, ministry, and atonement of Christ, God moves to have mercy on the human race. The redemptive suffering of Christ cannot be computed, and has very little to do with his physical pain on the Cross. It is the deep moral, mental, and spiritual suffering he experienced—especially at the point of his being abandoned by God—that is the evidence of, and the key to, the Divine mercy.

If man does not understand the dynamics of this mercy, and if he refuses his moral responsibility in regard to sin, then *mercy will not appear as mercy*. If man upbraids God for his state of suffering, or sees himself to be victimized by God or the sins of others (cf. Ezek. 18 and every man’s moral responsibility for his own choices), then he will not know the transformation that mercy brings. The passages above showed us man as hating and hateful, under the tyranny of objective evil (i.e. Satanic), the slave of his own lusts and passions, and caught under terrible guilt and wrath. They showed him as dead and without hope of resurrection, glorification, and the inheritance of a holy and free eternity. The man who refuses the proclamation of grace puts himself away from the Divine mercy. He violates the compassion and pity of God. If God does not come to him intentionally with overwhelming mercy, then his end is terrible.

THE MAGNIFICENCE OF THE MINISTRY OF MERCY

Paul says that he has the ministry of mercy, *by mercy*, ‘Having this ministry by the mercy of God’ (II Cor. 4:1). Usually Paul speaks of having ministry by the *grace* of God (cf. Eph. 3:1–11). Here, it seems he means that he would have no ministry had God not had mercy on him. Indeed he would have no salvation without that mercy, but the mercy is heightened by giving him ministry. Elsewhere he speaks of God making him trustworthy by His mercy (I Cor. 7:25). Having known God’s mercy (cf. I Tim. 1:13–16) in salvation, Paul cannot but declare God’s mercy to the nations. As he said, ‘I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy’. In this reference (Rom. 15:8–12) Paul shows that this mercy was intended for the nations, i.e. the Gentiles, an intention which is stated as early on as in Deuteronomy, and is greatly amplified in the prophets, especially in the latter half of Isaiah (cf. II Sam. 22:50; Deut. 32:43; Ps. 117:1; Isa. 11:10).

It is fascinating to note in Galatians 1:11–16 that Paul sees his conversion not as a thing in itself, but as the spring-board to the ministry of proclamation: ‘He who . . . called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, *in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles*’. The intention of this study is that we, too, should retrace our steps, and be constrained afresh to proclaim mercy.

Mercy received is mercy given

If God's mercy seems to us to be an outdated biblical concept, or a vestige of Pauline, Augustinian, Reformed, Puritan, and Wesleyan Evangelical doctrine, then we will not have, or espouse, the ministry of mercy. Without doubt such ministry of proclamation involves mercy in its many forms, i.e. compassion towards all the human race, sympathy in its various forms of suffering, and pity that is practical where human need presents itself. However, this latter ministry of mercy must be at one with the prior ministry of mercy, i.e. deliverance of men and women by the Gospel of Christ—deliverance *from* existential anguish known in the midst of human sinfulness and the wrath of God, and deliverance *into* the peace of God and the love of Christ. 'The mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ' as mentioned in Jude 21 is 'unto eternal life'. Christ as 'the merciful high priest' (Heb. 2:17) is primarily concerned with the matter of our sinfulness and God's salvation. This does not mean the mercy of the Father and the Son is limited to things salvific. It covers all life in the all-embracing wisdom of God. Hence the apostolic prayers for 'grace, mercy, and peace' for their brethren, and the practical outworking of loving concern where needs were material, relational, and emotional.

The mercy of the merciful

The beatitude 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' raises the question, 'Who will be merciful?', to which the answer must be, 'He to whom mercy has been shown'. This is the message of Matthew 18:21ff.

He who is forgiven much should forgive. Mercy is deliverance out of misery and distress. We can speak of a *natural* mercy, and a mercy which comes out of grace received. Luther said that in all the beatitudes faith is presupposed as the tree on which all the fruit of blessedness grows. When one has been in the misery of sin, one seeks to extend mercy to others in the same state. The nature and extent of this mercy is set out in Luke 6:35:

'But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.'

We do not *become* 'sons of the Most High' by showing mercy, but we show mercy *because* we are sons of the Most High. We are being consistent as sons of the merciful Father, by being merciful. Paul calls God 'the Father of mercies' (II Cor. 1:3).

We show mercy to our enemies, to 'the ungrateful and the selfish'. The 'merciful high priest' of Hebrews 2:17 and 5:2 'can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward'. How far this was from the self-righteous legalism of the scribes and Pharisees who tithed meticulously but 'neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith' (Matt. 23:23)! They had passed over the latter in favour of the former.

Jesus pointed out the mercy of the Samaritan who helped the Jew who had been molested by robbers. The true neighbour was 'the one who showed mercy on him'. The wounded Jew was in a state of great misery and the Samaritan was moved with compassion and so had mercy.

Jesus twice quotes Hosea 6:6 (cf. I Sam. 15:22, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice').

On the first occasion (Matt. 9:13) it was when he ate with Matthew's friends. They were sick ones who needed the physician. It is clear they were in the misery of sin and needed mercy. On the second occasion (Matt. 12:7) Jesus chided the severe Pharisees for their extreme legalism. James said, 'For judgement is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgement'. This surely means that the merciful need never fear judgement, seeing they have been merciful. The merciless must always fear judgement.

A FAMINE OF MERCY

It appears that never in the history of the world has there been such a time of mercy as seems to be before it now. Never have so many been helped so much by so many. In times of fire, drought, famine, earthquake and floods—to say nothing of the daily mental and physical suffering within society—nations give help to nations, and persons to persons. In such cases cynicism seems to be inappropriate, yet critical realism might sift out much that springs from the pity of guilt, from mere 'do-gooding', and so distinguish what is genuine. This—however—would be a difficult task.

One thing confronts us: do we understand the mercy of God towards sinful mankind, and His great act of mercy in Christ? Is this proclaimed, and is it the soil and root of all true compassion and genuine mercy? If we view the biblical mercy of God as an outmoded Jewish and Christian concept, and seek to establish mercy as a precept and

practice of the new 'Christian' humanism, we may find that posterity will brand our last hundred years of advanced liberalism as an age of cruelty and not of mercy. The rage of 'the justice men' who seek to establish 'mercy' at the end of an automatic weapon may be seen as the most merciless of all in history. If we lack the dynamics of Calvary we may finish up with a Crossless Christ, and an effete mercy.

As for Jesus, his practical mercy was shown to the Canaanite woman whose daughter was demon-possessed, to the father of the epileptic boy, to the blind men who cried for mercy and received sight, and his compassion was towards the crowd who were as sheep without a shepherd. He had compassion on Jerusalem as he saw its time of judgement, but supremely in his hours on Calvary he established mercy for the generations to follow. We do not compare his personal ministerial mercy with his great high-priestly ministry at the altar of the Cross, but we are sure it is the latter—for us—which gives birth to the former, so that without the Cross our mercy is never wholly true. The source of our mercy is God's mercy—His salvific mercy—obtained for us by a Saviour who took our misery into himself upon Calvary, encapsulated it within his holy suffering, and bore it to painful extinction.

Receiving this mercy, we shall be merciful.

THE PASTORAL APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF MERCY

What, then, is the pastoral application of mercy? We should note the following:

- The pastor must have received mercy, and see its wonderful gratuitous nature. He must also recognize that the mercy which once for all redeemed him is the mercy which is upon him every day.

Lamentations 3:22–23 is a statement made in the midst of misery and was not a calm statement about the believer's everyday experience of settled life. Here the mercies are still linked with the godly man's miseries and deliverance from them by the God of mercy. The pastor, then, must know *daily* the greatness of mercy.

- The pastor must preach up the mercy of God. If he diminishes his awareness of the misery of the lost human spirit, or fails to recognize the dire need of mercy, then he will fail in urgency in proclaiming the Gospel. Equally he must teach God's continuing mercies.

- The true pastor will be a merciful man, i.e. he will do acts of mercy towards his people as God continually does acts of mercy towards us. He will thus be the true vehicle of God's mercy. Having received mercy he will give mercy. This means identification with the misery of others and the use of the truth—the word of God—to deliver them.

2

The pastor and the ministry of mercy

QUESTIONS REGARDING THE MINISTRY OF MERCY

The pastor should ask himself: 'Am I a merciful man? Do I suffer fools gladly? Do I get angry easily with people in trouble? Do I think, sometimes, that people ought to stew in their own juice—that they deserve what they get, that they are "chronics" and that nothing will change them, anyway? Do I see people in need and merely regret the fact without moving towards them in pity, compassion, and mercy?'

If such questions are important, then even more important are the questions that follow: 'Do I have compassion for men and women who are in sin, who are lost, who are bound for eternal punishment, who are without hope for the next world and without God in this one?'

That is, having known God's mercy in salvation, am I now dead to the need for salvation in others, or—knowing such need in a theological way—am I heartless in that their plight moves me no more, or, anyway, very little?

**GOD'S DEMANDS UPON HIS PEOPLE
REQUIRING THEM TO HAVE MERCY
TO OTHERS**

'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' does not simply mean, 'No mercy from God if we do not have mercy on others', but rather, 'He upon whom God has had mercy will have mercy to others and so that experience of God's mercy will continue'. To refuse mercy under such conditions is to place us in the place of the merciless servant of Matthew 18:21ff. Mercy to others was required under the covenant law of Israel, but the demand of mercy is based, surely, on the nature of man as the image of God. God is merciful so that man, too, must be merciful, reflecting the image of God.

The mercy required under God's covenant with Israel is made on the revelation of God's nature in Exodus 34:6–7, 'The LORD, the LORD . . . *merciful* . . .' Leviticus 19—amongst other exhortations—has simple and clear teaching on social and relational responsibilities. In Deuteronomy 25:4 and other places, kindness to animals is enjoined. In Micah 6:8 the prophet said,

He has showed you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness [*'mercy'*, AV],
and to walk humbly with your God?

Zechariah 7:9–10 enjoins, 'Render true judgements, show kindness and mercy each to his brother, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart'.

The mercy of God

We have not defined mercy as such, but it is surely that pity of God which springs from His compassion and moves Him to do acts which deliver man from his misery. Archbishop Trench's famous definition says that God saves man from his guilt by grace, and saves him from the misery guilt brings by His mercy. God's mercy often delivers from the misery which does not spring from guilt but the selfish and unmerciful acts of others, but mercy can be defined as pity which acts. It is unfortunate that the *NIV* has often chosen to speak of God as compassionate rather than merciful (e.g. Exod. 34:6). One may have compassion or pity without doing anything for the object of that pity. The matter of God having compassion and pity and being moved to action is something for another study. It is sufficient to say here that whilst God is impassable, He does have affections of which He is the subject and not their object.

The compassion of God is shown in the following two passages, one from Hosea 11:8f., and the other from Isaiah 54:8, 10:

How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
How can I hand you over, O Israel! . . .
My heart recoils within me,
my compassion grows warm and tender.

I will not execute my fierce anger,
 I will not again destroy Ephraim;
 for I am God and not man,
 the Holy One in your midst,
 and I will not come to destroy.

In overflowing wrath for a moment
 I hid my face from you,
 but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,
 says the LORD, your Redeemer . . .
 For the mountains may depart
 and the hills be removed,
 but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
 and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
 says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

In the New Testament the mercy of God is primarily shown in the way He redeems man from the misery of sin and its guilt. The terrible passage of Romans 1:18–32 shows us the existential anguish and pain of the rebel human race. Other passages such as Ephesians 2:1–4, 2:11–12, 4:17–19 and Titus 3:1–3 when put together amplify our understanding of man’s misery. Man is dead, under the power and lordship of Satan, by whom he is inwardly energized to do evil, is a creature of wrath—under the doom of God—ruthless in disobedience and rebellion, a stranger to grace, God’s promises and covenants, is without hope, and without God in the world, a slave to various passions both of the mind and the body, and one who passes his days hating and being hated!

God’s mercy is shown in that He brings this morally putrescent, suppurating dead thing to beautiful life, making him reign in life—by grace—as he is now seated with Christ in heavenly places. Peter said that God had born

man anew to a living hope, and Paul said that God ‘saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly [lavishly] through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life’.

HOW CAN WE BECOME HARD, HAVING RECEIVED MERCY?

The subject of the hardness of the heart is a vast one in the Scriptures. The root of hardness is sin, especially sin’s deceit. Many warnings are given against hardening one’s heart. God has mercy ‘on them that fear him’. Israel was warned constantly against such heart-hardening: ‘Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts’. Hence the writer of Proverbs says (28:14), ‘Blessed is the man who fears the LORD always; but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity’. Jesus warned his disciples against hardness of heart because ‘they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened’ (Mark 6:52; cf. 8:14–21). Many other factors contribute to such hardening, especially the deceit of sin, the deceit of the lusts, and the deceit of Satan and his powers.

The major factor for believers in hardening is ‘forgetting that we were purged from our old sins’ (cf. II Pet. 1:3–10). The wonder of mercy is lost in a complacency that comes when we think we are now righteous—not simply *accounted* righteous but *actually* righteous!

LIVING IN MERCY

We are called to be merciful—‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy’. In Luke 6:35–36 Jesus said,

‘But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind *to the ungrateful and the selfish*. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.’

We need to be merciful to all in misery, but the thought of the *ungrateful and selfish* is a repugnant one.

James showed the need for mercy when he said, ‘For judgement is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgement’ (James 2:13). James is really saying that we cannot expect mercy if we are merciless. He is not saying that mercy is greater than judgement. He is saying that if we are merciful then we need not fear judgement.

Two kinds of mercy

Often, today, mercy is looked upon as any aid we can give to people in distress, without even enquiring as to the origin of that distress. Humanism has so affected Christians that they believe we should fly to the aid of people in any form of misery. Since humanism makes nothing of the next life and the ultimate maturation of man, it has little time for the principle of suffering. ‘Just don’t let anyone suffer!’ it exclaims; ‘That is mercy!’ Because of this, social and welfare services loom large. For purposes of definition we say, ‘Let us have mercy in all things but not without thought or discernment.’ Mercy can help a person in misery. The deepest expression of

mercy is not humanistic but salvific. Mercy must be seen in the perspective of eternity. God help us if we are simply in the ‘aid-trade’ to pay off our guilt for being so prosperous, to prove or justify ourselves, or are simply soft-headed out of mawkish sentiment which prevents us seeing the real issues, and true ways of genuine mercy.

It is helpful to see the stages of God’s mercy in which we live, for these encourage and constrain us to exercise mercy.

Knowing the mercy that redeemed us

Three strong passages which tell us of this are Ephesians 2:1–10, Titus 3:1–7 and I Peter 1:3–5. It is this initial experience of mercy which ought to keep us warm with mercy towards others. Paul never took this salvation for granted. He is a good model for us. Let us look at I Timothy 1:12–17:

I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but *I received mercy* because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners; but *I received mercy* for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

In this passage Paul is not saying that he received mercy because he was faithful but because he was ignorant, i.e. that he was not essentially impenitent as in Exodus 34:6–7 where God said, ‘I will by no means clear the guilty’. Paul also said he received mercy so that he could be an

example of Christ's patience to those who would come to believe. Paul, then, never forgot that he was saved as a sinner, and still regarded himself in that light—the greatest of sinners.

Knowing the mercy that gave us ministry

In II Corinthians 4:1 Paul said, 'having received this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart'. Again, Paul never took his ministry for granted. Whilst he speaks of it elsewhere as the gift of grace, he is here saying it is of mercy. Galatians 1:15–16 gives us a window on his view:

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him amongst the Gentiles [nations] . . .

Paul saw clearly that salvation was not an end in itself, but was with a view to the ministry, i.e. proclaiming the Gospel.

We might say, then, that the greatest gift of mercy that we receive is ministry. *If we keep seeing it as the gift of mercy then we keep in mercy and so remain merciful.*

Knowing the mercy that keeps coming to us

In II Corinthians 1:3–11 Paul recounts the suffering he and his team had in Asia, 'for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself'. In this account Paul speaks of 'the Father of mercies and God of all comfort', meaning that God's mercies come to him—to us—in desperate situations. This reminds us of the classic passage on mercies in Lamentations 3:22–33, in which the prophet said,

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is thy faithfulness.

That is, believers have God's mercies coming to them every day. The day of Jeremiah's 'Lamentations' was a fearfully sad one, one wrought with horrors and terrors, yet the prophet saw God visiting with constant fresh mercies—daily, and always. Like Paul and Jeremiah we have to recognize the constant mercies of God so that we live in the warmth of mercy, and keep being merciful.

Knowing the mercy that is ultimately coming to us **—i.e. eschatological mercy**

Peter (I Pet. 1:3–5) said that God—out of His great mercy—has begotten us anew to a living hope, i.e. an inheritance which is imperishable. Jude enjoins his readers to 'wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life'. Whilst eternal life is our present possession (John 5:24), yet we look to pass through the transition point of bodily death. If we realize that we have not received all mercies yet, we will still be mercy-dependent, and so keep ourselves in His mercy—always looking to His, as yet, coming mercy—and so, in this state of mind, be merciful to others.

SETTING UP OURSELVES TO BE MERCIFUL

Jude has a fine passage which gives us the background to living in mercy. In verses 17–23 he writes,

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; they said to you, 'In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.' It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

These are the last days; this is the last time. These things predicted by the apostles are happening. In the midst of these things believers are to build themselves up on their most holy faith. This is a deliberate and continuous exercise dependent upon the teaching word, the word of grace which is able to build them up. They are to keep themselves in the love of God. This could mean—middle voice—that they are to be being kept in that love, i.e. by God. It could also mean they should be keeping one another—mutually—in the love of God. In any case, they are to live in the love of God, and this is a dynamic experience, covering all facets of life. We cannot stress too highly the necessity of living just as Jude bids us if we are to exercise mercy towards others.

Then they are to live in constant anticipation of the 'mercy unto eternal life', i.e. 'the grace that is coming [to them] at the revelation of Jesus Christ'. They will then see what now no eyes have seen, will hear what never has previously entered their ears, and will behold what the richest imagination could never have conceived. Living in anticipation of this mercy, one would surely be merciful!

Then it is that Jude sets out three injunctions: (i) convince some, who doubt, (ii) save some, by snatching them out of the fire, and (iii) on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. There can be no doubt about it—*these three actions are the actions of true mercy*. For this reason we will look at them quite closely.

Convince some, who doubt

Who are the doubters? We could say that with the confusion of the last time, the presence of the scoffers, the divisions they bring, and the clever worldliness of those who follow their own passions, even believers could become confused, and could begin to question the faith. Among the rabble of the day were those (Jude 16) who were 'grumblers, malcontents, following their own passions, loud-mouthed boasters, flattering people to gain advantage'. The passage seems to indicate that in fact some of the doubters are also those who have disputed the faith and need to be convinced since they are in doubt. If they are weak in the faith, then they need mercy, i.e. tenderness, gentleness, and understanding. If, however, they be another kind of doubter, i.e. those who have been attracted by those who follow heresy (cf. verse 4) then they need to be overcome by the Gospel in their wrong contention. All of this is mercy.

Save some, by snatching them out of the fire

It is clear that we cannot save people, of ourselves, for that is the work of God, but then God chooses to use us. If we saw a person in a fire we would instinctively try to

save that one. If, remembering the mercy God had on us, we see those who are under the wrath of God, then we must snatch them away from danger. If we think God delights in men being burned up with fire, then we are mistaken. 'He does not willingly afflict or grieve the sons of men.' 'His anger is but for a moment.' He has sent His Son that men 'should not perish'. The Gospel is 'the power of God for salvation', for it is 'the word of the cross'. In Amos 4:11 Israel is 'as a brand plucked out of the burning', and in Zechariah 3:2 Joshua the high priest is 'a brand plucked from the fire'. John Wesley, saved from the rectory fire when a boy, always saw himself as a brand plucked from the burning.

At the same time, 'God is angry with the sinner every day', and 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth [in acts of unrighteousness]'. He is the One who has power to cast into hell, the place where the merciless and rich Dives pleaded for respite to be mercifully given to him via the Lazarus to whom he had not showed mercy. It is the situation 'where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched'. Revelation 21:8 calls this lake of fire the second death and says those who will be cast into it are 'the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted . . . murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars'.

Jude does not tell us who these are who need to be saved, but they may be the doubters, those misled by the apostates, they may even be believers but who are in moral danger through the deceit of sin and the deceitful lusts of the flesh, or simply those who waver concerning the grace of the Gospel. In our day and age we are apt to

think all respectable people are untouched by the flames of hell when—as Manton puts it—'They are in the suburbs of hell'. Saving is by proclaiming the saving work of Christ, telling the Gospel of forgiveness, cleansing, justification, regeneration, and love.

Manton cries to the pastors:

*Minister! art thou sensible of the danger of souls? Are thy words as burning coals? Do they fret through the heart of a sinner? Christian! art thou sensible of the danger of thy carnal neighbours? they are burning in their beds, and thou wilt not cry, Fire! fire! they are besotted with lust and error, and wilt thou let them alone? Oh, unkind!**

We had better ask ourselves whether or not we believe in God's wrath, hell, eternal punishment, lostness, perishing, eternal darkness, the lake of fire, the second death. If we do not, then the question of mercy does not authentically arise.

*On some have mercy with fear,
hating even the garment spotted by the flesh*

It may well be that the doubters, the burning brands, and the others who need 'mercy with fear' are all the one. We do not know. What we do know is that we must have mercy, but *have it with fear*. These last persons mentioned by Jude seem to be caught in moral pollution, and this could be as unsaved persons, or as those who claim to have faith. However, it may not be limited to them, for there can be great contamination within the fold of the church.

* Thomas Manton, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Jude*, Klock and Klock, 1983 reprint, pp. 361–362.

‘With fear’ reminds us of Philippians 2:12–13, where we are to work out (not at) our salvation with fear and trembling. In Isaiah 66:2 the Lord says, ‘But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, *and trembles at my word*’. Galatians 6:1 says, ‘Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. *Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted*’. Rescue work can be most dangerous. There should be a healthy fear of contamination or contagion.

Paul assures us there are forms of evil which can be dangerous when we associate with the evil doers (I Cor. 5:9–11; II Thess. 3:14). II Timothy 3:5 says, ‘Avoid such people’. Yet all of these need mercy. In I Corinthians 5 Paul spoke of delivering the incestuous man over to Satan ‘for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus’. Probably his reference is to the same person in II Corinthians 2:5–11 where he counsels not being over-severe but bringing forgiveness to the person.

The question is, ‘How truly can we have mercy when “the garment spotted by the flesh” refers to ugly—and perhaps contagious—evil?’. The undergarment, close to the flesh, would be soiled. For example, the leper’s garment would be unwholesome to a healthy person.

The perfect passive participle *espilomenon* denotes the past corruption that has defiled their garments, a defiling the effects of which abide and continue up into the present time.*

CONCLUSION

Paul counted it a high calling to proclaim the Gospel and so to share the mercy of God. For him it was not only a matter of indebtedness but of great joy. It was his life. So has it always been to those who have ‘fire in the belly’. Love for God compels us all, when ‘we see any man have need’, to seek to supply that need. We must keep warm in human feeling, sympathy, compassion, and pity. God’s richest expression is ‘the riches of his mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us’, for mercy out of love equals grace—‘by grace you are saved’—and in the end it will be seen that all is of grace.

* G. L. Lawlor, *The Epistle of Jude*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972, p. 136.

3

***The pastoral power
of Christ's Substitutionary
Atonement***

***Part One:
THE MATTER OF
THE ATONEMENT***

A number of factors have drawn our attention away from what was once central to the Christian faith, namely the atonement of Christ. By 'atonement', we mean that act of God whereby He set forth Christ as a propitiation

for the sins of mankind, thus acquitting from the guilt of sin those who have faith in this act of grace, thereby effecting reconciliation of believing man with God. The word 'atonement' is used considerably in the Pentateuch, and about 8 times in the rest of the Old Testament. It is not used in the New Testament in many modern versions, but was used in the AV in Romans 5:11, the word being translated 'reconciliation' (*katallage*) in most versions.

The word 'atonement' has been used by theologians for many years to cover the act we have described above, which primarily is the saving work of Christ in his cross and resurrection. Undoubtedly the incarnation, obedience, and ministry of Christ relate to the Atonement, as do his ascension, session and parousia, but they are not central to it. It may almost be said that the Atonement is central to them!

**THE ATONEMENT IN
HISTORICAL THEOLOGY**

We cannot possibly cover the history of this doctrine—it is so vast. It has had a central position in Western and Latin theology, but Eastern (Orthodox) theology has laid major emphasis on his incarnation and resurrection and present Lordship. What immediately concern us are the theories of the Atonement which have developed, and with which most of us are familiar. Again, we will not detail them.* The main theories are entitled

* See *The Things We Firmly Believe*, NCPI, 1986, pp. 103–105.

Ransom, Victory, Satisfaction, Moral, Rectoral or Governmental, Example, Mystical, Vicarious Repentance, Substitutionary, Representative, and Vicarious. Any of these may contain elements of other theories.

It must be understood that ‘theories’ of the Atonement do not of themselves save those who hold them. Christ saves, through his Atonement, by the Holy Spirit, but having a theory is almost inescapable. We are limiting ourselves to the Substitutionary Theory which has long been held by Evangelicals and many others.

The Substitutionary Theory holds that Christ died in the stead of man who deserved to receive God’s wrath and eternal punishment for the sins he has committed—which include his rebellion against God, and his enmity towards Him. This substitutionary principle is seen in the Pentateuch, primarily in the Levitical sacrifices, which themselves need to be studied in order to understand the ancient principle of atonement.

OBJECTIONS TO THE SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

When we view the number of theories of the Atonement, and the various elements they contain, we can understand why substitution is objected to, since this particular theory seems to neglect so many elements propounded outside it. The primary objection is that it is immoral, i.e. that one person should be made to suffer for the sins of others. This is held to be immoral in society and no law is based on such a principle. Other objections are that it is a forensic manipulation, an unreal transaction in the mind of God,

that it is mechanical, and by nature of the case impossible, i.e. one man (i) cannot take on himself the sins of any other, and (ii) cannot take upon himself all the sins of all mankind for all time. Nearly all of these objections may arise from inadequately examining the theory.

There is another consideration, however. It is the subjective approach of a person to the theory. All human beings seek to justify themselves in life, and the Substitutionary Theory leaves no grounds for that. Thus human pride is affronted. The idea of Christ doing ‘an alien work’—i.e. a work separate from us, for us—is not easily accepted. It is possible, if not probable, that many of the objections to the theory arise from a discernment—whether conscious or unconscious—that human effort can have no part in salvation. Salvation would have to be entirely of grace. Some forms of evangelism present the Substitutionary Theory of the Atonement as monergistic but make the act of salvation itself synergistic, i.e. make repentance and faith virtually to be works, speak of commitment—a human act—and so lessen the grace of the Atonement. Sooner or later this concession to human pride brings consequent results—a dimming of the brilliance of grace, some uncertainty in the believer as to his part in salvation, and application to secondary aid in the processes of Christian living. We will return later to these factors.

What we need to touch on briefly here is the so-called immoral element of the Substitutionary Theory. Since God initiates the act, and His Son is voluntarily one with Him in it, it means that the plan of substitution takes place within the Godhead, and Christ as the Son implements it

within his humanity. No innocent person is forced to bear the sins of the world. We cannot call God immoral if He designs, within Himself, to bear the wrath which is upon sin. Such an act is true love, and the most moral thing of all.

THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE OF THE SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

The centrality of the Cross and Resurrection in the New Testament

It is patently clear that the New Testament, as it has come down to us, is occupied with the centrality of Christ's death and his resurrection. The following points indicate this:

- Jesus himself was most conscious of the Cross, and spoke the *dei* of its necessity three times in the one Gospel, i.e. Mark 8:31, 9:31 and 10:33. Matthew and Luke also speak of its indispensability.
- The temptations of Satan in the wilderness and Peter at Caesarea Philippi were meant to draw away Jesus from the Cross, but he rejected them.
- The testimony of John to Jesus being the Lamb of God, and taking away the sin of the world has reference to death. Jesus refers to this death many times in John's Gospel, e.g. 3:14; 6:51–57; 10:11–18; 12:31–32; 14:30–31; 15:13.

- Jesus' statement of Matthew 26:28 links his death with effective blood-shedding and with Jeremiah 31:31–34 (cf. Ezek. 36:24–28). The important *anamnesis* of I Corinthians 11:23–34 (including the solemn warning to eat and drink worthily; cf. I Cor. 10:14–22) underlines the importance of the saving death to the early church.

- Approximately one-third of the text of the Synoptic Gospels is taken up in regard to the Crucifixion and Resurrection. The anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany gives prominence to the death. Whilst explicit references to the death in Acts may be said to be less than to the resurrection, yet both events are inextricably linked. The Epistles are greatly occupied with the death and resurrection, and it is significant in the Revelation (cf. 1:5; 7:14) especially as Christ is 'the slain Lamb'.

- The facts of forgiveness of sins, purification from sin's pollution, the justification of the believer and his liberation from the power of Satan, the world-system and its powers, sin, death, God's wrath, and the law are all linked with the Atonement, particularly as they are set out in the New Testament Epistles.

- Both New Testament ordinances or sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are *inexplicable* without the death and resurrection of Jesus. Their institution by Christ shows his intention that the Atonement should be remembered and made prominent in the life and thinking of the church.

At this point we can say that although some may not see the death as substitutionary, they would have to agree

that the death itself was of great significance in the New Testament.

**References to Christ's death for us,
pertaining to sins and salvation**

This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed *for* you and for many for the remission of sins;

Christ died *for* our sins in accordance with the scriptures and . . . rose again in accordance with the scriptures;

God made him to be sin *for* us;

who gave himself *for* our sins to deliver us from the present evil age;

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse *for* us;

[He] was delivered *for* our offences and raised *for* our justification;

sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *for* sin, he condemned sin in the flesh;

whom God put forward as a propitiation *by* his blood;

the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself *for* me;

he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin *by* the sacrifice of himself . . . Christ, having been offered to bear the sins *of* many;

Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice *for* sins . . . For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified;

the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified;

He himself bore *our* sins in his own body on the tree;

For Christ also died *for* sins once for all, the righteous *for* the unrighteous;

he is the propitiation *for* our sins;

he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation *for* our sins;

has freed us from our sins *by* his blood.

These statements stand self-evident, but others, seen in the light of them, underline the efficacy of the bloody death:

through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone that believes is justified . . . ;

it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead;

In him we have redemption *through* his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace;

having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, *nauling it to the cross*;

He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him;

we have confidence to enter the sanctuary *by* the blood of Jesus;

the blood of Christ, who . . . offered himself without blemish to God, *purify* your conscience from dead works;

may the God of peace . . . *by* the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you;

you were ransomed . . . *with* the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot;

By his wounds you have been healed;

the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us *from* all sin;

they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Linked with these are other statements which relate to the fruits of redemption as linked with the saving work of Christ:

Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for *the forgiveness of your sins*;

Repent, therefore, and turn again, that *your sins may be blotted out*;

every one who believes in him receives *forgiveness of sins* through his name;

they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness [shall] reign in life;

by one man's obedience many will be made righteous;

our old humanity was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin;

who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died;

you were *washed*, you were *sanctified*, you were *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ;

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and *you are still in your sins*;

his beloved Son, *in whom* we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins;

Christ loved us and *gave himself up for us*, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God;

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;

the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men;

our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself *for us* to redeem us *from* all iniquity;

he saved us . . . by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we *might be justified by his grace* and become heirs in hope of eternal life;

the Lamb who was slain.

The above Scriptures make clear to us the centrality of the Atonement in the New Testament for salvation, sanctification, and ultimate glorification.

The model of substitutionary sacrifice in the Old Testament

It is clear that the New Testament understanding of sacrifice is modelled on the Old Testament principle, especially in regard to substitutionary sacrifice. The references to Christ being the Lamb of God (John 1:29; Rev. 5:6; 6:16; 13:8; 14:4; 19:7; 21:22), along with the references to his blood-shedding and its substitutionary nature—*for us, for sins, concerning sins*—lead us to believe his sacrifice was substitutionary. Whilst theologians may argue as to the specific meanings of *peri*, *huper*, and *anti*, yet there is a general thrust of substitution. In this regard we need to look closely at the propitiatory and vicarious nature of his death. First, then, we should look at the Old Testament model of substitutionary sacrifice.

If we look at the ancient sacrifices such as that of Cain and Abel, of Noah, of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—then we may well discover that the worshippers thought in terms of their sacrifice being a substitute. Abel offered 'through faith', but what was his faith? Was it that God would accept his sacrifice

as satisfactory? See Luke 18:9–14, where the tax-gatherer requests God to ‘be propitious’, i.e. make propitiation for him, and so justify him—by faith. When Abraham offered up Isaac, the ram caught in the thicket was definitely a substitute. Apart from Cain’s sacrifice an animal was used as a victim. Why?

However we may develop the thought of substitution from sacrifices by humans—i.e. pagans use propitiation as a bribe to their gods—yet Leviticus chapters 1–7 certainly set out substitutionary sacrifice. In each case the victim was a substitute for the worshipper. The worshipper identified with the victim by laying his hand upon its head. He then slew the victim himself, i.e. slew the animal, washed the dirty parts of the animal, and chopped it up to be burned. The priest collected the blood and splashed it against the side of the altar. *The worshipper identified with the victim as though it were himself.*

All of this was said ‘to make atonement for him’. In a number of cases it was said—following that atonement— ‘his sin shall be forgiven’ (Lev. 4:26; 4:31; 4:35; 5:10; 5:13; 5:16; 5:18; 6:7). The atonement was made by the priest and not the worshipper, although his identification with the victim and its death led to that atonement.

In Isaiah 53 the substitution becomes very clear. ‘The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all’, so that the prophet can say,

Surely he has borne our griefs,
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,

he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.

What needs to be seen is that the atonement as prescribed must be meticulously followed to the last detail, for *there is no other way* for atonement, or for the forgiveness of sins. We are not told a lot as to *why* the sacrifice should be offered or *how* the sacrifice atones. It is simply said that sacrifice is for sin, and that God has given the principle of sacrifice as set out in Leviticus 17:11, ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life’. That is, we need atonement when we sin, and atonement is effected by the death of the victim, God having given this authentic prescription. The victim must die by the shedding of its own blood, the death having been occasioned by the worshipper and formalized as atonement by the priest. Note that Isaiah 53 gives us a developed rationale of the Substitutionary Atonement.

The notable fact is that there is no other way of atonement, and no other method by which sin can be forgiven. Since God has prescribed the ritual, and since its format is His prescription, then the worshipper can be sure his sin is forgiven.

SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT IS REQUIRED FOR PROPITIATION

If, at this point, we accept the fact of the prescribed atonement, then we may ask, ‘What is meant by propitiation?’.

Dr Leon Morris's book, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* is probably the most exhaustive treatment of the subject.* In the Old Testament the word *kipper* is used to indicate propitiation, and in the New Testament the *hilaskomai* word group covers this idea. Dr Morris distinguishes between the ideas of *expiation* and *propitiation*, and insists that the New Testament word group (*hilaskomai*) does not involve expiation. Expiation is the working out of one's sin or debt, whereas propitiation is linked with the wrath of God, and no human can propitiate. Dr Morris says that propitiation is that which averts the wrath of God from the sinner.

God's wrath and propitiation

The doctrine of the wrath of God, for various reasons, is not popular with human beings. The idea of wrath—with its connotation of irrationality, untrammelled emotion, violence, and punishment—is objectionable. Ideas of God are often more placid and pacific. At depth the sinner protests that he does not deserve wrath. This mistake arises from a misunderstanding of God's holiness. God's wrath is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and sin (Rom. 1:18; cf. Ps. 7:11; Ezek. 7:8; I Thess. 1:10). Habakkuk 1:13 means that God cannot look on sin without punishing it.

Since wrath arises from the violation of God's holiness by man, there is nothing man can do to appease that wrath, i.e. by human expiation. If God does not

* IVP, 1965, pp. 144–213.

propitiate His own wrath, then man is wholly doomed. Leviticus 17:11—amongst other Scriptures—shows us that God does propitiate, i.e. provide atonement. This is the thrust of the *kipper* references in the Old Testament and the *hilaskomai* group of words in the New Testament.

Propitiation is through the shedding of blood

Hebrews 9:22 states simply that 'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins'. A. M. Stibbs in his monograph *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' in Scripture** has shown conclusively that the shedding of blood is the taking of life, and, where propitiation is concerned, it is the taking of life in sacrifice. The following references in which the word *blood* is contained all show that it signifies 'sacrificial death', or just 'death': Acts 20:28; Romans 3:25; 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; Colossians 1:19, 20; Hebrews 9:7, 11–14, 15–20, 22; 10:2–4, 19, 22; 12:24; 13:20–21; I Peter 1:18, 19.

The need for such a death tells of the enormity of man's sin as it violates God's holiness. We have seen the *indispensability* of Christ's death, and its effectiveness. In I Corinthians 1:17–31 we are shown the fact that it is the power of God—over and above human wisdom, especially as Jews seek power in signs and wonders, and Greeks in (so-called) wisdom.

* Tyndale, 1958.

Part Two:
***THE PASTORAL OUTWORKING OF THE
SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT***

**THE PERSONAL PROBLEMS
OF SINFUL MAN**

Sinful man has multitudinous problems, such as his sin, its guilt, coming judgement, the fear of death, the power of various enemies over him, his existential awryness, dislocation and displacement in the true (ontological) creation. He is all that is described in such passages as Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:21–23; John 8:34; Romans 1:18–32; 3:9–18; Ephesians 2:1–3; 2:11–13; 4:17–19.

It is required of us to see man's problems as we proclaim to him the Gospel of the Substitutionary Atonement. We need to see how a clear understanding of this propitiation will deliver a person from the many fears, torments, and problems that dog many Christians.

One of the reasons for this study is that it is an observable fact that many Christians do not live in a clear understanding of the forgiveness of sins, the radical and total purification of those sins, complete reconciliation with God, access to His presence, the abolition of judicial death, the gift of love and sanctification, the assurance of eternal life, resurrection from the dead, and total glorification of the person. The pastor must see the root of these misunderstandings of the total nature of grace, so that the believer may—and shall—live freely.

Many pastors believe in the total efficacy of the Cross, but believe the reality and action of the Atonement does not come immediately to the believer, so that it must be mediated by teaching, and its full effect must come through by degrees. Often this impression arises when the pastor believes he has taught well concerning the Atonement but sees little response to that teaching. He thus believes he must gradually mediate its reality. A pastor in this frame of mind must ask himself whether he finds this model in the New Testament, and consider the possibility that he has not preached dynamically, i.e. has had more of the form of the word than its transforming content. For example, Paul knew (i) that by a certain kind of preaching he could 'rob the cross of its power' (I Cor. 1:17–18; 2:1–15), and (ii) that the Cross is preached effectively in the context of great suffering (II Cor. 4:7–15). The pastor will need to ask himself whether he is indeed himself a rich fruit of the Cross and therefore a true witness and—so—an effective preacher.

**THE EFFECTIVE POWER OF
THE ATONEMENT**

We can first say that the work of the Cross and Resurrection brings justification from the guilt of sins, forgiveness and purification of sins, freedom from law as a way of self-justification, freedom from law as a judgement-threatening system, freedom from the fear of death, freedom from Satan, his world system and his principalities and powers, freedom from the dead works of conscience, and freedom within the liberating Lordship of Christ, and the love of the Father as displayed in the Atonement. All of these elements are valuable pastorally when they are

pressed on people who are to a great degree ignorant of their accomplishment, and so do not live by faith in the Atonement.

**Some Scriptures which show
the initial and continuing dynamic
of the Atonement for Christian living**

I Peter 2:24 says Christ bore our sins, ‘that we, being dead to sins, *should live unto righteousness*’ (AV). Death to sin (cf. Rom. 6:1–6) means we are enabled to ‘live unto righteousness’. What does this mean? II Corinthians 5:14–15 shows that the believer knows he has already died, and so he now *lives unto God*. What does this mean? II Corinthians 5:21 shows that when God made Christ ‘to be sin for us’, then the goal of the death was ‘that we might *become the righteousness of God* in him’. Explore this. Is it the same as in Romans 8:1–4, where the work of the Cross is effected so that *we might fulfil the just requirements of the law*, or as in Romans 14:7–9 that Christ—by his death and resurrection—might be *Lord of the dead and the living*? In Galatians 1:4 Christ gave himself for our sins *to deliver us from this present evil age (aeon)*. Is this the same as being *liberated from the fear of death* (Heb. 2:14–15; cf. I John 4:16–18) which Satan exercised over us, and *from the domination of principalities and powers* (Col. 2:14–15)? Does the salvation of mercy, love and grace—as in Ephesians 2:4–10, and Titus 3:4–7, i.e. the fruits of the Cross—powerfully affect the believer in the forms set out? Does the grace, as in Titus 2:11–14, result in a reversal of man, as seen in Titus 3:1–3? What of the matter of sanctification,

as set out in (i) Romans 6:1–23, and (ii) Colossians 3:1–17, and explained in Ephesians 4:17–32? Does I Corinthians 6:9–11 adequately set out the radical transformation of people who have been under the degradation of sin?

The intimacy of the Substitutionary Atonement

We have not dealt with the *how* of the Atonement, i.e. *how* does Jesus become our substitute? We do not have space and time here to go into that intimately; however, Scriptures such as Isaiah 53:6b; Romans 6:6; II Corinthians 5:14; I Peter 3:18; John 12:31–32; Ephesians 5:2 and Galatians 2:20 establish the fact that God laid the sins of mankind on Christ, that all died when he died, and that it was for us it all happened. If he died *for* us, then in some way he must have become one *with* us, and doubtless this was by the Holy Spirit (Heb. 9:14) as God ‘*set him forth* as a propitiation’ (Rom. 3:25; cf. I John 4:10). The pastor should spend time in showing this to his flock, and especially to those who waver.

However, our main point in pastoral ministering of the Atonement is to take the listener to the Atonement, and help him to understand the total nature of substitution. What he could never do, Christ did *in his stead*, but *in his stead* means he is accounted as having done that for himself, by himself. In the Levitical atonement the worshipper *had to lay his hand on the victim* and by faith believe he was the efficacious sacrifice. It would be profitable to ascertain whether the person has done this—i.e. deliberately identified with Christ—and seen that his own sins have really crucified Christ.

If the person is still endeavouring to come to, or is trying to effect salvation, justification, forgiveness, and cleansing of sin, then he has yet to understand grace. If the pastor believes this can only be effected in dribs and drabs, then he must ask himself whether he is really preaching 'the word of the cross which is the power of God', or really believes the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. He must ask himself whether he is not encouraging human 'expiation' (self-atonement) or a synergistic Gospel in which repentance and faith are works rather than gifts of grace. He must also ask himself whether he has a split Gospel, i.e. believes God has done much for the repentant man, but believes the Holy Spirit does his own work of power and sanctification, i.e. that the Atonement is one work—a saving work—and the work of the Spirit is not connected with this, but is a work apart from, or beyond, the Cross. Such an approach would be in contradiction of Romans 8:1–5, Titus 3:4–7, and the other passages (above) that we have linked with the new life of the believer.

The sacraments at work in the congregation

Today we have much at work which is not the Atonement. We have humanly rationalized ministry which has one eye to utility, and another to the humanistic standards of what we call 'help', i.e. we are in the aid-trade, and are not seeking to penetrate the depths of persons, except in a psychological or psycho-therapeutic way. We do not see the deepest needs and problems of man as moral and spiritual, and that only the Gospel can actually reach these

depths. It is essential we realize that we have the word and the sacraments and they are sufficient for all, especially as they work through and in the context of the body—Christ's community.

When we realize that the sacraments are not only built upon the substitutionary work of Christ, but are down-to-earth aids given by Christ for man under grace, then we see that these are the means by which the work of Christ is constantly communicated to the people of God. In baptism and the Lord's Supper we have the setting forth of the Cross and Resurrection and an *anamnesis* of them. This helps to keep our mind—and heart—on the work of the Atonement. Above all, we must remember the Atonement is in the setting of covenant.

CONCLUSION TO THE PASTORAL POWER OF THE SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

It is evident that this paper is inadequate to cover all pastoral elements, but at least it is the basis for a certain line of investigation as to the causes of uneasiness in many believers today, in the seeming need for counselling therapies, especially those linked with the person's past, his (or her) lack of assurance in the present, and vagueness concerning hope for the future. The pastor himself must face his own inadequacies in believing the Gospel—if indeed there be such inadequacies—remembering that proclamation of the word is also a witness to its reality to the proclaimer. In the face of present humanism, conforming pressures by the world, natural timidity, and the human tendency to walk by sight and not by faith, the

pastor must be honest as to whether he believes the substitutionary work of Christ, and is not ashamed of it, or afraid to proclaim it.

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4

The Cross, the Resurrection, and the Holy Spirit

THE AIM OF OUR STUDY

In our last study we sought to see the power for proclamatory and pastoral ministry which lies in the objective Substitutionary Atonement. By 'objective' we mean something which God has done in history apart from man, although it is for man that He has done it. By 'objective' we do not mean that it was not a personal work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, for it was. We do not mean that Christ did not enter intimately into the human realm, and that on the Cross he did not so identify with us that he did not become one with us—become sin—and so did not suffer in our stead. In the

objective Atonement God did that substitutionary work whereby we have been saved from the wrath of God and the penalty of the law which is upon sin.

The purpose of this present study is to examine the relationship of the Cross to the Resurrection, and the work of Holy Spirit in regard to the whole act of the Atonement, the proclamation of that Atonement, and the bringing of it to bear upon man so that he repents, believes, is regenerated, and has as the source of his life the power of the Atonement.

The reasons we are seeking to do this are quite a few, namely:

- The Cross is sometimes regarded as a preliminary to the Resurrection, which then makes the Resurrection primary, and the Cross secondary. This might be called a theology of Resurrection as against a theology of the Cross, for in this case any theology of the Cross is subsumed under the theology of the Resurrection.

- It is often claimed that the Cross is simply a saving initiation to the Christian life, and that justification simply opens the way to sanctification, thus making sanctification the real goal of the Atonement. This approach tends to be a theology of sanctification, so that a theology of the Cross is again subsumed under a theology of sanctification. In most cases a theology of sanctification is related to, and dependent upon, a theology of the Resurrection.

- It is often claimed that the Atonement is an initial step, but however important it is, the primary reality is life in and by the Spirit. That is, power for Christian living does not lie primarily in the Atonement, but in the personal

presence of the Spirit, so that he is the one who enables us to proclaim the Gospel, and to establish the Kingdom.

SOME OBJECTIONS TO THE SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

Let us look at some of the points we began to discuss in our last study, namely the ways in which we skirt around the Cross. They are as follows:

(a) an inadequate understanding of the Substitutionary Atonement, resulting in an inability to communicate it powerfully.

If the reader will look to the two paragraphs below* (here appended as footnotes which are excerpts

* The following notes are abstracted from our previous study, 'The Pastoral Power of Christ's Substitutionary Atonement', pp. 252–253.

One of the reasons for this study is that it is an observable fact that many Christians do not live in a clear understanding of the forgiveness of sins, the radical and total purification of those sins, complete reconciliation with God, access to His presence, the abolition of judicial death, the gift of love and sanctification, the assurance of eternal life, resurrection from the dead, and total glorification of the person. The pastor must see the root of these misunderstandings of the total nature of grace, so that the believer may—and shall—live freely.

Many pastors believe in the total efficacy of the Cross, but believe the reality and action of the Atonement does not come immediately to the believer, so that it must be mediated by teaching, and its full effect must come through by degrees. Often this impression arises when the pastor believes he has taught well concerning the Atonement but sees little response to that teaching. He thus believes he must gradually mediate its reality. A pastor in this frame of mind must ask himself whether he finds this model in the New Testament, and consider the possibility that he has not preached dynamically, i.e. has had more of the form of the word than its transforming content. For example, Paul knew (i) that by a certain kind of preaching he could 'rob the cross of its power' (I Cor. 1:17–18; 2:1–15), and (ii) that the Cross is preached effectively in the context of great suffering (II Cor. 4:7–15). The pastor will need to ask himself whether he is indeed himself a rich fruit of the Cross and therefore a true witness and—so—an effective preacher.

from our last study), he will see what we mean by this;

- (b) the objection is that it is immoral, i.e. that one person should be made to suffer for the sins of others. This is held to be immoral in society since no law is based upon such a principle;
- (c) the objection is that one man cannot (i) take on himself the sins of any other, and (ii) cannot take upon himself all the sins of all mankind for all time;
- (d) the objection that overmuch is made of the Cross to the neglect of the Resurrection, which, it is claimed, is as significant as—if not more significant than—the Cross;
- (e) the objection that an objective Atonement does not relate to man where he is, that it is a forensic manipulation, an unreal transaction in the mind of God—or the theologian!—, that it is mechanical, and by nature of the case impossible, i.e. because it is conceptual, and not immediately dynamic in its affects and effects, so that it is more in the nature of a theory than a functional reality. As against this, Christ's defeat of death by his resurrection, and the immediacy of the Holy Spirit in communicating resurrection life and stimulating significant actions, argues for a more dynamic theology than that of the Cross.

One of the problems we face in all this is that there may be certain factors which incline some towards a theology of Resurrection, rather than one of the Cross. The factors may be of the nature of a hidden agenda, or a conscious nominated agenda, or both. It may well be argued that the case could be similar for those who espouse a theology of the Cross. In both cases the appeal must be to what Scripture teaches. When it is claimed that a theology of the Cross must include that of the Resurrection, then this cannot be gainsaid, for both are essential to a full doctrine of the Atonement. It is doubtful whether anyone holds a theology of the Cross in isolation from the Resurrection. Similarly—though not necessarily equally—a theology of the Resurrection must have as its starting point the matter of the Cross, but it is to be argued that the theology of the Cross does not place the Cross merely as a starting point, but covers all theology, such as the cosmic victory of Christ being worked out in his Lordship over all things, and his ultimate triumphant *telos*—the new creation.

The matter becomes even more complicated when various views of the Atonement are held so that there are, in fact, different theologies of the Cross. Since we are only discussing the Substitutionary Atonement we must, for purposes of this study, leave aside other theologies of the Cross.

The further matter of the place of the Spirit in relation to the Cross and the Resurrection makes our discussion even more complicated, but because it is essential to a true

understanding of the Cross and the Resurrection we are bound to examine it.

CHRIST, THE FATHER, THE SPIRIT, AND THE CROSS

As in all the works of God, such as creation, covenant, and the ultimate new creation, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit work as the One Triune God, so it is they participate together in the Atonement. Here, by 'Atonement' we mean the saving work of Christ through the Cross and the Resurrection.

The initiator of the Cross is the Father

It is by command that the Son lays down his life (John 10:17; 14:30–31). God sends him to be the propitiation for our sins (I John 4:9–10) and sets him forth as a propitiation (Rom. 3:24–26). God makes him to be sin for us (II Cor. 5:21), and it is assumed He also makes him to be curse (Gal. 3:13). He abandons him up for us all, i.e. up to death, up to sin (Rom. 8:32), offering him to 'bear the sins of many' (Heb. 9:28). Romans 4:25 speaks of him being delivered for our offences. Isaiah 53 teaches us that God has laid on him the iniquity of us all (vv. 4–12), and I Peter 2:24 uses this very prophecy in this regard. Hebrews 2:10–15 makes it clear that God manifested him for the work of the Cross in order that he might taste death for every man, and be the basis (pioneer) of our salvation. The Gethsemane prayer to be saved from death (cf. Heb. 5:7) is to the Father, who is asked to assist him in the hour of the Cross (John 17:1–5; cf. 12:27–28).

Other Scriptures speak more generally of Christ being sent for soteriological purposes (e.g. John 3:16, 17; I John 4:14; John 12:27, 28, 31–32; John 16:11). It is to be noted in conformity with John 17:1–5 that the Son speaks to the Father in the event of the Cross, both at its beginning and its end.

These things being the case, it is clear that there would have been no Cross had the Father not initiated the event. The use of the verbs 'made', 'abandoned', 'set forth', 'laid on', 'wounded', and 'bruised' all have the Son as their object. The Father is the subject of these actions, as the cry 'My God! My God!' indicates. The Son could not—unaided—take on himself the sins of the world, could not become 'sin' and 'the curse'. The Father had to abandon him, much as he also abandoned himself. To say that there was nothing penal about the death is to ignore the nature of sin being laid upon him, of him being made curse, of 'the chastisement that made us whole', and the matter of the judgement of the law—'he redeemed us from the curse of the law'.

It must, then, be summed up by 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them'. Whilst we must avoid patipassianism—the Father being crucified—we must also avoid saying the Father was merely a spectator to the event of the Cross.

The one who executes the work of the Cross is the Son

The verses which speak of the Father initiating the work of the Cross also imply the fact that the Son is

obedient and carries out those works (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 2:9–10; 5:7–10; John 10:17; 14:30–31). In Galatians 1:4 it is said he gave himself for our sins *according to the will of our God and Father*; he died for our sins—the message of prime importance (I Cor. 15:3). Again, he is said to have offered himself up (Gal. 2:20), and this as a sacrifice (Eph. 5:2; cf. Heb. 9:26; 10:10, 12, 14). He said he would offer his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45), that his blood was for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28). It is also said that he redeemed us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13), and that he gave himself up to redeem us from all iniquity (Titus 2:14).

It is clear that the Son works for our redemption, but is always dependent upon the Father, and the Spirit. To give himself over to being abandoned must be the apex of that work, and is incomprehensible to us, especially if we lack sight of the utter holiness of God, and the consequent and proper nature of His wrath.

The Spirit is present and efficient in the work of the Cross

It is true that we only have Hebrews 9:14 to indicate the Spirit's presence in the work of the Cross, for Christ is said to have offered himself, without blemish, through the eternal Spirit, and even here translators often use lower case—'the eternal spirit', meaning Christ's eternal spirit. Doubtless the vexed question of whether Jesus offered himself in his humanity or deity or both is unavoidable. Certainly we cannot define a division of the two, and the Father being in Christ to effect the work of the Cross preserves the reality of his humanity in that action.

The weight of evidence for the Spirit also being in the work of the Cross lies in the fact that Christ was conceived through the Spirit, baptized in—or by—the Spirit, was led to the Devil's temptation of him by the Spirit, effected all his ministry by the Spirit, was raised from the dead by the Spirit of the Father, and was caused to ascend by the same Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:19–20). The intimate work of the Spirit in man—especially redeemed man—is shown in Romans 8:26–27, where 'the hearts of men' and 'the mind of the Spirit' are regarded as one.

We have need to explain how Christ can be the substitute for man in the work of the Cross. The fact that the Father sets him forth as a propitiation means He makes him substitute. It is reasonable to assume that the Spirit—the Spirit of personal intimacy—*makes him one with sinful humanity* in his conception, in his baptism, in his ministry, and in his death as well as his resurrection. Thus it is by the eternal Spirit that Jesus is able to offer himself sacrificially, and offer himself without blemish.

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND EFFICACY OF THE TRIUNE WORK OF THE CROSS

The dimensions of the Cross are such as to make the work accomplished impossible apart from the participation of the Three. This, then, evaluates the Cross as the most significant work that is done. When we see the participation of the Father in raising Christ from the dead—a theme that is often expounded (Acts 2:24–32; 3:14–15; 4:10; 5:30–31; 10:40; 13:30; Rom. 6:4, 9; 8:11; I Cor. 15:4, 12, 15, 17; Eph. 1:19–20)—then we see the

entirety of the Atonement cannot be realized apart from the Father. Since, likewise, the resurrection of Jesus was accomplished through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 1:4; 8:11; Eph. 1:19–20; cf. I Pet. 3:18), and as Jesus is spoken of as rising from the dead (Matt. 28:6–7; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:46; Acts 17:3; Rom. 1:4; cf. Rev. 1:18), then the full work of the Atonement is Trinitarian.

The importance of this fact is that if the Atonement is accomplished by the Triune God, then *its revelation to sinful man and its application to the human person must also be a Triune work*. Methodologically, the best way to go would seem to be to trace the work of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit in the application of the Cross to the life of the believer. However, it seems better to look first at the goals of the Cross, and their outworking in history. Just to see these will not minimize the work of the Resurrection—since it is at one with the work of the Cross—nor demote the work of the Spirit, since his goal is likewise that of the Father and the Son.

THE GOALS OF THE CROSS

The goals for man

I Peter 2:24 says his sin-bearing was ‘that we might die to sin and live to righteousness’. That is salvation with a view to holiness.

II Corinthians 5:14–15, ‘that they which live should no longer live unto themselves but unto him who died for them and rose again’. That he died for them so that they might live unto him is salvation with a view to holiness.

II Corinthians 5:21, ‘For our sake he made him to be sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him’, shows that his death was with a view to our becoming ‘the righteousness of God’, i.e. living in true righteousness flowing from God, required by God, and attained through the Cross *in Christ*.

Romans 6:1–4, ‘He that has died is justified from sin’ is the key to the passage. Being in a state of sin, we had to die for our sins (because of our sins which equal death), but baptism into Christ makes us partakers of the death, and so we rise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness in which sin has no power to control us through guilt, since grace has liberated us. Thus the death is so that we may walk in holiness of life.

Colossians 3:3–5. We are to set our minds on the risen Christ, for we died—via the Cross—and our lives are now hid with Christ in God. Thus we can live holy lives—putting to death what was put to death on the Cross.

Galatians 1:4 tells us that he gave himself for our sins, and this was the way to ‘deliver us from this present evil age [*aeon*]’. *Colossians 2:14–15* and *Hebrews 2:14–15* both tell us man was delivered from the powers of darkness and from Satan, and so fear of death, so that the outcome is freedom from evil. *Colossians 1:13–14* shows that through the forgiveness of sins (via the Cross) man is delivered from the powers of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Romans 8:1–3 shows that man is freed from the law of sin and death by the death of Christ, ‘that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us’. Again the aim is holiness of life.

There are other verses which speak of the Cross

effecting the reconciliation of man with God. Romans 5:10 says ‘we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son’, II Corinthians 5:18–19 says that God reconciled the world to himself in Christ, ‘not counting their sins against them’. Ephesians 2:16–18 and Colossians 1:19–20 show that peace (reconciliation) with God comes through ‘the blood of the cross’.

This cluster of verses, then, assures us that the goal of the Cross for man was liberation from sin and evil, reconciliation with God, and consequent holiness of life. This theme is summed up well in Titus 2:14, ‘He gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good works’. All of these show the remarkable power of the Cross.

God’s cosmic goal for the Lordship of Christ and the new creation

Knowing that this age (*aeon, kosmos*) is under the prince or god of this world (John 14:30; 12:31; 16:11; II Cor. 4:4), Christ is lifted up as a serpent (John 3:14) to effect deliverance of man from Satan, the world powers, and the world system (Gal. 1:4; 6:14; Col. 2:14–15; Heb. 2:14–15), and so Satan is defeated. The efficacy of the Cross to defeat Satan is shown in Revelation 12:10, where the saints overcome him by the blood of the Lamb (cf. I John 2:12–14). The whole world system, then, is crucified (Gal. 1:4; 6:14; cf. Col. 2:14–15; Heb. 2:14–15), i.e. defeated and delivered over to death (cf. Rev. 19:20–21; 20:10). This is the fulfilment of the proto-evangel of Genesis 3:15.

God’s cosmic action by Christ in history for the defeat of evil by the Cross

We have already seen that the Cross was the cosmic defeat of evil under Satan. The victory of this Cross is worked out by Christ in this present age until, and with a view to, the regeneration of this world. I Corinthians 15:24–28 describes the action of the outworking, and Revelation 5:1—21:8 describes the way it is worked out by ‘Christ crucified’ in the historical process.

If we go into the details of this outworking, we will see that just as the Cross was the working of the Triune God, so is the outworking of history.

THE POWER OF THE CROSS, OF THE RESURRECTION, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The pastoral problem we need to understand is one of power—that of the Cross, of the Resurrection, and of the Holy Spirit. Are there three different instruments of power, or are they the one? Of course, they must constitute the one power of God as He works via these instrumentalities. Obviously they do not vie with one another. All this is self-evident, but not to various theological views. For those who hold to incarnation theology, the Cross is often seen as the outpouring of Christ’s life into us so that our humanity is lifted up. Indeed its levels rise towards that of divinization. A view close to this is that through the Resurrection the life of Christ—poured out at the Cross—is poured into us, so that his incarnation

extends the parameters of human living. All of this refuses the necessity for Substitutionary Atonement or sacrificial death for sins. There is a doctrine of Vicarious Repentance which says that Christ offered to God repentance for the human race by his going to the Cross, and this being the case man is accepted by God as he is, although the example of Christ now moves him to live as a penitent and forgiven person.

The triumphalist view is that Christ did indeed die for man, and now man is emancipated. The resurrection power of Christ is now his, i.e. there is actual metaphysical power of Christ for the believer to live against all evil and triumph over it. That power extends to the doing of miracles, signs and wonders, and such power comes to him through the Holy Spirit. In one sense he is able to leave the Cross behind, though grateful for its initial deliverance of him. Naturally enough, the triumphalist has a supernatural orientation. He does not face the problem of indwelling sin—as in Romans 7:13–25—of the groaning within of Romans 8:22–24, and of daily mortification of the flesh. All for him is a vivification which has happened once for all. His view is essentially an optimistic one, though curiously enough many triumphalists think that everything can be lost through some kind of fall. Perhaps the fear of this motivates them to live in continuous—even if perilous—triumphalism.

In the face of these various views we need to understand the power of God in the life of the believer.

In opposing the triumphalist view we are not opposing the operation in power of the believer: to the contrary. The believer must always work in the power of God, but in doing so will have no

triumphalism. As created, man had great powers, especially in the realms we call 'moral', 'spiritual' and 'vocational'. Restored in Christ, these powers operate afresh, and in one sense can be said to be 'natural', i.e. truly human. These work well in the context of the Atonement and the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Cross

Paul said, 'The word [*logos*] of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God'. 'Being saved' suggests a duration and a process. That is, the Cross goes on being God's power in a believer. Our studies have shown us that it is the power to deliver man from the penalty, pollution, and power of sin, from the bondage of evil, and that it is effective daily in the mortification of sin and the flesh, and is the basis for victory over sin in the positive living of holiness. The Cross provides the constraint of love for obedience in every area of life. The same power enchains Satan, his powers, and his world system. Through the Cross the believer is proof against evil, provided he lives by faith in the grace of God.

We have also seen that, cosmically, Christ's death has defeated evil and caused him—by his redemptive act—to be Lord, Cosmocrator, King of the Kingdom of God, and Perfector of Creation. This, then, is the ongoing power of the Cross.

The power of the Resurrection

Paul does not speak of 'the word [*logos*] of the resurrection'. He does speak of 'the power of his resurrection' (Phil. 3:10).

In Romans 5:10 he says, 'For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life'.

In Romans 4:25 Paul said that Jesus was 'put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification'. The clear inference is that the death was for sins, and the resurrection attested to the efficacy of the death for this, resulting in justification. This is what he discussed in I Corinthians 15, which is often thought of as a treatise on resurrection, but is primarily one on the effective death. The main point is that the death without the resurrection would have been pointless, but this does not mean the point lies primarily in the resurrection. Without the death nothing is done for the forgiveness of sins, but by the resurrection this forgiveness is authenticated. At the same time it is not resurrection *per se* which takes away the sting of death, for the sting of death is sin, and the death was for the sin. That is why Paul says (15:3–4),

I delivered to you as *of first importance* what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

Doubtless 'of first importance' applies to the three elements—death, burial and resurrection—and doubtless that was the order in which they had to be reported, but the resurrection is not first mentioned, when—it would appear—it was always first mentioned in the apostolic preaching, a point which we shall presently consider.

When we look at the term 'the power of his resurrection' (Phil. 3:10), we must understand the context in which it is stated, namely in verses 7 to 14. In this

passage Paul is saying that he counts his human 'gains' as 'loss' over against Christ. His desire is to be found not in his own but in the righteousness of Christ, accounted to him through faith, and in which he may come fully to know Christ. He knows Christ in three things: (i) the power of his—Christ's—resurrection, (ii) the suffering of his—Christ's—sufferings, and (iii) being conformed to the pattern (or shape) of his—Christ's—death. Here resurrection power is Christ's—the power he wields in virtue of his resurrection which brings justification (cf. v. 9; Rom. 4:25), the power of being raised from spiritual death (Rom. 6:4–11), the power of Christ's risen life that is exercised in his Lordship which itself was won through his death.

This—immediately above—is really a commentary on Romans 5:10, 'if we were reconciled to God by his death, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life'. In verse 9 Paul had said, 'Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God'. He means that if the death justifies us *now*, *then* at the end time—the time of wrath—the living Lord shall ensure our escape from wrath. Verse 10 naturally follows: 'If his death *now* reconciles us, *then* we shall be saved because he lives'. Paul is not saying that the death reconciles but the life—of itself—saves; rather, he is saying that the living Christ will save us at the end time.

When we go to Ephesians 1:19–21 we see a power raised Christ from the dead. This was the power of the Father (Rom. 6:4) and of the Spirit (Rom. 1:4; 8:11), and the risen Christ works in this power. In Christ we, too, work within this power, though it is never separable from the

Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is never a power that we operate, although we do operate by it.

The power of Christ's resurrection, then, cannot be divorced from the Cross, as we saw in Romans 4:25 and I Corinthians 15. From his resurrection onwards Christ has operated in this power—doing all his works. We must never forget that he is always 'Christ crucified', even when he is risen, and so his Cross and Resurrection are the works which completed the Atonement. The 'power of his resurrection' is not something post-crucifixion and apart from the Cross, but one with it. So far as the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing from sin, and justification and sanctification are concerned, they all continually spring from the Atonement. That is why it is 'the power of God to those of us who are being saved'.

The power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, being the third member of the Trinity, exercises power from himself. This is the power to create, to give life, and to sustain it (Ps. 104:29–30; Job 33:4). His is the power to raise from the dead (Ezek. 37:1–14; II Cor. 3:6; Rom. 1:4; 8:9–11; cf. Rom. 8:2), and his is the power relating to the Cross (Heb. 9:14). We have seen that his power is linked with the Atonement.

Romans 8:1–4 shows us that 'the law of the Spirit of life has set [us] free from the law of sin and death'. 'The law of sin and death' is the law against which we have sinned and which kills us (cf. Rom. 5:13; 4:15), and 'the law of the Spirit of life' must be the action of the Spirit in setting us free through the Gospel. Likewise this must be

the case in II Corinthians 3:17—'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty'. The context in the Corinthian Epistle shows that we are free by grace, so that here the Spirit is the Spirit of grace. So then, these two references show us that the Spirit brings the Atonement to man and liberates him. This is certainly the power of the Spirit, and is needed to apply the Atonement, without which the Atonement is virtually powerless. It is powerful in the context of the Spirit. This application is seen powerfully in I Corinthians 6:9–11, and Titus 3:4–7.

Undoubtedly the Spirit's coming makes man free, but it also invests him with power to witness to Christ (Acts 1:8; cf. I Cor. 2:4; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12; Heb. 2:4; Rom. 15:19; cf. Heb. 6:4). Witness to Christ is the testimony of his life and in particular his Atonement, so that man has to receive salvation—via the Spirit—before he can truly witness to it. The reality of this is seen in Galatians 4:4–6, where the Atonement is mentioned first, then the gift of sonship (adoption) which is brought to man by the Spirit.

In all these things, then, the power of the Spirit is related to the Cross and Resurrection—i.e. to the Atonement, its revelation and application—and the thought of power being separable from him is as unlikely as Christ and the Spirit being separable. When it comes to power to witness, and power to effect signs and wonders and use the gifts, then all must be by the power of the Spirit, but not power used autonomously. Romans 15:18–19 makes it clear that all Paul has done has been wrought through him by Christ effecting 'word and deed, signs and wonders', and these have been through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We ought not to conclude this section without saying that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of his Sonship, and the Spirit of his Lordship, and so is the Spirit of the Kingdom, the present outworking of Christ's victory, and the eschatological Spirit, in that all things will be destroyed 'by the breath of his mouth' (the Holy Spirit), as indeed all things will be given their new life in the new creation 'by the breath of his mouth'.

**CONCLUSION TO
'THE CROSS, THE RESURRECTION,
AND THE HOLY SPIRIT'**

Whilst our study may have appeared to be tedious and somewhat detailed, yet it does clear the air for us. We can rightly conclude that the Atonement results from the substitutionary work of the Cross, and the attesting and dynamic work of the Resurrection. That Atonement continues to be the power of God. There is no dichotomy in the Cross and Resurrection for they are of the one piece, but the Cross is the work which substitutes for man, is the propitiation for our sins, takes away our guilt and pollution of sins, purifies the conscience, gives us forgiveness and justification, and sets the basis for authentic sanctification.

Just as the word of the Cross is God's power, Christ's resurrection is said to be a matter of power, and there is the power of the Holy Spirit, so these three things are of the one piece. The Spirit never takes us 'beyond the Cross', but causes us to have power within and from the Atonement so that we may live holy lives and witness to

Christ as Lord. He is the Spirit of the Kingdom which is 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'. He is the power of the Kingdom, for 'the kingdom does not consist in talk but in power'.

In all these things there is no place for an incarnational infusion by Christ, no place for triumphalism and supernaturalism—as such—but the power of the Atonement and the Spirit triumphal and supernatural as they may prove to be.

5

The psychology of conversion**NOTES ON
THE THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION**

In the Old Testament the verb *shub* has the idea of ‘to turn’ or ‘to return’. See Psalms 19:7, 51:13 and Isaiah 6:10. It is used generally for turning or being turned without necessarily meaning ‘conversion’, but see the principle of turning from evil to good, in many cases. (See Concordance references in Ezekiel for the use of the term [*shub*], especially 18:30–32; see also Lam. 5:21, ‘Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned’, AV; ‘Restore us to thyself, O Lord, that we may be restored’, RSV.) We need to see the mutuality of returning and (being) restored.

In the New Testament the verb *epistrepho* (translated

for *shub* in the LXX) is generally used for ‘to turn’ (see Matt. 13:15; 18:3; Mark 4:12; Luke 22:32; John 12:40; Acts 3:19; 28:27). This verb is really not used in the New Testament in a passive voice. It can be transitive and intransitive, but one must convert (especially Matt. 18:3; Acts 3:19; 26:18), i.e. one comes to conversion by deliberately turning around. This pertains to the psychology of conversion. So do *faith* and *repentance*—always associated with the total act of conversion.

The term *conversion* has come to be used of the total complex of the salvific act and experience which embraces conviction of sin, repentance, faith, forgiveness and cleansing of sins, justification, regeneration (the new birth), adoption, the reception of love, accorded holiness, and the Holy Spirit.

***Summary of the term ‘conversion’ in the
Old and New Testaments***

It is helpful to see that the verb can be used transitively, intransitively, and reflexively, i.e. one can convert another, be converted, and convert oneself. This gives room for the work of God, the response of the will of man, and for one to turn oneself when commanded or motivated.

**NOTES ON THE PSYCHO-THEOLOGY
OF CONVERSION**

Conversion, in society, is used for many things such as conversion from one ideology, philosophy, diet, life-style (etc.) to another. It is obvious that a conversion

experience can be partly influenced by elements brought to bear on the person who is converted. Technically speaking, conversion is a matter of the will. The will is influenced by a number of things such as necessity, pleasure, attraction, persuasion, threat, fear, and desperation. Whilst the will may be influenced, it is *relatively* free to make its own choice. Inner elements as well as overt influences help to make the choice. Even so, the choice is always that of the person. Conversion under stress or duress—e.g. ‘brainwashing’—does not mean the will is irrevocably captured. We might note here that there is one dynamic which changes man directly and permanently, namely love. The direction of any conversion is determined by the type of love. Only God’s love can bring about an authentic conversion.

A biblical ontology of man in relation to conversion

Our thesis is this: Man and creation, having been brought into being as perfect (i.e. wholly functional), initially knew the system of innocence, i.e. guiltlessness. Through the Fall man experienced existential guilt, and has thus come into guilt for his committed sins. Guilt leaves him a prey to many elements, such as conscience, law, and accusation. Guilt (i.e. the guilt of sin) is itself dynamic, and man-in-sin (in guilt) seeks always to justify (vindicate, prove) himself to escape the anguish of both guilt and shame.

Self-justification occupies the major part of man’s operations in life. Because he has no basis of innocence on which to build self-proving (self-vindication, self-justification)

he intensifies his guilt and shame by constant failure to be just (justified) before man and God. He is thus constantly open to accusation from himself, others (who are also in the competition for self-proving), and the powers of evil.

From the psychological insights into *brainwashing* we recognize that guilt (either true or false) builds up to a point where abreaction is precipitated. The main factors in the build-up of guilt to the point where it is beyond toleration are *conscience* and *the memory*. (Note that these two factors—conscience and memory—need to be explored.) Abreaction brings immediate—though not lasting—release from guilt because the sins (faults, weaknesses) of the past are rejected, remorse for them is experienced, and some sort of personal expiation by contrition and turning from them brings a catharsis of the old, and so the mind is prepared for a new system. Obviously the new system is adjudged genuine truth (*sic*). Sargent gives detailed accounts of inducing this happening. Since human beings can be wrought upon for brainwashing we must recognize it as a phenomenological principle which can be utilized for good or evil.

Cultural and Christian conversion systems

Functional but non-Christian conversion systems

The operation of brainwashing can be classed as a conversion system. The examples which Sargent gives of the tribal and cultural ways of dealing with accumulated

guilt (my interpretation), such as the use of drugs, alcohol, dancing, religious sacrifices, mystery teaching and rites, demagogic preaching and mob hysteria—amongst others—all show there is some kind of experience induced which leads—whether satisfactorily or otherwise—to some conversion experience or state. These may be temporary or otherwise. Both Sargent* and Kilpatrick† speak of *new birth* experiences open to devotees. Those desiring them seem dissatisfied with natural birth, and require some ritual which will rebirth them. Today there are psychological rebirthing therapies. Being cleansed and new appears to rehabilitate the devotee from the old, so that life begins anew.

The Christian conversion system

My understanding is that the non-Christian systems of conversion and the Christian system are one functionally, i.e. the psychological processes of both are identical. This would have to be so when considered ontologically, since man is essentially immutable, though provisionally mutable. As I would see it, the forces using or manipulating the conversion processes are either that of man and evil, or of the Holy Spirit.

If this is true then it would explain why certain functional (phenomenological) elements are common to non-Christian and Christian conversion. When one operates *apart* from the Spirit of God then its outcome will differ from the outcome of that which is operated *by* the Holy Spirit.

* op. cit., pp. 156–264.

† op. cit., pp. 90–101.

Note that the elements of conviction (of sin, crime, errancy, etc.), repentance, confession and faith are at work in both cases. New birth is part of the whole conversion complex, along with forgiveness, purification, justification and liberation.

Two basic thrusts in conversion

The first thrust is the *ontological*, and the second the *soteriological*. By *ontological* thrust we mean that man has a sense of things as they are essentially, i.e. ontologically. He can never be fully at peace when he is unontological or anti-ontological, which is why the person or system seeking to bring about conversion always has a leverage. In other words, he—the man being brainwashed—has always sensed that he is malfunctioning regarding certain actions, and so cannot be at ease in this life. Another way of saying this is that there is always the kick-back of guilt when one is not ontological. This at the same time relates to *existential* guilt, i.e. being an existent in a functional world but not measuring up—as a person—to what one ought to be. Objective guilt or guilt *de jure* (guilt-at-law) rarely tallies with guilt *de facto*, i.e. one's own subjective guilt feelings. Even so, the existent can be manipulated both by existential guilt and guilt feelings, and so can be brain-washed and converted.

The *soteriological* thrust is a matter for debate. God being God, has He always intended salvation for man, and has He put the salvific process into the world *by creation* (ontologically), or is the salvific process *provisional*? The Scriptures make it clear that God

planned salvation prior to time and creation. Does God being Creator, Father and King imply He is innately Saviour and so has built the salvific process into creation and man, so that salvation is congruous with the nature of man and God, or is *grace* something quite different from the creational ontology? *Grace always appears to be linked with the restoration of that which has fallen from the ontological.* It appears to be outside that which is immediately ontological, but in that which is eschatological.

Given in that grace is not directly part of the ontological order, the *need* of grace will always be present, either as a felt need or as an element to be rejected by angry man because of his guilt and pride. In his pride he will always seek to register himself as just, i.e. justified by his deeds. His guilt will be rejected in the face of this pride since it implies imperfection and need. The only way out of guilt for this person is to intensify his self-justifying activities, and, by nature of the case—since guilt is ineradicable and innately dynamic—he will be a candidate for self-working abreaction, or an alien brainwashing system which is really a system promising ultimate and authentic salvation.

**Conclusion regarding
a biblical ontology
relating to conversion**

We can conclude reasonably that man who is awry and displaced ontologically has a hefty matter with which to deal. Conversion systems which seek to lever those with existential and objective guilts must always succeed, even

if only temporarily, because the manipulators seem to work towards the equivalent of the ontological, and thus have existential authority as their support system. The main weakness will be that such systems are not based on love, and do not work towards love. The persuaders and manipulators themselves are persons of guilt, and thus not in a position to achieve authentic conversion. Only the Holy Spirit can achieve authentic conversion, even though the functional principles by which the Spirit does so are psychologically at one with what might be called religious and secular brainwashing. The goal of spiritual conversion is authentic, but the goal of the manipulators is not, even if it appears to have some justification in the immediate situation.

Christian conversion is a living system, since conversion is the constrained response to the love of God. By this love—explicated and outworked in and by the Atonement—man can receive authentic forgiveness, genuine purification, justification *de jure*, the grace of adoption, and respond to this offer by repentance and faith, thus ‘converting’, i.e. turning himself from what was to what is now his, and which will one day be his, both *de jure* and *de facto*.

The area, then, in which to seek to understand conversion, is the theological one. The inner work of the Spirit will effect the steps, but to know the theology of sin, guilt, atonement and its ethico-moral fruits, the nature of faith, repentance, confession, and conversion is to be well equipped both in the evangelistic and pastoral elements of conversion ministry.

All of this (above) presupposes a biblical theology, anthropology, and cosmology.

**SOME RESOURCE MATERIALS
FOR THE THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION**

Bible Dictionaries, Manuals and Dictionaries of Theology. Articles on Conversion, Confession, Repentance, Faith, and the New Birth (Regeneration).

Bingham, G. *The Concentration Camp and Other Stories*. NCPI, 1983, pp. 55–95.

———. *Faith Justification Conversion and the New Birth*. NCPI, n.d.

———. *The Justice-Men and the Great Rage*. NCPI, 1985.

Collins, Gary. *The Rebuilding of Psychology*. Tyndale Press, 1977.

Kilpatrick, W. K. *Psychological Seduction*. Nelson, 1983.

McKenzie. *The Meaning of Guilt*. No details.*

Routley, Erik. *Conversion*. Muhlenburg Press, 1960.

Sargent, W. *The Battle For the Mind*. Pan Books, 1957.

* Compare this book with *The Concentration Camp and Other Stories* and *The Justice-Men and the Great Rage*.

6

Evangelism and worship

THE THESIS

The thesis we seek to establish in this essay is that man—as created—was and is primarily a worshipping creature. His loss of true worship through the Fall was such as to change the *object* of his worship, and bring him into God’s judgement. Worship is man’s primary purpose for living. In order to worship God truly he must be redeemed, for such worship is the true *telos* of redemption. Objectively the Gospel is required for his salvation, and subjectively he cannot exist as a true creature without the exercise of authentic worship. There is, then, a drive in every human creature to come to such worship, even though that drive may be contested by powers of evil both within and outside of man. Evangelism is that work of God which declares the liberation of man from his

bondage to sin, evil powers, and his own flesh, and which effects that emancipation. Only when emancipated may a human person come to true worship. There is no other way of coming to worship of 'the true and living God' (I Thess. 1:9; John 17:3; 4:23; Heb. 9:14). We further insist that worship presupposes salvation, especially if this is understood within the context of covenant, and particularly the covenant of grace. We thus conclude that salvation and worship are inseparable, and that the offer of true worship, i.e. the offer of coming to know the true God, is a fundamental part of true evangelism.

We will later look at the implications of our thesis for the practice of evangelism.

Man and worship

We commence our examination of man as a worshipping creature at the point of his creation. To be created in the image and likeness of God meant that man had affinity with God in a manner and measure not known by other creatures. God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it'. *Service* and *worship* are virtually synonymous in both Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament the Hebrew verb *abad* means 'to serve', and is related to *ebed*, i.e. 'servant'. The verb 'to worship' is *shachah*, i.e. 'to bow down'. The verbs *abad* and *shachah* are often coupled as being parallel, e.g. Deuteronomy 11:16 and Jeremiah 22:9. 'Let my son go *that he may serve me*' can mean nothing less than 'that he may worship me' (*JB* has 'offer me worship'). When one serves the god and idols then one

worships them, and when one worships them then one serves them. Not to serve and worship God is unthinkable.

Similarly, in the New Testament the Greek verb to 'serve' is *latreuo* and 'to worship' is *proskuneo*—to bow the knee towards. Romans 12:1 uses *latreuo*, which is variously translated 'reasonable service' or 'spiritual worship' (*ten logiken latreian*).

When, then, God gave the primal mandate to man, He expected man to serve Him by what he did, and so to give Him worship, i.e. 'worthship'. In the light of God's creation of man, this is 'reasonable worship'. Man's refusal to do this was wholly illogical. Paul's account in Romans 1:18–32 of man's rebellion against God shows the reversal of true worship: (i) they did *not* honour Him as God although they knew Him and His worth; (ii) they were *unthankful*. True worship, then, is true knowledge of God, due honour of Him, and thanksgiving to Him. This refusal to worship—to serve—brought about radical changes in man's mind, and so much so that (i) he gave the glory of the immortal God to idols, and (ii) he wholly exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

This does not mean that man ceased to worship, but that the *object* of his worship changed, and so the values he gave to God, man, and creation radically altered. 'The lie' was a newly—though variously—rationalized theology, anthropology and cosmology. Henceforth what man would do would be conditioned by this changed set of values. This change wrought by man brought him into incongruent living with God, man, and creation. Man from that point onward lives under the tension of incongruence and personal dislocation. Nothing can be to him essentially what it was.

The thrice-repeated ‘God gave them up’ of verses 24, 26 and 28 must be the explanation of God’s wrath, for ‘the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth’. The giving up of man to his attitudes and acts wrought by his rejection of God is the nature of the wrath of God. Man’s guilt is compounded dynamically as he seeks to suppress the truth. His alienation from God causes his existential aloneness and loneliness. He suffers because he is against God, and against the truth of God, of man, and of creation. In this state he is in deep need of pure worship of God, and true service to Him. Because he refuses to accept the nature of the ‘true and living God’, his idolatry becomes compulsive—for he must, somehow or another, worship. He must give value to the creation in which he lives, and the creatures and objects within it. He must know how to relate to them. To function within a rational universe means he must understand it. The creation itself can give him no reason—of itself—for the being of himself, man, and itself.

To know God is life (John 17:3; I John 5:20), and to refuse to know God is death (Gen. 2:17; 3:1–10; cf. Isa. 59:2; II Cor. 5:15). Life and the living of it is a relational matter. Death is the breaking of that true relationship. Man’s misery arises from his existential situation—his self-alienation from God—and its consequent result—God’s wrath upon man. Man must worship, but his worship will have to be of surrogate deities or inadequate spirits. He may even be reduced to total worship of himself—a form of closed-circuit or autonomous adoration.

What concerns us in our study is that in this fearful existential living within human incongruency, dislocation of the true self, and the unsatisfying worship of idols, man will know misery of an order that we cannot compute. This sort of misery is constantly discussed by the psalmists. Not only will his idols from time to time prove fruitless and futile, but a satisfying rationale of himself as creature will be impossible to obtain, even whilst it is imperative that he achieve it. The strong drive to worship—by nature of the case—will not be satisfied by surrogate deities. Man must have God or nothing else, and that is his dilemma for he cannot and may not have Him for his true worship.

All worship is by faith

Cain was a worshipper without authentic faith, whilst Abel worshipped by faith. That seems evident from Genesis 4:4–5, 7, Hebrews 11:4 and I John 3:11–12. This seems to be the import of I Samuel 15:22–23. Hebrews 11 indicates that faith and obedience are integrally the one. The patriarchs worshipped in faith (Gen. 48:1–22; Heb. 11:21). Whilst Abraham was firstly an idolater (Josh. 24:2), yet God revealed Himself to Abraham (Acts 7:2; Gen. 12:7; 17:1–4; 18:1–2) and *gave him the gift of true worship and with it salvation* (Gen. 15:6; cf. Rom. 4:3, 6–8). Isaac and Jacob worshipped by faith, knowing the grace of covenant.

Israel as a nation came to receive the gifts of God (*charismata*: Rom. 9:4; cf. 11:28–29). The various elements of these *charismata* are worthy of study, for there can be no true worship without them. Worship and salvation are inextricably linked. This is borne out in the

important passage of John 4:20–24. The woman at the well asked Christ whether Samaritan or Jewish worship was the correct worship. His answer was, ‘You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for *salvation is of the Jews*’. She had not asked about salvation and this is the only place in John’s Gospel that the word is used. Why, then, did he say it? Salvation must have been linked in her mind with worship. Is there always, then, the link of worship and salvation in the minds of devotees? Her own countrymen later said of Jesus, ‘We know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world’. In some way they, too, must have linked worship with salvation.

Here we pause to examine Jesus’ statement, ‘Salvation is of the Jews’, for this is certainly a claim in the Old Testament (Ps. 147:19–20; cf. Deut. 4:5–8; Amos 3:2; Isa. 27:13) Doubtless he is telling the woman that the Samaritans were deficient in their worship because they lacked the true centre and altar of worship, and because they had only the Pentateuch and lacked the holy and prophetic writings. He is really saying that only he who knows the true God truly worships, and to worship God in this way is to have—or be in the way of—salvation. Not to know God is not to have salvation, but to know God is to have salvation.

Jesus then goes on to show that a transition is taking place in the matter of worship, i.e. ‘the hour is coming, and now is’, and this is in Messiah. True worshipping will come with him, and it will be worship of the Father, and will be in spirit and truth, and in it *God will take the initiative*, i.e. ‘such the Father ever seeks to worship him’.

*The new true worship is in the truth,
and by the Spirit*

As against worshipping gods *in the lie*, the new worship must be *in the truth*. The worshipper must *know* ‘the only true God’—as over and against the false idols—and this truth of God is revealed to him by Messiah, the Son of the Father (Matt. 11:27; John 1:14, 18; 14:6; 18:37; cf. I John 5:2). The Holy Spirit brings the very truth to which Christ himself witnessed (John 15:26; 16:12–15;

I John 5:7). Hence worship of God is ‘in [man’s] spirit’ (Rom. 1:9) by the Holy Spirit (note Eph. 5:18–20, where true worship is by the Spirit, and Acts 13:2, which shows that in the context of worship the Holy Spirit was present), for he has revealed God as Father (Gal. 4:4–6; Rom. 8:14–17). Equally he has revealed the *Sonship* of the Son, and his Lordship over this age and the age to come (Gal. 4:4–6; I Cor. 12:3). This is also the truth revealed.

The prophetic element of the new worship has a vast apparatus in the Old Testament. It is linked with the eschaton, and can only be interpreted by that system with which the scholar views it. That is, the new worship is millenarian or post-millenarian, involving as it does the nations who are drawn by Israel to learn worship from that nation. See Isaiah 2:1–4; Micah 4:1–3; Isaiah 45:14, 22–25; 49:12; 55:5; 60:3–6; 66:18–23; Zechariah 8:20–23; Isaiah 51:4–5; Luke 24:47. Along with this new worship is the new temple, which is implied in the references immediately given, and which we will examine in detail at a later point.

It is true, then, to say that the new worship announced

by Jesus to the woman at the well has come historically in the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, at Samaria, and at Caesarea. That is why Paul can say, 'For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh'. Whilst *functionally* their worship in their own spirits (Rom. 1:9; Phil. 3:3) is by the Holy Spirit, yet *soteriologically* the centre of worship has changed from Israel to Messiah, or—if we will have it—to the New Covenant. This can be seen in Ezekiel 36:24–28, which corresponds with Jeremiah 31:31–34, and is evident in Ezekiel 37, where in verses 1 to 14 the nation comes to life by the Spirit (as by Pentecost: cf. Ezek. 37:9–10 and Acts 2:2–4) and then, being unified, becomes the true sanctuary of God in the context of 'a covenant of peace. . . an everlasting covenant'. Now it can be said that 'salvation is of Messiah' (Acts 4:12) and not *per se* 'of the Jews'.

In conformity with all this, the passage of John 4:20–23 (cf. Gal. 4:4–6; Rom. 8:14–17) reveals that to worship God the Father through Messiah the Son, and the Spirit, is to have salvation, i.e. to have already received salvation. When the Spirit reveals the Father and the Son (John 16:12–15), God can no longer be said to be 'the unknown God', i.e. one unknown (John 4:22) or worshipped in ignorance (Acts 17:23).

The Pauline view of worship and salvation

Paul's message to the pagans at Lystra was that he and Barnabas were not gods. He said, 'We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things (pagan sacrifices, Acts 14:13) to a living God who made the

heaven and the sea and all that is in them'. The term 'living God' always indicates 'the God who acts', and Paul is urging them to turn to the God who acts. In I Thessalonians 1:9 the Thessalonians had turned 'from idols to serve [*douleuo*] a living and true God'. His message to the Greeks in Athens is to proclaim to them the 'unknown God' (cf. John 4:22). He does this by an exposition of the nature of God as Creator, and moves to the fact that God is Father ('we are his offspring'; cf. Jer. 2:26–27) so that to worship depictions of God is something of which man, universally, must repent (Acts 17:30; cf. 26:20). Paul's first preaching at Athens had been of 'Jesus and the resurrection' (Acts 17:18). In Acts 20:21 Paul sums up his ministry as 'testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God [*eis theon*] and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ [*eis ton kurion emon Iesoun*]'.

When Paul preaches the Gospel at Athens he is proclaiming the unknown God to them as now known. The call for repentance—because of their former wrong worship—and the demand for faith in Christ (Acts 17:30) meant the message was soteriological, but the call is not merely to repent of sin but of wrong (false) worship. Wrong worship is the evil of man who has rejected God (cf. Rom. 1:19–25), so that salvation consists in moving from wrong worship to the true, i.e. from the false deity to the true God.

The Petrine view of worship and salvation

On the day of Pentecost Peter proclaimed the Gospel to Jews only, and 3,000 responded and were baptized. Jesus was announced as 'Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36). In the face of the centrality of Christ, and the Jews' rejection

of him, Peter told the Jews (Acts 2:39–40) to ‘Save yourselves from this crooked [perverse] generation’, i.e. those Jewish worshippers who refused to see salvation in Jesus—as Messiah. Such Jews are not simply reluctant to try new worship, but are in fact rejecting the truth of Messiah (cf. Acts 4:11–12; 5:30–32) and so the new worship and the new age. Whilst this fact is more implied than explicit in the apostle’s utterances, it is worked out further by Paul in such passages as Philippians 3:3 and Romans chapters 9–11 (esp. 10:1–3). Also the writer of Hebrews gives it great attention.

In the First Letter of Peter the writer speaks to his readers as the elect people of God:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

‘Mercy’ here undoubtedly refers to salvation, but the point is that they are now the true worshipping people, and part of the expression of that priestly worship is to ‘declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’. In fact *their priestly worship is declaration of the Gospel*.

The view of worship of the author of Hebrews

Resource materials for our thesis in this book are plentiful. The writer has a view of worship which both transcends and outmodes worship under the ‘first covenant’. His view of Christ as high priest and as victim certainly categorizes his worship as soteriological. This is seen

clearly in the ninth and tenth chapters. The efficaciousness of Christ’s sacrifice is such that worshippers now have ‘confidence to enter into the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus’ (10:19). The worship is of faith and a cleansed conscience: ‘Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience’ (10:22).

One worships when one is saved: ‘the blood of Christ. . . purify your conscience from dead works to serve [*latreuein*] the living God’ (9:14). We note again that God becomes ‘the living God’ to the saved person (cf. I Thess. 1:9; Acts 14:15), so that He is dynamically the object of worship.

Worship in the Book of the Revelation

Much of the worship in this book is by celestial creatures, and so is no paradigm either for human or terrestrial worship. We might refer to it as ‘original worship’, i.e. that kind of worship accorded to God as Creator and as the Holy One (cf. Rev. 4:2–11). Yet, because of salvation, both God and the Lamb are worshipped, and their ultimate triumph is seen to be *soteriological* (e.g. 5:6–14; 11:16–18; 12:10; 19:11–20:10).

What interests us is the worship (i) of the 144,000, as seen in 7:4–8 and 14:1–5, and (ii) of the multitude which no man could number, as seen in 7:9–17. The latter’s worship is soteriologically inspired:

‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation and made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve [*latreuo*] him day and night within his temple . . .’

Church worship as proclamation in the New Testament

If, as we have claimed, worship is primal and central to true human living, then the Gospel brings sinful man to the point where he exchanges the lie for the truth (Rom. 1:25) because the truth is the Gospel of God (Rom. 1:1; 15:16) and the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1) is ‘the word of truth’ by which man is born anew (I Pet. 1:23) and becomes ‘a kind of first fruits of his creatures’ (James 1:18). We mean that the Gospel reveals God not only as Creator but as Redeemer and as Father, so that the one believing is not only a saved person but becomes a true worshipper.

First it can be said that the worship of the Jews prior to the proclamation of the Christian Gospel was itself a witness to those who, seeing it, became ‘god-fearers’. The Book of Acts shows us a group of Gentiles who gathered around Jewish centres of worship. It appears they had become disaffected of pagan worship, and were attracted by Jewish teaching and worship (cf. Acts 10:1–2; 13:43; 14:1). Some of these had become proselytes, i.e. they had become Jews. At Caesarea Cornelius and his household would be included in the ‘devout’ persons (Acts 10:1–2), and whilst they had been deeply affected by Jewish worship, they had not as yet received salvation. An angel had said to him, ‘Send to Joppa, and bring Simon called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household’ (Acts 11:13–14). Once this household believed (Acts 10:44–47) they immediately began worship by the coming upon them of the Holy Spirit. *Worship was the immediate fruit of the Gospel.*

Worship was by the Spirit and held elements of proclamation

It would be interesting to examine the worship of the Old Testament to see what soteriological elements it contained. There can be no doubt about the case of Abel’s worship. A good commentary on this could be Luke 18:9–14, where the tax-gatherer, in saying ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’, was really saying ‘God be propitious [*hilastheti*] to me, the sinner’. Paraphrased, his utterance could have run something like this:

‘Oh God, I am a sinner, and as such I deserve death. Look at me, I am beating my breast as a sign of the death I deserve. I cannot offer to you—the Holy One—a pure sacrifice. My position as sinner-tax-gatherer prohibits me—a Jew—from offering a bloody sacrifice, and that is why I stand in the court of sinners, where also stand the Gentiles. You require a propitiatory sacrifice from me but I am unable to give it. I know, however, that you offer such a sacrifice—though *how* I know not—but that You are the propitiation-making God I know. So do just that and free me from my guilt as a sinner. This is Your innate mercy as the God of grace.’

Of course, we are reading more theology into the utterance than the tax-gatherer may have consciously thought, but this idea certainly stands in the use of the imperative ‘be propitious’.

Jesus said the man went down to his house justified, rather than the self-justifying Pharisee. Our whole point in using the incident is to say that man worshipped *by faith*—through the *cultus* of sacrifice—and Abel could have done no less. There must have been much that was salvific in the worship of Israel, especially as we understand the nature of the covenantal sacrifices that resulted

in the forgiveness of sins. There is surely something of this in the Pauline passages below:

I Corinthians 11:23–26

Here Paul is saying that every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, especially in the manual acts of breaking bread and holding forth the cup, we 'declare' (*kataggellete*) or 'show forth' or 'proclaim' the Lord's death until he comes. Doing this, it is most reprehensible to do so in an unworthy manner, whatever action that may be. We cannot escape the fact that participation in the Lord's Supper is also a form of proclamation, and a dynamic one at that. This 'holding forth' is a soteriological act, and is a proclamation of the Gospel.

I Corinthians 14:20–25

In this passage Paul has unbelievers in mind. The ministry of tongues will be misunderstood by unbelievers if all speak in tongues. Indeed, unbelievers will think the assembly to be mad. He then says,

If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship [*proskunesei*] God and declare that God is really among you.

This speaks of the dynamical nature of worship. It also informs us that the use of prophecy—the utterance of God's word directly from Himself—will bring conviction to the unbeliever's heart and cause him to fall down on his face and worship God. Whilst it does not say salvation comes to the convicted worshipper, it certainly says that he knows and acknowledges the presence and reality of God. In fact this passage may introduce us into

the evangelistic importance of worship—something we rarely speak of, or even think about.

Galatians 4:4–7

This is not primarily a worship passage. However, it does speak of the utterance 'Abba! Father!'. Doubtless this cry arises at the initial awareness of adoption or sonship of the Father. Even so, the form of address to God will be 'Father!', as was the case with our Lord. When he prayed to his Father the disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, and his answer was, 'When you pray, say: "Our Father . . .".' It may well be that just as in the Lord's Supper the manual acts can conduct one to the first Last Supper event and all that it meant, so to prophesy directly from God or to address Him as 'Father!' may have vital, existential communication with the hearer, and form a mode of proclamation, especially on the principle of 'It's better felt than telt'.

Eschatological worship

We now come to the heart of contemporary worship: the presence of God's people as the new temple in the present world. We suggested above that our interpretation of the new temple may require—for some of us—rationalization in the light of one or other *schema* of eschatology, i.e. the use of some millennial view. The way to avoid this is to grasp the *Sitz im Leben* of the apostolic church. Paul sees the new church as a dynamic and spiritual entity in the present time, as composed of living stones built together for a sanctuary (habitation) of God in the Spirit (I Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:19–22; cf. Ezek. 37:26–28; Rev. 21:1–3).

Peter has a similar understanding, as can be seen from I Peter 2:4–10, and when the writer of Hebrews uses the principle of ‘the house [or household] of God’ (Heb. 3:1–6), then his thinking is somewhat similar to that of the two apostles. The three writers also hold similar ideas of ‘spiritual sacrifices’ (Rom. 12:1; I Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15–16). We have seen—interestingly enough—that Peter sees part of the priestly ministry of the new spiritual priesthood ‘telling the wonderful deeds of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’, and this must be soteriological.

The new temple is Christ, and is the Church

The problem which plagued the leaders of the Jews during the ministry of Christ, and following Pentecost, was that the new believers would reject the Mosaic system. In other words, they would abrogate the temple and its worship and traditions. They suspected Christ’s words about destroying the temple and that he would raise it in three days. Whilst they may have misunderstood them literally, they nevertheless knew what he was about. His body which was ‘razed’ by the crucifixion and then entombment, rose to be the new temple, and to outmode the temple of the first covenant.

In the Book of Acts and through the writings of the Epistles we recognize the transition through which the church went as it knew itself to be the Body of Christ and yet the Bride, to be the new Temple of God, yet under the headship of Christ. It was branches to Christ’s vine, and sheep to his vocation as the Great Shepherd. So in the new—as the writer of Hebrews so brilliantly argues—there is continuity with the old, yet dynamic discontinuity also.

The old—with its didactic ministry—gives way to the new, and the new is altogether new. There is a new temple in history and with it a new worship.

Universal worship and the new temple

Those Old Testament passages which indicated that a desire for a new law and a new worship would ultimately grip the nations now present us with the fact that as Jesus had contained all true worship—and salvation—within Jerusalem (i.e. Israel), so now this worship is to be available through the new temple. In one sense all worship is still to be contained within the new temple, but the new temple is able to embrace all who are prepared for the new worship. Just as there was no salvation outside the Jews, so there is no salvation outside the new people of God. Israel itself will be part of this new people of God (cf. Rom. 11:13–24), but in no way will transcend it, or be above and beyond it (Eph. 3:1–6).

The passages we nominated above need to be closely examined in understanding the universality of the new worship. See Psalm 147:19–20; cf. Deuteronomy 4:5–8; Amos 3:2; Isaiah 27:1; 2:1–4; Micah 4:1–3; Isaiah 45:14, 22–25; 49:12; 55:5; 60:3–6; 66:18–23; Zechariah 8:20–23; Isaiah 51:4–5; Luke 24:47. Perhaps more important than all the passages cited is Isaiah 56:1–8, the essence of which is that the temple will not be exclusive to Israel, but inclusive of all who would genuinely worship God. We here examine verses 6 to 8:

‘And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,

everyone who keeps the sabbath and does not profane it,
 and holds fast my covenant—
 these I will bring to my holy mountain,
 and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
 their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
 will be accepted on my altar;
 for my house shall be called a house of prayer
 for all peoples.
 Thus says the Lord God
 who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
 I will gather yet others to him
 besides those already gathered.’

This passage holds deep significance since it was quoted by Jesus at the cleansing of the temple at the time of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46). John places a purging of the temple at the commencement of Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem (2:13–17), where Jesus said, ‘Take these things away; you shall not make my Father’s house a house of trade’. This is linked in the memory of the disciples with Psalm 69:9, ‘Zeal for thy house has consumed me’. Matthew and Luke quote Isaiah 56:7 as saying, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’, and Mark only adds ‘for all the nations’, in conformity with the Isaianic passage. In Luke 2:49 Jesus tells his parents who had sought him, ‘Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’. We see, then, that Jesus saw the temple as (i) his Father’s house; (ii) the house of prayer for Israel, and (iii) that it was to be the house of prayer for all nations.

The nature of the temple as the house of prayer is seen in II Chronicles 7:12–16, where—amongst a number of elements—God says,

‘Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there for ever; my ears and my heart will be there for all time’ (vv. 15–16).

There is no dichotomy between prayer and worship, for they are the one. God, then, is saying that Israel exclusively has the locale of true worship. This, of course, would be in the face of other—and false—gods.

When Isaiah universalizes the temple as the house of prayer for all nations, he indicates that the new (eschatological?) temple will be inclusive of all nations, but exclusive for the true worshippers, i.e. (i) those who worship the Father, and (ii) those who worship Him in spirit (the Spirit) and in truth. This must surely be ‘the new worship’, and its locale is ‘neither on this mountain [Samaria] nor in Jerusalem’, but is the new temple, the people of God.

Conclusion: the implications of Christian worship for true evangelism

We come now to the crux of our study. If our thesis is tenable, then we deduce that:

- (a) ontologically all men (persons, humanity) have a drive for worship;
- (b) without pure fulfilment of that drive a person lives in existential deprivation, incongruency, and so suffers untold misery and doom. The functional denial of man’s essential affinity with God comes from his refusal to worship God ‘in spirit and in truth’ in the context of the wrath and judgement of God which is upon him because he has refused to acknowledge God;

- (c) the opportunity for worship has been provided by God—even in the face of the fall of the human race—and such worship is based on God’s grace and man’s (responsive) faith;
- (d) God has provided covenantal worship to Israel in the context of the temple, providing for Israel to be the matrix of Messiah, and in Jesus—that Messiah—has redeemed man so that he may now worship Him as Father, and such worship has been ordained and is assisted by the Holy Spirit in this present (church) era.

If, then, this thesis is tenable, it must mean that the church is the locale for all true worship. In one sense, then, all true worship is evangelistic, if not wholly evangelism. If what man most needs is to worship God, and if the church—the new temple—is the place, context, and channel of that worship, then the appeal to man’s ontological and existential drive is the most dynamic of all appeals.

The intention of this study is not to practicalize this principle of worship as being inseparably linked to evangelism—as evangelism to it—but simply to point out that the history of the church—both in apostolic and post-apostolic times—has borne witness to this very principle. Doubtless we need to—indeed are driven to—examine the soteriological nature of the sacraments, the context of worship as the primary situation for Gospel-proclamation,

especially as the apostles understood the nexus of ‘old’ Israel with the ‘new’. We need also to explore the modes of current evangelism with its own practice of proclaiming the word of God within the context of worship, and to examine the widest expression of worship, i.e. true service to God. In a true sense the new temple is everywhere, for it is composed of ‘living stones’ organically bonded, and such ‘stones’ give expression to worship by the lives they live. The temple—to change the metaphor—laps up on the vast shores of humanity, and powerfully and livingly affects it, even to effecting salvation, and liberating that idolatrous humanity to the true worship of the Father.

Section Seven

**THE MATTER OF HEADSHIP IN
THE CHURCH**

Introduction to

THE MATTER OF HEADSHIP IN THE CHURCH

It seems almost impossible today to get a hearing for the matter of headship and authority. This subject is rarely approached on exegetical grounds, and when it is there is the danger in all of us of having 'hidden agendas'. This is where the need for being justified by grace is imperative, and it is equally imperative that we live in such grace, and not seek to justify positions which may or may not be correct. The present approach to the subject is generally on sociological and psychological grounds, mainly issuing from current humanism. It is claimed that much Old Testament and New Testament authority derives from outmoded patriarchal systems, and that understanding of men and women springs from such cultural systems. The

real question is whether or not the Scriptures posit certain ontological principles which ought to obtain, no matter what the culture may be.

The material in the first part of the study is set out at greater length in my book *God's Glory, Man's Sexuality*. Indeed this present study was seminal of that volume. The headship of Christ is shown to be ontological because of Christ being the Son, being Creator-Mediator, and being Redeemer-Mediator. The relationship of his headship to his body—the church—should lead us to see the true principle of authority. I think, then, that this study is of great importance. Radical feminism in the church is leading from the material here presented—which it scorns as a patriarchal conspiracy—back to naturism, Baalism, and even to gnosticism. Its democratizing humanism presents a great danger to the church.

1

The ministry of men and women

INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMS OF DISCUSSION

We see that everyone has problems in discussing authority, law, subordination, and superordination, which is really the problem of what God ordains (ordination). With prejudices, presuppositions, and conditioning, none is wholly objective. Many of us have unhelpful experiences of maleness and femaleness which further complicate the situation. When we live in the world of changing culture, mores (etc.), we find it difficult to discuss certain matters. The principle is to accept what the Scriptures are evidently saying. Good exegetes differ on the same passages, so we come to an impasse or stalemate. Also there are differences of interpretation (hermeneutics).

None should ascribe to another deficient exegesis or ideas, unless one is clear of 'hidden agendas'.

THE TRUE HEADSHIP, CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE (CHURCH)

We have to keep in mind the True Man and the True Woman (Christ and his Bride, the church), and realize that in marriage the two are one (ontologically). *Vocation* is the reason and driving force of their marital relationships and actions. Neither thinks independently of the other, for they are 'one flesh'. The question of 'equality' or 'inequality' does not arise, but that of uniqueness, discreteness, and subordination—superordination as *function* related to *purpose* and *goal*.

Christ is the head of the church (see Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:15; cf. Col. 2:19). He is archetypal head, i.e. the true (ontological) head. Also 'the head of every man is Christ', i.e. he is not directly the head of woman, but the man is head of the wife (I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23). What, then, does Christ's headship mean?

- In Ephesians 1:22, where Christ is 'head over all things', this must mean '*wholly in command*', i.e. in authority. In Colossians 2:10 he is 'the head of all rule and authority'. 'Head' here must refer to rule and authority.
- In Ephesians 5:23 Christ is the head of the church (cf. 4:15; Col. 1:18; 2:19), and it is said by some that here '*headship*' is '*source and origin*'. This may well be so, but the church is to be subject to such headship (Eph. 5:24), and this implies submissiveness to the leading of

the head who is 'source and origin'. We can say that Christ 'originated' from the Father, that redeemed man originated as a creation from Christ (Col. 1:16; II Cor. 5:17), and that woman originated from man (Gen. 2:21–24), and indeed that these three find their source of being in constant union with their 'heads'.

- *Headship must also signify intimacy*. A headless body is as dreadful as a bodiless head. The Father is intimate with the Son (John 10:30; 17:21), the Son with redeemed man (husband), and the husband with his wife, i.e. 'one flesh' (Gen. 2:23–24).

This intimacy takes away the human sting of subordinate—superordinate functions, and of giving and receiving of commands and directions. Both are sharing the one programme, and together are under the Lordship, i.e. the Headship of Christ.

THE HEADSHIP AS IT IS IN I CORINTHIANS 11:3

- *The Father is head of Christ*. Is this limited to source and origin? The Son was subject to the Father, received commands from Him and obeyed them. See John 5:19–20; 8:28; 9:4; 10:17; 14:10, 30–31; 15:10.
- *Christ is the head of every man*. Is this limited to source and origin? Christ gave commandments to his disciples (Matt. 7:24; Luke 6:46; John 13:34; 14:15, 21; Matt. 28:20; Acts 10:42), and commanded them to pass them on to those who would be baptized (Acts 1:2; Matt. 28:19–20).

• *The husband is the head of his wife.* Man was the source of woman, as we have seen. He has the function of love, of nourishing and cherishing her, whilst she is subject to him (see Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22–24; Titus 2:5; I Pet. 3:1). Does being subject to her husband mean obedience to him? See I Peter 3:5–6, ‘Holy women

...were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord’ (cf. Gen. 18:12, AV; Heb. *adon*).

The verb *hupotasso* is used of principalities and powers being subject to Christ (Eph. 1:21–22; I Pet. 3:22; I Cor. 15:24–27), of demons to the apostles (Luke 10:17–19), the children of God to His Fatherhood (Heb. 12:9), slaves and servants to masters (Titus 2:9; I Pet. 2:18), Christians to the authorities (Rom. 13:1ff.) as well as wives to husbands (Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22–24; I Pet. 3:1; Titus 2:5). In most of these cases commands are issued, but where no commands are issued there is no direction, correction, and so no sense of security.

THE LEADERSHIP OF THE MALE

• In *I Corinthians 11:3ff.* the husband is head of his wife. In verses 7–9 woman is the glory of man, as man is the glory of God. This does not mean the woman is not the glory of God, but that as man glorifies God by his worship and obedience, so the wife does her husband by honouring and obeying him. The reason given is, ‘For man was not made from woman, but the woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man’. Paul goes on to say that husband and wife are mutually dependent (vv. 11–12), but this does not alter the

fact of the husband’s headship, nor that woman was created from man, and for man.

The account of man’s creation in Genesis 1:26f. gives no statement that man is superordinate to the woman. However, in 2:18–20 the man is given the task of naming the animals. It is clear that man is given lordship over the animals (1:28). His naming of them is to delineate their character. Before the Fall he names his wife ‘Ishshah’, i.e. ‘out of man’, and after the Fall ‘Eve [Heb. *hawwa*], because she was [to be] the mother of all living’. She does not name him, and in some sense the man exercises authority, taking the initiative, and even being prophetic, as she had not yet borne children.

• In *I Timothy 2:8–12* Paul says, ‘Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent’. Authority in the assembly did not belong to women, for ‘Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived, and became a transgressor’. *The first reason* was that Adam was formed first. Since Adam was created he could be called ‘the first born’, but must be called ‘the first formed’. Since ‘first formed’ equals ‘first born’ and ‘the first born of all creation’ (Christ: Col. 1:18) has pre-eminence, so with the ‘first formed’. He must be pre-eminent. *The second reason*—‘the woman was deceived’—is not explained. As a result of that deception the wife was to be ruled by the husband.

• In *I Corinthians 14:34–35* Paul says,

... the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

If this passage follows on with the instructions given in the previous verses (29–33), then it can mean that when prophecies are made they are subject to male prophets, and not women (female prophets), i.e. for interpretation and authentication. This does not mean women may not prophesy (I Cor. 11:5), but that they may not exercise authority (as prophetess) over the prophets. If, however, the verses 34–35 refer to the teaching situation, then women must ‘learn in silence’ (I Tim. 2:11) and not take the initiative at any point. Early teaching was often by dialogue (cf. Acts 17:2–3; 19:8), but heads of women alone should be part of the dialogue. If a woman asked questions of another than her husband, then she would not be applying to her true head. She ought to apply to him in the privacy of their home.

In the three passages (above) Paul is insistent upon the headship of the husband, and the men leading worship and teaching. It is quite possible that the elders of the church are mainly in view, since they are primarily the teachers (cf. I Tim. 3:2, ‘an apt teacher’; 5:17, ‘who labour in preaching and teaching’; cf. Heb. 13:7, ‘leaders, who spoke to you the word of God’; Eph. 4:11, ‘pastors and teachers’; also see Acts 20:7; I Pet. 5:2). If this is the case, then the teaching role for a mixed group must be male-led. For women’s groups, older women are to teach younger women (Titus 2:3ff.), in which case they would not be having authority over men, but sharing their gained insights with less-experienced women. We will see below that pastors are a special authority in the church.

• *I Peter 3:1–7*. Peter says that (i) women are to be submissive to their husbands especially in order to win them to Christ and his word; (ii) women should not seek to do this by outward attraction but by an inner one, ‘the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit’; (iii) Sarah is a good example of this, for ‘she obeyed Abraham, calling him lord’;

(iv) husbands must not take their wives for granted, but must continually consider them, showing them honour (respect) as ‘the weaker vessel’*; (v) husband and wife are ‘joint heirs of the grace of life’, i.e. they both share the new life given by redemption, and will inherit the legacy (inheritance) it will bring in heaven.

• *I Corinthians 14:31–35*. Prophets must be subject to other prophets, i.e. cannot speak, without question, from themselves. The custom of the church is that women should not speak in the assembly but be subordinate in accordance with the law. Wives who wish to know something should ask their husbands (heads) at home. ‘Not permitted to speak’ could mean (i) not to affirm the (male) prophets who speak, (ii) that teaching in church was often dialogue (cf. Acts 17:2; 19:8) and women were not to take part in it; or (iii) desiring to know should be fulfilled at home and not in the worship.

• *Titus 2:2–6*. Older men should live sensible, mature lives. Likewise women, who then can teach younger women to live domestically and familiarly. Younger men should be taught to control themselves.

THE ELDERSHIP

This is a vast subject,[†] but eldership is a fact. There has always been eldership in tribes, nations, government, etc.

* We have said that to glorify is to acknowledge the true position of the one who is the object of respect. If man to God, then man is obedient. If God to man, then God honours the image He has made. Likewise the man to the woman.

[†] See *Shepherds of the Flock*, NCPI, 1985.

There were elders in every tribe of Israel, and seventy elders (the Sanhedrin) over all Israel. Without doubt the eldership in the early church was male. For ‘leaders’, ‘rulers’, ‘overseers’, ‘elders’, ‘bishops’, ‘pastors’ and ‘shepherds’, see Acts 14:23; 15:6; 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11; I Thessalonians 5:12; I Timothy 3:11f.; 5:17f.; Titus 1:5; Hebrews 13:7, 17; Revelation 4:4f.

The elders are teachers (I Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9; Heb. 13:7; I Pet. 5:2; Eph. 4:11*). The elders are leaders, overseers, and ‘have the rule’. In I Peter 5:1–4 it is clear that the elders are shepherds and must shepherd the flock. So far as we know, this is purely a ‘male’ operation, i.e. teaching and leading. What, then, is a ‘pastor’ or ‘shep-herd’? We must see.

THE PASTORS

The term ‘pastor’ is only once used in the New Testament in English. It is the word for ‘shepherd’ (*poimen*) used many times in the Old and New Testaments. See especially Ezekiel 34 and 37. In Ezekiel 34 God is first the true shepherd, and then David His under-shepherd. The idea behind ‘shepherds’ is ‘kings’, ‘leaders’, and ‘elders’, i.e. those in charge of the flock (cf. I Pet. 5:1f.). In John 10 Jesus is the true shepherd—as against the false ones mentioned in Ezekiel 34. In Zechariah 13:7 (cf. Matt. 26:31) the shepherd (Jesus) is smitten and the flock scattered. In Hebrews 13:20 Jesus is ‘the great shepherd of the sheep’ (cf. I Pet. 2:25; 5:4). From I Peter 5 it is

clear that elders are pastors, so that the ‘pastor-teachers’ of Ephesians 4:11 must be elders. Teaching in the assembly must be from these.

THE MALENESS OF GOD AND MEN

Under our next heading we will be looking at the ministry of women. How powerful is the feminine ministry in all its true forms! Women are totally involved in ministry. Leadership, however, is masculine.

The word ‘masculine’ is a difficult one. But then it is difficult, indeed impossible, to work from an ectype to the archetype. Since God is ineffable we cannot know Him. We cannot work from anything in creation back to God, for there are no elements or criteria of comparison. Hence, to think of God’s masculinity (He is never referred to as being feminine) in terms of human masculinity would be a grave error. Not only does God not have sexuality, but He is not just ‘male-without-sex’, i.e. all a man would be without sexuality. His ‘maleness’ is a mystery, but is unquestionable. Since all the elect will be ‘sons of God’, it may well be that masculine and feminine elements are contained in God’s masculinity, hence Genesis 1:26–27 and 5:1–2.

One way to work out the matter is to work from the Son. He is masculine, and the church feminine to him. His ultimate union with the church will not be ‘sexual’, but it will be true union. Whilst the church will not merge into God or God into it, yet the Bride will participate in the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4). Even so, the leadership will still be masculine. It appears, then, that God’s masculinity is

* Are the pastor-teachers in Eph. 4:11 the elders? Cf. Acts 20:17ff.

always in leadership, and His people (Bride, Wife) always have the subordinate role in co-ordination with Him.

THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN

- *Men and women both have ministry.* All members of the church are ordained to ministry, whether they are men or women. This can be seen from the following references: Mark 10:45; cf. 9:35; Romans 13:8–10; Ephesians 4:12; Galatians 5:13–16; 6:10 (etc.). However, even these references do not compass the general ministry of women. Often writers are eager to inform women that there is almost anything they can do *except be eligible for the office of elders or 'the priesthood'*. To some women this seems like throwing a bone to distract the barking animal (feminity), or is unconscious but heavy patronage and condescension. Even so, let us see something of the ministry of women, i.e. the ministry to which they were (and are) ordained.

- *In the Old Testament, woman was to participate with man in fulfilling the mandate God gave at creation* (Gen. 1:28ff.; cf. I Pet. 3:7). This would be a full-time work. Any vocation, of course, could be contained within the general vocation. Revelations from God came directly to many women, i.e. to Hagar (Gen. 16:7–8; 21:17), Rebekah (Gen. 25:23), and Manoah's wife (Judges 13:3). They also came to prophetesses Miriam (Exod. 15:20f.; Num. 12:1–2), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Huldah (II Kings 22:14–20), and to the prophetess of Isaiah 8:3. Deborah was also a judge in Israel (Judges chs 4–5).

Athaliah is the sole example of a queen ruling over Israel (II Kings 11). The prayers of Rebekah (Gen. 25:22f.), Rachel (Gen. 30:6, 22), Leah (Gen. 30:17), and Hannah (I Sam. 1:11; 2:1–10) have helped to change the course of history.

- *In the New Testament, Christ called all who obeyed his word his 'brother, and sister, and mother'* (Matt. 12:50). Many women ministered to Christ (Luke 8:1–3; 10:38ff.; John 12:1ff.). They were at his cross when many of the disciples were not, were at the taking of him down from the cross, were first at the tomb, first to announce his resurrection, were present at Pentecost and received the outpouring of the Spirit, were at prayer for Peter (Acts 12:12ff.), and others (cf. Acts 4:23ff.). We saw in I Corinthians 11:5 that women prayed and prophesied in the church. In Acts 21:9 the four unmarried daughters of Philip prophesied (not only once, but, it seems, continually), and this accorded with the statement of Joel, repeated and amplified by Peter (cf. Joel 2:28f.; Acts 2:17ff.) that both 'sons and daughters', 'menservants and maidservants' would prophesy. In Romans 16:1–2 Phoebe is called 'a servant', or 'a *diakon*' (the word means 'ser-vant'; cf. Mark 9:35; 10:45), which some believe belongs to the order of 'deacons', and she is also called 'a *pro-statis*', which can be translated 'guardian' or 'protectress'.

- *Women laboured in the Gospel*—whatever that means in different contexts—for Lydia opened both her heart and home to God's messengers (Acts 16:14f.). Women at Thessalonica and Berea also accepted the Gospel, searching the Scriptures, and doubtless were part of the witness of which Paul speaks in I Thessalonians 1:6–10.

In Philippians 1:5 Paul speaks to the Philippians about their ‘partnership in the Gospel’, and in 4:2–3 nominates at least two of these women, Euodia and Syntyche. Couples such as Priscilla and Aquila, and those mentioned singly, such as Mary, Junia and Julia (there could have, and would have, been numerous others), all attest to women in ministry. We repeat: all Christian women, as also all Christian men, were assumed to be in ministry or ‘servantship’.

- *Women received what are called ‘the gifts of the Spirit’, for they prophesied.* Apart from what we may call ‘ministry gifts’, i.e. apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher, we have no need to doubt that all gifts at some time or another are manifested by the Spirit in both men and women. There is some debate as to whether women were given these ‘ministry gifts’. It is argued that in Romans 16:7 the Junia (a woman or a man?) mentioned is one ‘notable among the apostles’. Some scholars see two meanings for the word ‘apostle’: (i) for those of the apostolic college, i.e. ‘the Twelve’, and (ii) for anyone who was a ‘sent one’ or ‘messenger’. Junia could not be included among the former, but there is no reason why she (or, he) should not be included among the latter. We have evidence that women prophesied, although we would need to be certain whether this was the gift of prophecy (which all had) or the office of a prophet, which was given only to some. In one sense all Christians are sent (are apostles), and all can prophesy (cf. I Cor. 14:1; Acts 2:17, 18).

- *We must draw the conclusion, then, that women carried out no less ministry than did men.* It is better to say,

‘Together all Christian men and women carried out a combined ministry under the Lordship of their Head, Christ’. There the matter of ordination to ministry should be left, provided the injunctions of Paul are kept in mind. *All are ordained to ministry, but not all are ordained to the eldership*, and those who are ordained to the eldership are males.

A REMINDER OF THE TRUE MASCULINE AND FEMININE ‘TYPES’

The male–female connections

At this point we need to remind ourselves of the Man and the Woman, the Bridegroom and the Bride, and think of them in terms of ‘headship’ and ‘body’. In regard to the church we have seen that the headship is always male, and the body feminine, and in regard to marriage the husband is the ‘head’ and the wife the ‘body’. In regard to the Holy City—the New Jerusalem which is feminine because it is the Bride—both God and Lamb dwell in it. They are the Head/s. If we say the church is prophetic, priestly and royal, then it is because the Head is Prophet, Priest and King. These three ministries the church exercises are headed up in, and by, Christ. There can be no prophetic, priestly and kingly ministry but from him. The church is also the Temple, without doubt, and is feminine in that it is one with the ‘New Jerusalem’. In Revelation 21:22 there is no Temple in the city, it being subsumed under ‘God and the Lamb’, i.e. it is (archetypally) masculine. The Holy City is not an entity in itself. Its

Headship is that of God and the Lamb. Again, when we take another picture of the church—that of the Family—we see that it is the ‘one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all, and in all’, i.e. the Family has its Headship in the Father, as the Kingdom has its Headship in the King. The Vine has its ‘branch identity’ only in Christ its true source and head.

In all these so-called images or figures we see that the church is feminine to Christ’s masculine, and so subject to him. What we have to watch—as we have expressed above—is that the ‘body’ does not seek to run its own being in separation from the Head, and that the Head–body identity is maintained, so there is no ‘Headless body’ or ‘bodiless Head’. We see in II Corinthians 11:1f. that the old ploy of Satan to divide the body from its head (woman from man) is what Paul fears in regard to the church.

In the Revelation, the elders (eldership) are expressed in the male gender (see esp. 7:13–14), and as this is archetypal of all eldership it is fair to assume the ectypal eldership is masculine. This eldership has authority (4:4, 10), and so a certain headship in the creation. Whilst the elders are not spoken of as shepherds—as indeed they are in the New Testament—yet since they are shepherds under the Chief Shepherd this undergirds the fact of their masculine headship, for it is the Shepherd of Revelation 7:15–17 who leads the heavenly flock of the redeemed.

The power of the feminine

In regard to the Woman—the Feminine—she is always at one with the Bridegroom. As we have seen, she has a

vast ministry, for the Holy City—so to speak—houses the nations, and gives out healing to them, but always under the direction of God and the Lamb. She has power to do what the False Woman—Babylon—could not do. Babylon did what she did by seduction and cruelty. The True Woman is not adorned in gaudy hues, but in ‘linen, bright and pure’. Babylon is destroyed: the Holy City is eternal.

A conclusion to the male-female principle

We may conclude, then, that the truth of ‘male and female’ is that they are one, and have a ‘one-flesh’ union. They work together in God’s plan for the vocation He has for them.

2

Christ's headship in church and history

CHRIST HEAD OF ALL THINGS

Christ's headship is shown: (i) *By creation* (John 1:1–5; Col. 1:15–17; Heb. 1:2–3; I Cor. 8:5–6), and this headship is ontological. In one sense we should say 'the headship of the Word', or 'the headship of the eternal Son', but because the Word (John 1:1–4), the Son (Heb. 1:2–3), has become incarnate, the terms 'Jesus', 'Jesus Christ', and 'Christ Jesus' are used even when speaking of his being prior to, and being at, creation. (ii) *By redemption*, i.e. by his victory of the Cross (Gal. 1:4; 2:19–20; 6:14; Col. 2:13–14; II Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14–15), and by his resurrection (Acts 3:15; Rom. 1:4; I Pet. 1:3; Rom. 5:10; 10:9),

for his resurrection makes him Lord over both death and life. He is also Lord by his ascension (John 16:10; Acts 2:33–36; 5:31; Heb. 1:3, 13).

What is immensely important is that Christ has been made, and continues to be, 'head over all things', as is set out in Ephesians 1:20–23. His Lordship is not only to do with his being prior to his incarnation (cf. John 17:1–5, 20ff.; Phil. 2:5ff.; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4), but it is in Christ that God has planned all (Eph. 1:3–14; 3:1–11; etc.). II Corinthians 1:19–22 (cf. Luke 24:25, 44f.) shows us that Christ is the heart, substance and fulfilment of all things.

CHRIST THE HEAD OF ALL THINGS FOR THE CHURCH

Ephesians 1:21 (cf. Col. 2:10) shows Christ as head over *all things*, for (i) he created them (Col. 1:16–17) and (ii) he renews and unifies all things, 'filling them up', 'reconciling', and 'harmonizing' them, for it is impossible both creationally and redemptively that they should be out-side his control. Ephesians 1:20f. (cf. Heb. 1:3; 10:12–13) is linked with Psalm 110:1f., and is also connected with Psalm 2 (cf. Heb. 5:5–6). His headship ('Jesus is Lord') over all things 'for the church' means (i) that since he rules all things his church is kept in victory and true supremacy, and (ii) that the church ministers with him, fighting with him in this last age to defeat and destroy the enemies (I Cor. 15:24–28; cf. Rev. 15:2), so that it will be one with him 'in the age to come'.

CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Statements regarding this fact are: (i) Ephesians 4:15; (ii) Colossians 1:18; (iii) Ephesians 5:23 (cf. Rev. 19:6–9; chs 21–22); (iv) Ephesians 2:19–20 (cf. I Pet. 2:6–8); (v) Colossians 1:19; 2:3, 9–10. Revelation 1:12–20 (cf. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 2:3, 7, 14) shows his practical headship, and his strong control over his church, consonant with Revelation 1:12–13 where the glorified Christ is in the midst of the (sevenfold) church.

What, then, are the purposes and functions of his Headship of the church? Being ontologically Head, the Vine, the Shepherd, the Bridegroom, the true High Priest, the True Prophet, and the True King of the people of God indicates that Christ as Head is not only ‘the source and origin’ of his people, but also Leader and Ruler of them, and for them. The Body has its identity only in him, receiving the benefits of his multi-faceted Headship, i.e. Head over the Family, Head of the branches as the Vine, Head of members of the Body, Shepherd of the Flock; thus his people operate prophetically as the priestly and worshipping community, the royal community, being his Bride. He has given to the Body his own fullness, hence they share with him in the fruits of his victory (Eph. 4:7ff.), and presently fight evil powers with him (I Cor. 15:24–28). In him they participate in God’s plan for history. We must closely examine II Corinthians 11:1ff., and in fact all the triumphalism (along with the philosophy of non-suffering) of the ‘super apostles’, and the nominated false apostles, as well as the heresiarchs spoken of in the Acts, the Epistles and the Revelation.

THE LIFE OF THE HEAD AND THE BODY

The Head has given to the Body (i) the mandate for proclaiming the Gospel; (ii) the gifts *of* ministry (Eph. 4:7–11); (iii) the gifts *for* ministry; (iv) the leadership of the eldership; (v) the weapons for warfare; (vi) the grace for community life—grace flowing continuously from the Father and the Son, via the Spirit; (vii) the power for the internal life of the church, for proclamation of the Gospel to the world, and for fighting the forces of darkness.

If the Body remains true to the Head, then Head and Body work as one. If the Body is ‘headless’ (the Flock Shepherdless, the Branches without the Vine, the Priesthood without the Priest, etc.) then there is chaos and an unontological situation, i.e. chaos and tragedy. We should closely examine Ephesians 4:11–16, especially verse 15, and Colossians 2:16ff., especially verse 19. We must also see the references which speak of Christ’s relationship to the church, in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Christ is in the midst of the church, showing his Headship in dynamic ways, rebuking, encouraging, judging, executing judgement, and helping in the conflict.

THE HEAD, AND HIS APPOINTED HEADS OF THE CHURCH

In our last study we saw the following:

□ The fact of leadership: see Acts 14:23; 15:6; 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11; I Thessalonians 5:12; I Timothy 3:1ff.; 5:17f.; Titus. 1:5ff.; Hebrews 13:7, 17; I Peter 5:1ff.; cf. Revelation 4:4 (etc.). Note: The Elders in the Revelation are spoken of as male.

□ Terms for leadership: ‘rulers’ (hegoumenoi), Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; cf. Acts 15:22; ‘overseers’ (episkopoi), Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:1, 2; Titus 1:7; ‘those over you’ (*proistamenous*), I Thess. 5:12 (cf. I Tim. 3:4, 5, 12), ‘elders’ (*presbuteroi*), Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; I Timothy 5:1, 17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; I Peter 5:1; ‘pastors’ or, ‘shepherds’ (*poimenas*), Ephesians 4:11; cf. John 10:1–16; Hebrews 13:20; I Peter 2:25. All these are male.

• *The task of teaching* belongs to elders (I Tim. 3:2; 6:17; Titus 2:6; see Acts 20:17ff.), whilst women can *learn* (I Tim. 2:11; cf. I Cor. 14:35). Older women can *teach* younger women (Titus 2:3–5), with perhaps a *husband–wife* pair also able to teach (Acts 18:26).

The question then remains as to (i) the total relationship of each member (person) to Christ as Head; (ii) the corporate relationship of the community to Christ as Head; (iii) the place of the Eldership as the entity through which Christ speaks and leads (cf. Acts 15:6, 19–20, 22); and (iv) the entity by which Christ teaches the true word, and confutes heresy, wrong doctrine and wrong practice (Titus 1:5–16; Jude 3–4), etc. We also have to see the place and authority of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher, and the relationship to the head through the elders and them, as well as members to mem-bers (Eph. 5:21; I Cor. chs 12–14; Acts 2:42ff.; 4:32–33; Phil. 2:1ff.; Eph. 4:1ff.) and all members working together under their Head.

Section Eight

MISCELLANEOUS DOCTRINES

An introduction to

MISCELLANEOUS DOCTRINES

This last section should prove no less interesting than those which have gone before. 'THE POWER CONNECTION' is included to show that the energies we put into pastoral ministry, especially into being successful, having promotion campaigns and stimulating church growth, can be from less than the best motives. Our weakness may be our greatest strength. Linked closely with this is 'THE SPIRIT AND THE KINGDOM', a study which shows us that the purpose of the Spirit's coming was primarily the Kingdom of God, and especially Christ's Lordship in that Kingdom. We cannot manipulate the Kingdom.

I well remember giving the study 'ACCOUNTABILITY'. Pastors who attended this particular session looked at the heading of the notes and—with humour—decided they

were suddenly wanted elsewhere! Accountability is rarely taken into account in our counselling.

‘WORSHIP AND THE ESCHATON’ may appear to be a wide subject, and not immediately relevant. It is. We are missing the most powerful dimension of worship when we miss this. Pastors could find their understanding being an enrichment to their congregations. Because we are in the last days, ‘THE POWER OF SIGNS AND WONDERS’ is no less relevant. Pastors and people need to know the biblical doctrine concerning these things—which are much discussed and greatly debated—so that their practice of them can be a wise one.

‘BEYOND THE CROSS’ is a study which should be sobering to those who think the work of the Cross in salvation is simply an initial matter, and who believe ‘much lies beyond the Cross’. This is not true, and the study is a fitting one to conclude the book. Perhaps it is the most important of all.

1

The power connection

INTRODUCTION: WHOSE IS THE POWER?

We know that in the New Testament there are various words for power, but the two main ones are *exousia*, which is authority, and *dunamis*, which is ability or power as we know it in the word *dynamic*. We need to see whether man innately has power, or can be given power which he may then use. A simple run-down of the use of *dunamis* is as follows:

- (a) The word is used: 77 times
- (b) this power is shown directly to be God’s power: 43 times
- (c) it is used to show the power was Christ’s: 4 times
- (d) Christ works by God’s power or has God’s power—including the power of the Holy Spirit: 8 times

- (e) Power is given by Christ to others: 2 times
and it was promised that power would come to them
through the Holy Spirit: 2 times
- (f) The power of the Holy Spirit is mentioned: 6 times
- (g) The Gospel (or the word of the Cross) is said to be
the power of God explicitly: 3 times
and is inferred generally.
- (h) A person is said to be full of power: 1 time
(Acts 6:8; cf. 6:3), but often persons are filled with
the Holy Spirit and hence power in accordance with
Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8. When the Gospel is
preached in the Spirit there is power
(I Cor. 2:4–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12).
- (i) Certain men are said to have power: 9 times
- (j) The Kingdom of God is linked with power, 3 times
and twice with ‘the age to come’:
- (k) Power is linked with ‘signs and wonders’: 3 times
- (l) The power of God is said to *effect* something or
someone: 27 times
- (m) Where godly men exercise power, they deny it is
essentially their own (Acts 3:12; 4:7–12): 2 times
- (n) Men or evil forces exercise power: 2 times
(i) II Thessalonians 2:9; (ii) Revelation 13:2, cf.
16:12–14, Matthew 24:24. See Acts 8:18ff.

ANALYSIS OF THE REFERENCES ON POWER

Any analysis on mere numbers of occasions and contexts in which the word *power* is used will be deficient, but some overall picture can be seen. The principle of who

has power, the reasons for having it, and the use of it need to be looked at. The following can be seen:

- All power belongs to God—and none to man.
- Christ as a man and as anointed by God had the power of the Spirit to do the Father’s will. He used this power for all things in his life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension.
- His disciples had no power until they were given it (Luke 9:1f.; 10:1f.). They were promised power through the Holy Spirit, and received it at Pentecost. This power was and is primarily for *witness*.
- When the disciples did miracles, signs and wonders they accredited them to Christ himself (e.g. Acts 3:12–16). They insisted they had no power of themselves. They knew that they did what they did from God.
- The power of God did (and does) the following things: (i) assisted Jesus in all that he did; (ii) assisted the apostles to witness to Christ, to preach the Gospel, to deliver a dynamic word; (iii) aided believers to abound in hope; (iv) raised Jesus from the dead, raises us to spiritual life and power, and will raise us from the dead; (v) causes us to live with Christ. (vi) It caused Paul—and others—to minister through grace (cf. Eph. 3:7; see ‘(ii)’ above); (vii) to fulfil every good work (cf. II Thess. 1:11); (viii) to share in suffering (II Tim. 1:8). (ix) It guards us for a future salvation (I Pet. 1:5); (x) enables us to participate in the Divine Nature (II Pet. 1:3); (xi) assures the coming or *parousia* of the Lord Jesus Christ, ‘at the right hand of the power’ (II Pet. 1:16).

THE PLACE OF POWER AND WEAKNESS

- Man as man is not weak—as a man (cf. Gen. 1:26ff.; Ps. 8:3ff.), but fallen sinful man has no moral-spiritual power (Rom. 5:6, cf. Jer. 10:23).
- When man recognizes his own innate weakness, admits it, and lives in dependence upon God, then he is strong in God's power, especially as he is in the purposes of God (see Acts 1:8; Rom. 9:17; I Cor. 1:26–31; 2:1–5; 15:43; II Cor. 4:7; 6:7; 12:1–10; 13:4; I Thess. 1:5; II Tim. 1:7). The conclusion here is that *a man is never strong in himself, has no innate power and can only exercise the power of God when he recognizes that he is wholly weak in himself, and, as such, has faith in God for the power he needs to proclaim and live the truth.*
- God as the God of power assists Christ to be powerful in his (Christ's) weakness. Christ always declared himself to feed on his Father, to be led and enabled by his Father to do His work. He recognized the power of the Spirit in him. All these statements pertain to his manhood. If Christ was weak without the Father's assistance, then where does that place us? In this regard, it is interesting to see in Revelation 5:1–6 that the Lion is the Lamb, i.e. the power of the Lion lies in his lamb-like humility (cf. Phil. 2:1–11; see also I Cor. 13:8ff.).

THE PASTOR, PREACHER AND POWER MINISTRY

Is it possible to gather from what is set out above that God gives power unconditionally to His servants and

expects them to use it? Is it possible to misuse power from whatever source it may come? Is there a power which does not come from God? What of psychic powers, occult powers, and mental powers?

It is clear that the believer should work in great power in preaching the Gospel, in exercising the particular ministry and gifts God has given him, in opposing the enemy and overcoming him (them). Ideally, then, every servant of Christ should be powerful, through grace and faith, to proclaim and live the truth.

Power need

- *All human beings seek power of one kind or another.* They have fear of death (Heb. 2:14–15; cf. I John 4:18). They need to prove themselves (cf. Gen. 10:9ff.; 11:1f.; 4:8ff.; Acts 8:12–22; 10:20–23; II Thess. 2:3–4). They are after a name, a tower, a kingdom (Gen. 11:1ff.). Sinful man is so wrong. He has existential guilt. He is always trying to prove himself. The higher the accomplishment, the 'higher' the justification or self-vindication he supposes.
- *There is power for the preaching of the truth:* (i) the Holy Spirit and his power; (ii) the Word of God is God actually speaking now, and so this 'word of the Cross', this Gospel of salvation, is its own power to effect dynamic and radical salvation, new birth, justification, forgiveness and sanctification. *The word brings deeds* (Rom. 15:18).
- *There is the power of signs and wonders* (Rom. 15:18–19). NOTE: signs and wonders are not innately power-ful; it is *the power of God* which causes them and makes

them effective (see John 2:23–25; Acts 2:43; 3:12f.; 5:12; 14:3; 19:11). *God attests the word by signs and wonders when He sees fit.*

- *There are signs and wonders which are wrong* (Matt. 24:24; II Thess. 2:9; Rev. 16:13–14; see also Matt. 12:38–42; Mark 8:11; Luke 11:16). In I Corinthians 1:22 Paul says that ‘Jews demand signs’ (cf. John 4:48–54). Matthew 7:21–23 shows that sign-doing *per se* is not necessarily good, but often deceptive.

- *God’s signs and wonders are often judgements against evil powers as they are support for His people.* See the ten plagues in Egypt (cf. Jer. 32:20; Num. 14:11–12); Numbers chapters 12 and 16; II Chronicles 26:16–21; the three series of 7 plagues each in Revelation chapters 5–19.

Power use

- *God’s people are called upon to use power.* It is power used in humility and from the point of view of weakness, as we see above (‘The Place and Power of Weakness’). We need to see that we are strong only in Christ (Rom. 8:36–37; II Cor. 2:14; Phil. 4:13; II Cor. 12:9).

- *God’s power is presently ours, but is so by faith.* See Joshua 3:5–7; Judges 6:11–12; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8 (cf. Eph. 5:18); James 4:7; I Peter 5:8–9; I John 2:12–14; 4:4; 5:4; Revelation chapters 2–3, ‘He that overcomes’; 12:11; 15:2.

- *Gifts, weapons, signs and wonders used in faith and love are the working out of God’s power.* We need to see

the gifts are given by God to work in certain situations, and they must be used in love, for love (I Cor. 13:1–3; cf. Matt. 7:21–23). *Weapons are spiritual and are given to fight evil.* See II Corinthians 10: 3–4; Romans 13:11–14; I Thessalonians 5:8; Ephesians 6:10–18. *Signs and wonders* are not just the mechanistic use of *gifts*. God uses signs and wonders (i) to attest the word, and (ii) to work judgements. A question to ask is, ‘What discipline, authority and control should be exercised in the use of the proclamation of the word, the use of gifts and weapons, especially as they relate to signs and wonders?’.

CONCLUSION TO ‘THE POWER CONNECTION’

We recognize that it is dangerous on the one hand to live out of faith, to fail to proclaim and live in the truth by the power of God, i.e. the power of Christ, of the Spirit, all in the grace of God. It is equally dangerous ever to seek from our own powers to accomplish the will of God, even by proclaiming what we believe is the word of God, using the gifts and seeking to effect signs and wonders.

It is right, appropriate and necessary to live in personal weakness, thus living in the power of God. To say we are weak when we should be strong in Him is untrue and an escape from the reality of the truth. To be true persons of the truth we must have the power of God appropriated by faith and obedience, and exercised *only* in the love of God.

2

The Spirit and the Kingdom of God**THE GENERAL NATURE OF THE KINGDOM**

We understand the Kingdom of God to be the reign and rule of God in all times, places and conditions. In this sense the Kingdom ever was, and ever will be. God always has and will be Sovereign over all. Whilst we can have biblical verification of these statements, we do not need them. The nature of God—as God—demands them.

THE PARTICULAR NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

The initially undisputed reign and rule of God became disputed at a point in the history and action of creation. Heavenly powers rebelled against God and sought equality with Him if not precedence over Him (cf. Rev. 12). The

serpent in Eden tempted man to similar disobedience and autonomy. The Kingdom still obtained but had—and has—rebels within it. This is known as ‘the world system’, i.e. a system in which Satan is the head, his fallen celestial powers under him, and into which man has been caught by deceit, seduction and threat. This is sometimes known as ‘the kingdom of darkness’ (Luke 11:18; Col. 1:13; Rev. 16:10–11), and is a counter-kingdom within the entire Kingdom of God.

The history of the Kingdom is that certain celestial powers never rebelled, and there have been human beings who, though fallen in Adam, are people of faith and hence loyal subjects within God’s Kingdom. Such are known as ‘the people of God’. Seth and his progeny; Noah and his progeny; Abraham, Isaac; Jacob and his progeny all represent the stream of the true people of God, and so loyal—by grace—within God’s Kingdom (see Heb. 11; Gal. 3:9, 29).

The Old Testament prophets prophesy the coming actions of the Kingdom of God, and link it—one way and another—with Messiah, the Davidic King, the Son of Man, the Righteous Branch, and the Suffering Servant. The New Testament—through John the Baptist—announces the coming of the King. Jesus also announces it, but as the King, for he was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism. The Kingdom thus came in his own person (Luke 3:21–22; 4:18–21; 11:14–23; Matt. 12:28; John 18:33–37). This Kingdom he appointed to his followers (Luke 12:32; 22:28–30).

In the work of the Atonement—the Cross and Resurrection with the vindication of the Ascension—Messiah defeated the powers of evil, and liberated men from the

powers of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13–14). The ‘Gospel of the Kingdom’ (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:14; Isa. 52:7) now became ‘the Gospel of salvation’, whilst still being ‘the Gospel of the Kingdom’ (cf. Acts 2:36–38; 8:5, 12; 19:8; 20:21–25; 28:23, 31).

The Kingdom became known as ‘the Kingdom of God and Christ’ (Eph. 5:5; I Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 11:15). From Pentecost to the Parousia of Messiah the victory of the Cross is being worked out in history, as seen in (i) I Corinthians 15:24–28, and (ii) the Book of the Revelation, especially chapters 12 to 20.

Only with this background known to us can we now discuss the Spirit in relation to the Kingdom of God.

THE SPIRIT AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Acts 1:1–8

- (a) For forty days Jesus spoke of the Kingdom to his disciples (v. 3).
- (b) He insisted they stay in Jerusalem—i.e. not preach the Kingdom—until they received the gift and power of the Spirit (v. 4).
- (c) He promised the baptism (or the outpouring on them) of the Holy Spirit (v. 5).
- (d) Linking the concepts of the Kingdom and the outpouring of the Spirit, the disciples asked whether that meant an immediate restoration of the Kingdom to Israel (v. 6).

- (e) Jesus told them (vv. 7–8) that the matter of Israel and the Kingdom was in the Father’s hand. They would receive the outpouring of the Spirit and be empowered to witness to him—Messiah—and this would be to all Jewry in Palestine, to Samaria (the Samaritans) and to all the nations (Gentiles, ‘the end of the earth’, cf. Ps. 2:7–9; Isa. 42:1–2).

The conclusion from this passage is as follows: (i) they were to preach the Kingdom to all nations through the Spirit of God. The Kingdom would be restored not only to Israel but to all nations. Matthew 24:2–14 confirms this, i.e. the Kingdom will not ‘come’ until its Gospel is preached to all the nations; (ii) there would be no true preaching of the Kingdom without the Spirit.

In the Old Testament every promise of the outpouring of the Spirit is linked with the promise of the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. See Isaiah 32:15–20; 35:1–10; 41:17–20; 44:1–5; 61:1–4; Ezekiel 36:24–28; 37:1–14; Joel 2:28–32/Acts 2:17–21; Zechariah 12:10–13:9. Thus *the disciples saw the renewing of the Kingdom and the outpouring of the Spirit as being together*.

Acts 1:1–8 with 2:1–21

Here we see that Acts 1:8, in considering the preaching of the Kingdom *through the Spirit*, refers it to all nations—Israel, Samaria and the Gentiles (nations). That is in regard to *time* (cf. Matt. 24:14; I Cor. 15:24ff.). Acts 2:17–21 also refers to the action of the Spirit in time, i.e. from Pentecost to the ‘great and manifest day’ (2:17–20) which is the *duration* of the pouring out of the Spirit, and the *duration* of prophetic utterance (2:17–20). This must be *exactly the period of time* defined in I Corinthians 15:24–28 and in Matthew 24:14.

***Jesus, the Kingdom, and the Spirit
in the Synoptic Gospels***

- Jesus was anointed by the Spirit to be the Messiah, Son of the living God, to fulfil his appointed work in the Kingdom (Mark 1:10–11; cf. vv. 14–15).
- He was *driven* by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil (Mark 1:12–13). As Israel was taken out of Egypt to be the living epitome of the Kingdom, it was led by the Spirit through the wilderness to establish a holy Kingdom (Exod. 19:5–6). Tempted (tested), it fell into worship that belonged to another kingdom (Exod. 32:1–14), and ‘grieved his holy Spirit’ (Isa. 63:10). Jesus the tested Messiah could now announce his ‘Kingdom platform’, as in Luke 4:18–21.
- The failure of Israel in the wilderness (Isa. 63:9–11; Exod. 32:1–14) was transcended by God in His grace, as we see in Isaiah 63:11–14 (cf. Exod. 33):

Like a horse in the desert,
they did not stumble.
Like cattle that go down into the valley,
the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest.
So thou didst lead thy people,
to make for thyself a glorious name.

- Christ proceeded—as the King—to do the work of the Kingdom, but only by the Spirit of the Lord (Luke 4:18–21; Matt. 12:28). We note that he had been conceived by the Spirit, anointed, tested, and then he ministered by the Spirit,

offered himself up by the Spirit, was raised by the Spirit and caused (enabled) to ascend by the Spirit.

We thus conclude—via the Synoptists—that all that he did was by the Spirit, and all of it with a view to the Kingdom.

The Book of Acts, the Spirit, and the Kingdom

We have linked Acts 1:8 with 2:1–21, and seen that the Spirit will be poured out from Pentecost up until ‘the great and notable day of the Lord’, i.e. *the period* of I Corinthians 15:24–28 and Revelation chapters 12–20. We have seen that this equals *the time* of Acts 1:8 for bringing the Gospel to Jews, Samaritans and the nations (Matt. 24:14). When we closely study the sermons in Acts, we see *they primarily tell of Jesus being Messiah*, which must mean ‘King of the Kingdom’. This is confirmed by Acts 8:5, 12, i.e. *the Gospel of Messiah is the good news of the Kingdom*. This is substantiated by Acts 20:20–27, which makes the Gospel of the grace of God to be the preaching of the Kingdom of God (cf. Acts 19:8–9; 28:23–27; 28:30–31).

Acts 1:8 holds the key to the Spirit and the Kingdom. The Epistles insist that there was no preaching of the Gospel apart from the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:1–5; I Thess. 1:5, I Pet. 1:12; Heb. 2:4; cf. 6:4). We can say, then, that the power for preaching was by the Spirit, and thus, as Jesus preached the Kingdom, so did they. *Acts 8:5–8 tallies with Matthew 12:28, i.e. as to the mode of proclamation.*

The apostolical use of the keys of the Kingdom in Acts

In Matthew 16:16–19 Jesus evokes from Peter the confession that he is the Messiah, the Son of the living God,

i.e. the King of the Kingdom. Jesus then says he will build his church on the rock of this confession. He told them (in the plural) that he would give them—the apostles—the keys of the kingdom of heaven, ‘and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound [*have been bound*] in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, shall be loosed [*have been loosed*] in heaven’.

At that time *if* any nation was within the Kingdom, then it was Israel. In Acts 1:6–8 the apostles asked concerning its restoration to Israel, and were told that the Father had that in hand. Rather, they were to teach the Kingdom to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles (the nations). The question is, ‘How do (did) the nations come into the Kingdom?’. Surely by the use of the apostolical keys. The further question is, ‘By the simple preaching of the Gospel, *or* by some special apostolical action?’.

What is often missing in later thinking about the matter is the background of the day where Jewish thinking did not envisage the Samaritan nation and/or the Gentile nations having the door of the Kingdom opened to them. It would have been a vast leap in thought to envisage that! At Pentecost the Kingdom was opened to Israel, for this was evident by the outpouring of the Spirit on all. Note that the apostles were present.

In Samaria (Acts 8) the Gospel of the Kingdom was preached by an evangelist (Philip) and was received; the people were baptized but there was no outpouring of the Spirit *until the apostles came down*. At Caesarea Peter the apostle was present and the Spirit was poured out. Thus initially and principally there was no opening to any of the peoples—Jewish, Samaritan, and Gentile—*without the use of the apostolical keys to the Kingdom*. The point

of saying this is to show that without the outpouring of the Spirit in accordance with Acts 1:8, the Kingdom of God is not opened—but it is opened by the Spirit. This accords with John 3:1–14, where Jesus said that entrance into the Kingdom was by birth through the Spirit. The Kingdom, then, has been opened to all nations (cf. Matt. 24:14), not that everyone in all nations will enter—only *the elect*.

The Church, the Spirit, and the Gospel of the Kingdom

Matthew 16:16–18 links the building of the church and opening of the Kingdom of God together. When we see that Israel was led towards being a kingdom by the Holy Spirit, as in the interpretation of Isaiah 63 (cf. Haggai 2:5), the prophecies by the Spirit of the Kingdom to come, and the announcement of the Kingdom by John the Baptist and Jesus, as well as Jesus’ Kingdom operations in Palestine, then we see the Kingdom has always been under the guidance of the Spirit. He has always had the true people of God linked with this Kingdom.

The church, then, is not the Kingdom but is linked very closely with it. Statements as in Acts 14:22, Matthew 5:10, and II Thessalonians 1:5 show that the church is persecuted because it is the agent of the Kingdom. The Book of Revelation also portrays this constant warfare. In this age the Spirit supplies the church with power to proclaim the Kingdom, with gifts to equip it for true living, and with spiritual weapons to fight the powers of evil. Whilst the church is not named in the action of I Corinthians 15:24–28, it is nevertheless empowered and

led by the Spirit and hence participates in that spiritual warfare.

The Holy Spirit coming upon the church for the work of the Kingdom

There can be no question from Acts 1:8; 2:4ff.; 8:14–17; 10:44/11:15–18; 19:1–7 that the various outpourings of the Spirit had in mind (i) bringing the recipients to regeneration, and (ii) bringing them to power for the ongoing work of the Kingdom. In Acts 6:1–10 we see seven men filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom, amongst whom are Stephen and Philip. Regenerated and filled with power they do great works. When—so to speak—more (or fresh) power is needed, prayer for power, signs and wonders brings a fresh outpouring of the Spirit on all the church (Acts 4:23–33). Infillings of the Spirit come at special times such as Acts 4:8 (Peter), 7:55 (Stephen), 13:9 (Paul; cf. 9:17).

It is clear from references such as Acts 1:8; 8:29; 10:19–23, 44; 13:2–4; 15:8, 28; 16:6–10; I Corinthians 2:1–5; I Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 2:2–4; 6:4; I Peter 1:12; Revelation 1:10; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 4:2; 5:6; 17:3; 19:10; 22:17 that the Spirit is always promoting the work of the Kingdom. Church history shows that when the church lacks power and true utterance of the word, when society is sinful and prayer is made, repentance happens and the Spirit of God comes upon His people so that the church is revived and the work of the Kingdom of God issues afresh under the Spirit.

We have seen, then, the relationship of the Spirit and the Kingdom. Knowing the Kingdom is that of God and

His Christ (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15), we can recognize that He has persisted from the beginning, working towards the final coming of the Kingdom. We cannot of course ‘use’ the Spirit but we can be led by him, walk in him, be constantly filled by him so that the work of the Kingdom proceeds to its consummation. We must live by the Spirit.

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT IN THE KINGDOM

The Sermon on the Mount may in some sense be called a directory for living in the Kingdom. Some passages in the Epistles warn us that certain ways of living are incongruous with the Kingdom and will prevent us ultimately inheriting that Kingdom (I Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:18–21; Eph. 5:5–6). By Colossians 1:13–14 we see that we are in the Kingdom, now. Romans 14:17 tells us that ‘the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’. I Corinthians 4:20 says, ‘The kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power’.

Whilst the church and the Kingdom are not the one, the church must proclaim the Kingdom, hence it will suffer (II Thess. 1:5). It is not just that the church proclaims the Kingdom, but that Christ is Lord of the church, the Spirit guides, leads and empowers the church for Christ, and so the Kingdom is proclaimed. The gift of the Spirit is personal for each person in Christ, and is also for the whole church. We will look at some of the reasons for the gift of the Spirit.

**The gift is given for power
to witness to Christ**

Acts 1:8 makes that clear. This witness we have seen (above) at Jerusalem and following, Samaria and following, and Caesarea and following. We do not receive the Spirit for power *itself*, but *for power to witness to Messiah*. We see various modes of witness, and they cannot be stereotyped. See *Peter and John* in Acts 2 to 5, i.e. proclamation at Pentecost, healing of the lame man and further proclamation, witness before the Sanhedrin, judgement of Ananias and Sapphira, and further witness to the Sanhedrin. See *Stephen* in Acts 6–7, dynamic debate, signs and wonders, prophetic witness to the Sanhedrin. See *Philip* in Acts 6 and 8, preaching at Samaria with signs and wonders and conversions, speaking to the Ethiopian eunuch. See *Barnabas* in Acts 4:36–37, and chapters 11–15. See *Paul* in Acts chapters 9, 11, and 13–28 (cf. Rom. 15:18–19). See the words ‘witness’ and ‘testimony’ in the Book of Acts (1:8; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39; 10:41; 13:31; 22:15; 23:11; 26:16; 26:22).

In the Book of the Revelation ‘witness’ or ‘testimony’ is always linked to ‘the word of God’ or the commands of God, which are the same thing (1:2; 1:9; 6:9; 11:4–7; 12:11; 12:17; 19:10; cf. Eph. 6:17; Rev. 19:14–16).

When we realize that every element of testimony or witness comes from the Spirit himself, and none of it is apart from the word of God, then we understand that it is the truth being brought to the world—the truth of God’s dynamic and overcoming Kingdom. Notice also the gifts and weapons and leading of the Spirit mentioned above. These are essential for witness to Christ’s Lordship.

The gift is given for love

The witness of Messiah is absent without love. It is evident from Acts that the new community was one of love, e.g. Acts 2:42–47, 4:32–33 (cf. 11:23). Romans 5:5 shows that the Spirit pours in love at conversion. See also Romans 15:30, Ephesians 1:13–15 and Colossians 1:8. Where love is present, so is true witness, and so is the Spirit.

I Corinthians 13:1–3 shows that gifts are ineffective as a witness to Christ where love is not present in their use. Such use of the gifts would have to be apart from Christ himself and from the Holy Spirit.

**The gift is given for living
under Christ’s Lordship**

In I Corinthians 12:3 Paul shows that we say ‘Jesus is Lord!’ by the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit we cannot proclaim that Lordship. It is part of the saving Gospel (Acts 2:36–38; 10:36; Rom. 10:9). Without the Spirit we cannot live under Christ’s Lordship. His Lordship is also Headship of the church, and he directs the church in its actions. Note that the Holy Spirit exalts Christ’s Lordship in all its aspects (John 16:12–15; cf. Eph. 4:16).

**The gift is given for knowing and living
under God’s Fatherhood**

Galatians 4:4–6 shows that we cry to God as Father by the Spirit, thus activating the relationship God has granted

to us. See also Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 3:14–19; 4:6. This is a further witness to Christ, since we put him on in baptism and participate in his Sonship (Gal. 3:26; 4:6). We work with the Son for the Father’s Kingdom (I Cor. 15:24–28).

The gift is given for purification and holiness

Acts chapters 10 and 11 are given over to what might be called ‘the purification of the Gentiles’, which is the same as their entrance into the Kingdom. Peter had to be shown that God had made the Gentiles clean (10:15). Peter later said to the Jewish Christians, ‘He made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith’. That cleansing was given directly in the form of the remission of sins (10:44–48) with the gift of the Spirit. This included their act of repentance (11:15–18). Forgiveness and sanctification by faith are together (26:18). See also I Corinthians 6:11. Without holiness there is no witness to or of Christ.

CONCLUSION: THE SPIRIT, THE KINGDOM, AND THE LIFE OF THE KINGDOM ARE INSEPARABLE

We cannot understand the Holy Spirit or the Kingdom apart from one another. We must keep this wholly in mind, and consequently act in accordance with its reality.

3

The principle of accountability

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN GENERAL

The subject of accountability is a vexed one. It is the principle of being called to account for what one does. Most of us recognize accountability on the basis of the principle of responsibility, and responsibility has to do with authority, law and order. Paul recognized this when he said, ‘Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God’ (Rom. 3:19). Romans 7:1 says that ‘the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth’ (AV). On this basis we take it that (i) every human being lives under the principle of law, and (ii) that being under the law he is accountable for his actions. That is, an account is made out to him for his actions—whether good or bad. Hence

Jesus said, 'I tell you, on the day of judgement men will render account for every careless word they utter'. This points us to the principle that we will be held accountable for everything we do.

There have been those who do not believe this fact. In Psalm 10:13 the wicked renounces God and says in his heart, 'Thou wilt not call to account'. Against this Paul says (Rom. 14:12), 'Each of us shall give account of himself to God', and adds in Colossians 3:6 that 'on account of these [evil] things the wrath of God is coming'. The writer of Hebrews urges his readers to obey those who have the rule over them 'as men who will have to give account'.

It seems reasonable, then, to say that universally man has a sense of accountability, and accepts the fact of it, though he may fear what is coming to him. In Romans 1:24–31 Paul gives a long list of the sins that men do, and adds, 'Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practise them'. They may not care about accountability, but they do not deny its fact and reality.

Who are accountable?

We have claimed that all persons are accountable for their acts, but there is a universal protest which says that only when a person comes to the age of accountability can he be held accountable for what he—or she—does. What, then, is that age of accountability? It is difficult to give an answer to this question.

In Genesis 25:22 it is said that Esau and Jacob

'struggled together' within their mother's womb. It appears that the two were struggling for supremacy the one over the other. In other words, they were aware of life, and each sought to establish his supremacy. There is much spoken in Isaiah about Jacob and his mother's womb, but in 48:8 it is said, 'from birth you were called a rebel'. This recalls Psalm 58:3, 'The wicked go astray from the womb, they err from their birth, speaking lies'.

On the positive side Jeremiah is told by God, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations'. Paul claims that he was separated by God from his mother's womb to preach the Gospel to the nations. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit 'even from his mother's womb' (Luke 1:15, 41). On account of both good and evil it appears that the child is conscious in the womb and makes decisions which affect its life. Recent research into the pre-natal activity of the foetus in the womb seems to be supportive of these Scriptural accounts.

The answer to the question heading this section seems to be, 'All of us are accountable, and from the womb if not within it'. Whilst many will debate such a statement, the truth is that we are often deceived by the smallness of a child, thinking its will is not developed, when in fact will is something which is asserted at all ages without variation in insistence. The further elements of man being born in sin (Ps. 51:5), and being in Adam (Rom. 5:12ff.) have to be taken into consideration. Whilst we may argue for varying degrees of culpability, we must recognize the accountability we demand of children, as well as of adults.

The doctrine of victimization

All humans beings are prone to self-justification. When we fail, we seek to rationalize away our failure. We are prone to blame four things (amongst many others) for what is our seeming failure, namely: parental upbringing, heredity, environment and circumstances. 'These,' we say, 'have conditioned me to be what I am.' In fact these four things, of themselves, have not conditioned us at all. It is our reactions and/or our responses to these four things which have brought us to our present frame of mind. We make our own decisions and choices, and must stand by them.

It is often common practice these days to pity folk whose parental upbringing, heredity, environment, and life circumstances have seemed heavily adverse to them. We tend to treat them as victims of life, and this is not in the long run truly helpful. It more or less indicates that we think them to be flotsam and jetsam tossed to and fro on adverse tides. James Denney, in speaking of heredity, said, 'Heredity fixes not our fate but our trial'. This would also apply to the other three elements we have mentioned. If we face the four things positively they may assist us in developing rich and strong characters. Joseph commented to his (formerly) persecuting brothers, 'As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good'.

If we persist in simply pitying people instead of encouraging them to face adverse elements and win through them, then we will be doing a great disservice to them. Probably it is because we would pity ourselves in similar situations that causes us to be this way. The example of the

mute, blind and deaf Helen Keller should help us to see that a human being—if she wills—can be incredibly resilient, and can win through under even enormous odds. We should drop the 'pity syndrome' for one of tenacity and encouragement. 'Hurt,' it has been said, 'is a mixture of self-pity and anger.'

The sins of the fathers

In Jeremiah 31:29–30 and Ezekiel 18:1–32 we hear God telling Israel that the children cannot blame the parents for their present condition. Because God had said that He would visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation '*of those who hate me*, but [show] steadfast love to *thousands* [of generations] *of those who love me and keep my commandments*', His word has been misread. As is universal, children blame their parents for their problems and states of life. In both prophetic sections God stated the principle of accountability: 'Only the person who sins will die. The child will not suffer because of the parents, nor the parents because of the children. The person who sins *he* shall die.'

It is to be noted that when a generation turns from hating God and loves Him, then the entail of sin ceases. Likewise when a generation turns from loving God to hating Him and worshipping idols, then 'unto the third and fourth generation' commences. In Deuteronomy 24:16 God stated, 'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin'. The practice of this can be seen in II Kings 14:6 and

II Chronicles 25:4, where the children of murderers were not killed for their fathers' sins.

The practice of accountability in human living

John the Apostle once said,

If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That is, if we will accept our accountability for all that we have done, then life will be richer for it. When we try to rationalize away authority and law, it is so that we will not be convicted as sinners, i.e. of having sinned. If we take responsibility for all we have ever done, then—in the light of God's forgiveness—we can be free of it.

Again, if we abolish law, and refuse authority, then we are seeking to escape the need to fulfil the law of God. Micah said, 'He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' Moses (Deut. 10:12–13) had talked with Israel:

'And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I command you this day for your good?'

No 'needs' therapy but a 'deeds doing' way of life

Much of our modern way of life relates to needs which are many in kind, such as emotional, relational, and

material. We feel we should have our needs fulfilled, and that we should help to fulfil the needs of others. Whilst there must be some truth in this approach, yet it is God who requires us to be faithful, obedient, and those who fulfil His requirements. We are to 'fulfil the just requirements of the law' (Rom. 8:3–4), which approximates to what Micah told his people.

We must be requirement-fulfilling people, for as such we have moral being, true dignity, and can see ourselves as participating with God in His work and plan. We are not weak, lazy, lethargic and purposeless beings. Fulfilling 'just requirements' we are living properly the lives God has ordained for us, and doing the works He prepared for us to walk in and to do (Eph. 2:8–10). In fact we are growing into true human maturity. We are not victims of various adverse elements; we are not those caught in self-pity; nor are we those who stretch out our hands for spiritual welfare 'hand-outs'. We are those who seek to fulfil God's requirements of us.

The value of accountability

The matters of authority, law and accountability are all inseparably linked. If we are not morally accountable for every deed and action of our lives, then we are not truly in the image of God. We therefore lack dignity, and as a result cannot dignify God, man, and the creation. If we face our failure as moral creatures who have not fulfilled the law of God, then we are admitting our accountability, and for this confession and repentance there is the gift of grace. Being liberated from past failures means being free to live in integrity.

It is this integrity which assists us to be true men and women, and to enjoy the vast network of relationships which is ours in this world, not only amongst Christ and his people, but in the whole race of humanity.

THE PRINCIPLE OF PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Pastors are appointed primarily by God and are answerable to Him. Paul's Pastoral Epistles are filled with injunctions, admonitions and warnings, and are a great resource for checking out our pastoral accountability. Another special passage is Acts 20:17–35, where Paul addressed the elders of the church of Ephesus at Miletus. In fact this passage in Acts speaks of Paul fulfilling his accountability. Peter also gives us an outline of our responsibility as pastors, in I Peter 5:1–4. I Thessalonians 5:12, Hebrews 13:7, 17, along with I Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 2:7–9, cover much of the qualification for pastors, as well as pastoral care. Each element of qualification, as well as each element of responsibility, should be examined in great detail and scrupulously observed. There is always high accountability with high calling: 'Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required' (Luke 12:48; cf. I Sam. 15:13–29).

If we are interested in developing the archetype or paradigm of the true pastor, then we should study the elders in the Book of the Revelation.* If we see the elders

* For a more detailed study of eldership in the Scriptures, see my *Shepherds of the Flock*, NCPI, 1985.

as the pastor-teachers of Ephesians 4:11, then we will gather the nature of true elders from the Book of Revelation. There the elders are given authority, are linked many times with the worship of God and the Lamb, are concerned with the prayers of the saints, are linked with the 144,000, are concerned for John and the prophecy God has given him, and describe themselves as servants.

The pastor is the shepherd of the flock (Acts 20:28–33; I Pet. 5:2–3; cf. John 10:1–18; cf. Ezek. 34). Note Ezekiel 3:16–21 (esp. v. 18) and Acts 2:36, where the matter of accountability is of a most serious nature. A similar warning is in James 3:1. In the light of the sevenfold 'I know your works' of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 (cf. 2:23), and II Corinthians 5:10, we ought to take the matter of pastoral leadership most seriously (cf. Heb. 13:17).

4

***True worship and
the eschaton*****WORSHIP AND THE WILL OF GOD**

We have seen that God is the living God—the One who acts. Prayer and worship are fellowship with God in His action—the fulfilling of His plan in history. Thus worship is God in action, and we for our part fellowship with Him in that action. Action leads to worship, worship is action, and worship leads to action. To refuse to worship God is to be in some *other* action, for our worship will surely be directed somewhere, and it will be somewhere other than to God. To be bent upon worship of God will take us on in maturity as we ‘press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus’. In one way the prize is to ‘see Him face to face’, in another it is to be

‘mature in Christ’. It is to be finally—and utterly—released into pure worship, full fellowship with the living God.

NO ULTIMATE TERMINUS

Eschatology is the study or doctrine of ‘the last things’, i.e. of the close of this age which is brought about by the appearing of Christ, at which point in history there will be the final judgements, ‘the regeneration’ (Matt. 19:28) or forming of the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21:1–5; Isa. 65:17–25). This time will be linked with the resurrection from the dead of the people of God, the punishment of evil powers and the finally impenitent of humanity. Heaven will reign supreme in the affairs of creation, and hell will be the lot of all things evil—a situation known as ‘the second death’. The saints of God—the church—will be glorified, and will constitute for ever ‘a kingdom of priests’, i.e. royal priesthood which will serve God and creation in true worship and service.

All this will not constitute a terminus, i.e. a climax which sets things for ever in a rigid pattern so that what we now call ‘the future’ will simply be a matter of repetitive action. To the Greek the idea of ‘eternal’ (*aionos*) was ‘the ages upon the ages’, that is, ‘aeon upon aeon’. Each age or aeon is seen as dynamic. The symbol pictures in the Book of the Revelation are the throne, the temple, the holy city, and such like. Whilst God is immutable, He is not static. The throne, temple and holy city are dynamic. We can, then, expect constant action, a flow of perpetual worship having equally unceasing action of the purest kind. If we may speak of eternity being a terminus,

then it is only in the sense that when we alight at a terminus we have reached our destination. Having alighted, we then go about the business that occupies in and at that terminus. It is the entrance into even richer and more purposive action.

WORSHIPPING IN THE ESCHATON

Abel—and with him all the men and women of faith—looked to ‘a better country, that is, a heavenly one’. Their thinking was always eschatological. In one sense man has always lived in an eschaton, has always anticipated the ultimate. His age has always been the penultimate aeon, the age before the ultimate aeon. Because of this, history has been open-ended to him, or—better still—the end is in the hand of God. People of faith have always been the people of hope. Whilst love works through faith, yet faith and love exist in hope and are powerful by means of it.

Two things face the believing man in the eschaton in which he lives. The first is that he knows that ‘the fashion of this world is passing away’, and the second is that the powers of evil are using their massive powers to change the curve of time, seeking to make it swerve away from its *telos* or goal. Tennyson’s beautiful statement of

One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves

is not quite the biblical view. Predestination certainly sets the destination, but the movement towards that destination, i.e. the history of the human race (salvation history),

is not so much teleological as it is eschatological. It is not the fact of the *telos* achieved that is significant so much as (i) the manner in which it is achieved, and (ii) the dynamic nature of the *telos* itself. The *telos* is not merely achieved by the fiat of God, or the dogged persistence of God, so much as it comes to fulfilment by that action of God which is through Christ the Messiah with his people, along with the obedient celestial creatures who assist in the struggle. It is in the face of opposing evil powers that the Kingdom of God comes to its irreversible victory. History, then, is the conflict of personal evil forces against the forces of God. The *telos* is not so much the desirable goal as it is the purpose of God through the moral and spiritual work-out of history. It is the vindication, the theodicy of God, but a working out which utterly establishes the character of the redeemed, the nature of His Kingdom, and the verity and dynamic of the future.

This being the case, eschatological worship can be seen to have two phases: (i) the present phase in which worship is always in the context of moral conflict, and (ii) the worship beyond this worship, the full eschatological worship in the presence of God and the exclusion of defeated evil. In one sense we can talk of the present eschaton, and the eschaton beyond this eschaton.

The worship of faith

To speak of ‘the worship of faith’ is to say two things: (i) we walk by faith and not by sight. That is, hope gives us a sight of things to come, and so we are drawn on in faithfulness to move towards that end and presently to

work with that goal in sight; (ii) faith is the constant battle we fight against the insinuating accusations of evil powers, i.e. doubts which would destroy our faith, weaken our worship, and paralyse our true endeavours. Worship, then, is carried on only in faith, and in the face of the unceasing struggle with evil powers. We can rightly call this worship the *action* of faith.

THE CONFLICT OF ESCHATOLOGICAL WORSHIP

By 'conflict' we mean that Satan is seeking to attain to the highest place of worship—to be worshipped as God in the Temple of God. His 'hope' is that he will succeed. He has sought to shape history after his compulsive passion to be admired in and by the saints—an event reserved exclusively for Christ (II Thess. 1:10). His strategy for this achievement is worked through the beast, the second beast, and the false prophet. He creates and utilizes the 'mother of harlots'—the unholy city of Babylon. Whatever we understand by this unholy trinity of dragon, beast and unholy spirit, and whatever the nature of the unholy city, we see the delusive nature of this anti-ontological system. In the light—or darkness—of this evil system, worship is always against this evil as it is for God. Worship must be from God so as to be against evil. Worship must always be operative in the presence of evil. It must always be in the ethos of conflict.

When we translate this theological understanding into *praxis*—the practice of true life—then we see that our eschatological living is always in the form of battle. Doubtless the

fruit of the Spirit is the means by which we can live and operate, for without love, peace and joy—along with their concomitants—we would be overcome with dread, despair, and hopelessness. In practice we face the rivalry of Satan as he seeks to undo God and establish his own righteousness in history. The vital question is, 'Do we do good that evil may be vanquished?'. Our reply to this question determines the modes of our operations.

Worship and works

In agreeing that worship and works are in the one bundle, we need to see firstly the emphasis upon works in the apostolic teaching, and then something of its outworking. To do good works would then be to worship in truth. We must, of course, beware of seeing such works as a separate entity. Only those works done within—and as part of—the will of God are of real value. Works, worship and the will of God are the one entity.

The doing of good works is a basic—if not major—teaching of the New Testament. Jesus told us to let our light so shine before men that they would see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. Paul told us that God had beforehand prepared the works we are to walk in, and had prepared us to be able to walk in them. Christ told each of the seven churches, 'I know your works'. He had told his apostles that they would do greater works than he had done. Such works would not be confined to signs and wonders. All signs and wonders are works, but not all works are signs and wonders. The doing of such works will be an offence to the system of the dragon, the beast, and the unholy woman—Babylon.

The nature of the works—I

The works we are to do are of various kinds. The works that Christ did—and which he continues to do through us—include preaching the Gospel to the poor, proclaiming release to the captive, recovery of sight to the blind, setting at liberty the oppressed, and proclaiming the year of liberation by the Lord (Luke 4:18–19). Peter affirmed this in Acts 10:38, ‘doing good and healing [curing] all that were oppressed of the devil’. In the Gospels he exorcizes demons, heals the sick, cleanses the lepers, and brings relief of forgiveness to people troubled by their sins. He also gives teaching which corrects wrong thinking and wrong practices. He proclaims the Kingdom of God by these works and words (cf. Matt. 4:23–25; 11:28), and then goes to the Cross where he effects the Atonement and thus makes open the way for his followers to do ‘greater works’. The apostles followed on doing the things he had done, but having the Gospel of salvation to proclaim by which people could enter into eternal life. This proclamation was sometimes attended by signs and wonders and the use of the gifts of Christ and the Spirit.

Works within the life of the church were those we have just mentioned, and also works of compassion and care. True religion was to visit the orphans and widows, to remember the poor, to effect distribution of goods to those who did not have them, to pastor the flock of God, feeding, tending and guarding it. From the Book of the Revelation we gather that works were holding to pure doctrine, rejecting heresies, testing out false apostles and prophets, rebuking evil, facing persecution, and doing all

these things in love—Christ’s love. The doing of such things constituted direct opposition to evil powers—the dragon, the beasts, the false prophet and Babylon. In this way work and worship were the one. To refuse to worship the beast was a good work. To refuse to have his mark was a good work. To proclaim the truth in the face of such evil was also a true work. All of these works can be summed up by, ‘bearing witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ’, ‘keeping the commandments of God and bearing testimony to Jesus’. Because of the anger and persecution aroused by such witness, Christians were martyred, but the word of encouragement was, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth . . . that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds [works] follow them’.

The works, then, are not lost, but accrue to the faithful as rewards on the day of Christ. The faithful have both worshipped and served.

The nature of the works—II

A most difficult of questions to solve presents itself: ‘In the light of the suffering of this world, is the church committed to bring relief to persons, families and nations, and if so, what kind of relief and help is appropriate to the Christian Gospel?’. In other words, are social action, social welfare, and social justice the direct responsibility of the church of Christ? We need to address ourselves most thoughtfully to this question. Most find the direct solution through the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31–46. It would seem that whatever we do for another human being, in the way of pity, compassion

and help, we are really doing to Christ. Such an interpretation knows no bounds in its outworking. *The church is bound to do all things for all men.*

There is, however, another interpretation, namely that Jesus, here, is confining the doing of works to the brethren who are proclaiming the Gospel. They are ‘the least of these my brethren’. When Jesus told Mary Magdalene to report to his *brethren* (John 20:17) it was the first time he had called the apostles his brethren. In I John 3:10–22 John is speaking of brethren, i.e. those who are believers, and says that if a person sees his *brother* has need and that person closes his heart of compassion when he could help, then he is wholly unloving.

In Matthew 23:8–10 Jesus applied the term *brethren* to the covenant community: ‘you are all brethren’, i.e. ‘No one is your teacher but God, no one is your master but Christ, no one your Father but God, and that makes you *brethren*’. It may sound like special pleading to limit this term to the faithful, but to do so is surely biblical. If this claim is true, then Jesus in the parable of the sheep and goats was speaking about doing good to the proclaimers of the Gospel. In any case it is clear that the sheep and the goats were not brethren! *Brethren* is, of course, a term for the members of the church both in the Acts and the Epistles.

There can be no question about it. In the New Testament the church is hard put to look after its own, let alone others. It was a poor community, composed of many slaves, and there were not many wise, powerful, or of noble birth (I Cor. 1:26–28). Indeed, there were many who were weak and despised and of no reputation. Paul

advised, ‘Do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith’. This does not mean there is partiality exercised but recognition that the Christian community was generally rejected by the world and had to make its own way. There can be no doubt that Christians were to love all men (I Thess. 3:12), and to pray for them all (I Tim. 2:1–5; I Pet. 2:16–17). Even so, there is no general direction to undertake universal social welfare, social service, social action and social justice. It does not even seem to be implied.

The nature of the works—III

The truth of the Scriptures is that all men are to do good to all men. This is implicit in the mandate that God gave to man: to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, and have dominion over it. Insofar as members of Christ’s community are human beings they have a responsibility to all human beings. Those outside of Christ’s community have the same responsibility. For Israel the principle of care for others—e.g. the poor, the handicapped and the strangers—is set out in Leviticus 19 and other places. It is confined to the perimeter in which the nation lived.

If we establish the fact that insofar as is possible we ought to help others, then we do not reject responsibility for the human race. Just what we ought to do, and how and when we ought to do it, is a most complex matter. Our motives for what we do ought to be looked at, i.e. whether we are simply active in ‘do-gooding’, are justifying ourselves, are seeking fame, are seeking to make a guilt pay-off, and other similar things. If we wait for our

motives to be pure we shall probably never do anything, so let us do what seems to be good. We need, however, to take certain factors into consideration.

What do we understand in this last age by the wrath and judgements of God? In Romans 1:18–32 man lies under the active wrath of God. Whilst it is his own rebellion and evil which brings him to misery, yet God is active in giving man up to his own evil, and this is His active wrath (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). The Book of the Revelation shows us three sets of judgements under the headings of ‘the seven seals’, ‘the seven trumpets’, and ‘the seven bowls’. Is it possible that in this aeon we are simply seeing the wretched condition of men and women through the eyes of human compassion, and are not alert to the judgements with which God may be visiting the world? What ought we to do in the face of these judgements?

Again, is it possible that much of our passion for social justice has its roots in our own indignation with man, and even with God?* Is it also possible that we do not trust God’s sovereignty in the world, and that we are seeking to do what we think He ought to do, but is failing to accomplish? Are we even attempting to ‘play God’, being judges, passing sentence, and seeking to rectify what God seems impotent or reluctant to do? These are certainly not easy questions to answer, but the problem is compounded by our insistence that we know what is needed, and what we ought to do.

* See my essay ‘The Justice-Men and the Great Rage’. It is contained in the volume *God and the Ghostown*, NCPI, 1984, and has also been published in booklet form, NCPI, 1985.

The need, then, of true worship and genuine prayer is very evident. Our so-called ‘good works’ may turn out to be hasty and premature works; they may be ill-advised in the light of God’s plan. They may cause more harm than the relative good they may do. Christians may embark on certain ventures of good works, and become so absorbed in them that the major good work—that of redeeming men and women from their moral, spiritual, emotional and mental agony—may be neglected. So then, to pray and worship is to keep ourselves in the mind of Christ and the will of God, and despite all criticism to do only His will. If this involves us in social concern, social welfare, social action and social justice, then we will know it is no fad, of course, but a work of God.

DOING GOOD, SERVING GOD AND ALL MEN, IN THIS ESCHATON

The elements by which we work in this age are faith, hope, and love. We need not expand on the nature of these things. We simply need to see that in worshipping, doing good works, and fighting the spiritual warfare, we must never depart from them. The weapons we use are spiritual, i.e. are not political or carnal (II Cor. 10:3–4). Likewise we must not use the resources God has given us in an unspiritual manner. In I Corinthians 13:1–3 Paul speaks of the use of spiritual gifts without love, and concludes that they are nothing, and accomplish nothing. In Romans 12:14–21 Paul sets out a way of thinking and living which defeats the evil which attacks us, but does it by love, and not by attempting to get justice:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay to no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Here we are to extend our love to all men by good works, though not in the role of a reformer or one seeking to obtain justice. It is important that we know this, otherwise our reactions to persecutors and the forces of evil will cause us to use their methods against them. In worship and service we are to submit to evil rather than fight it with such weapons.

In relation to this principle, we should look at Daniel chapter 7, where the beasts—as in the Revelation—seek to subdue the saints. In 7:21 a horn of the fourth beast 'made war with the saints and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgement was given to the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom'. In 7:25 the fourth beast 'shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High. . . and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and a half a time'. Ultimately the saints shall be given the kingdom of the Most High, prevailing over the fourth beast.

There is a parallel to this in the Book of the Revelation. In 13:5–10 the beast is given authority for forty-two months,

i.e. three and a half years, or 'a time, times, and half a time'. It was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. Then, 'If any one is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if any one slays with the sword, with the sword he must be slain', which appears to mean that the saints must submit to prison and not retaliate, even if it means their death. To use the sword is to die by it. The exhortation is then given, 'Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints'. In other words, the saints must accept their temporary defeat at the hands of the beast but maintain their integrity. Ultimately they will inherit the Kingdom of God.

This, then, is the context of worship and service in the present aeon, the eschaton that is upon us. We must worship whilst we battle, battle whilst we worship. Our battle is one of faith, and it is a spiritual and moral one, in which we serve the creation, and refuse allegiance to the dark powers. No wonder, then, that every day we face terrors and can easily be confused. On the one hand we see the needs of the world which we pity, and on the other hand its terrible cruelties and evil. We understand prophetically the judgements of God and the Lamb, and the need for these in righteous history; yet we are tempted to intervene and help those under judgement. It is no small wonder that we need the Father exonerating us, the Son—at the right hand of God—intervening for us against evil powers, and the Spirit interceding within us. We can see afresh the process of worship and action. We come from action to worship; we worship; we go from worship to action. That is the continuing course of our operations. That is what the counsel of God—His will and purpose—is all about.

It is in this context that we worship and serve the Most High. By doing the deeds He has appointed for us we shall prevail.

WORSHIP IN THE ULTIMATE ESCHATON

We have said that there is an eschaton beyond the eschaton. Of course, history is a whole, and there are not eschatons, but there is the eternal *telos* beyond the last days which is the fruit of the past and present epochs. We have seen a number of times in our book that the end is the substance of our hope. We shall see Him face to face, i.e. God and the Lamb. We will have seen the defeat of Satan and his powers, the judgements on such powers and evil men. We will have seen history sealed off from further rebellion and insurrection. Peace will reign. There are glorious pictures in the Old Testament, when men

... shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

At this time,

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall feed;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

The redeemed saints shall be decked out as is the Son himself, for all shall be like him. They will have glory like his, and their resurrected bodies will be of the same glory, and they shall be pure and substantial. The Day of the Marriage will send its glory down through eternity, for the glorious Bride and the noble Warrior-King—the Bridegroom—will come to inseparable union and marvellous fruitage. The Father-King and the Son-King shall inhabit the throne of grace and love. The Holy City will open its gates to His elect—the true citizens of eternity—and there they shall worship for God and the Lamb will be the Temple. All will be light. The nations shall surge forwards into the City and the Kingdom. The River of Life will flow incessantly and the Tree of Life yield its fruit regularly to satisfy the nations, whilst the leaves of the tree will be for the healing of the nations.

There shall be no night there, for God and the Lamb are the light of the City.

All creation shall bow in wonder, in trembling joy and in irrepressible adoration. There—and for ever—our worship will be perfected. From it shall proceed the glorious action of eternity.

No wonder the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!', and no wonder, too, that we cry, 'Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!'

5

***By the power of
signs and wonders*****INTRODUCTION**

In Romans 15:18–19 Paul lists the means God gave him to preach the Gospel: ‘. . . what Christ has wrought through me . . . by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit’. The action is primarily that of Christ through Paul. It is first ‘word and deed’, that is, the word of God with deed (*ergon*), i.e. works. ‘Works’ would be Paul’s action that went with the word, such as we find in I Thessalonians chapters 1 and 2, and would include his manner of life, suffering, and action that happened because of the word. ‘Signs and wonders’ would undoubtedly be the signs, miracles and powers that Christ did, for the reasons which we shall examine in this study. ‘The power of the

Spirit’ would be the means Christ used to do the things through Paul which he claimed brought the Gospel in power to the nations. We ought to note that all of these things are in the one action and ministry. *Signs and wonders are not greater than the word. What effects salvation (etc.) is the word and not the signs and wonders.*

**THE MATTER OF SIGNS AND WONDERS
IN THE BIBLE****Signs and wonders in the Old Testament**

- Signs and wonders began in Egypt, being first mentioned in the Book of Exodus. They were intended to let Pharaoh know that Yahweh was the true God, stronger than the Egyptian deities, and to force the king’s hand to let God’s people go. There are other signs which show God’s power and His Being, such as the overcoming of enemies in battle. The event at Mount Carmel is also to be considered, as it humiliated Baal and showed God’s glory. Israel, also, was—at this and other times—to know God as the true God by the signs and the liberation which came from the signs.
- Signs and wonders were also done in the forty years in the wilderness. The first was the rescue of Israel and the defeat of Egypt at the Red Sea. Numbers 14:11–12 promises judgement to Israel if it does not believe and obey God because of the signs He has done.
- The pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night was a powerful and ‘supernatural’ sign of God’s presence with

His people—for them—in their difficulties, shaping the nation in faith, worship and service.

- There were signs which were judgements. In Numbers chapter 12 Miriam was struck with leprosy for her highhandedness with Moses, and later, in II Chronicles 26:16–21, Uzziah the king was also struck with leprosy for another form of highhandedness. In Numbers 16 (cf. Lev. 10:1–3), there was the judgement of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, with other protesters, for seeking to equal or supplant the spiritual leaders the Lord had appointed. Other plagues also were judgements on Israel following rebellion.
- God’s signs were, and are, continuous. See Jeremiah 32:20, where the prophet spoke of the God ‘who hast shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and *to this day in Israel, and among all mankind*’. At first glance the Old Testament may seem to have few ‘signs and wonders’, but in fact there are many.
- There were signs which were portents and witnesses, such as those given to the prophets, and those done by the prophets. Sometimes the prophets were made sure of the word they were to give. Sometimes the signs which the prophets did were prophetic acts, but in any case the ‘supernatural’ origin of these showed them to be ‘supernatural’, i.e. out of the ‘fixed order’ of things.
- Whilst seeking signs can be a tempting of God, yet they can bring conviction to God’s people that God will intervene for the deliverance of His people or other purposes (cf. Ps. 85; Hab. 3), and thus sanctify His holy name and His holy people.

Signs and wonders in the New Testament

In the Gospels

In the Gospels, signs and wonders are linked with the action of the King (Christ), in and for the Kingdom of God. Power to do signs and wonders is delegated and aided by God, and these are done by the Spirit of God (Luke 4:17f.; Matt. 12:28; Acts 10:38). Power and authority are delegated by Christ to his apostles (Luke 9:1f.; 10:1f.).

On the last night Christ told his disciples they would do ‘greater works’ than he had done (John 14:10ff.). Are these works limited to ‘signs and wonders’, or is there something more, i.e. witness, the preaching of the Gospel? Is the word the ‘greater works’ attested by signs and wonders as the ‘lesser works’?

In the Acts

In the Acts, signs and wonders are done primarily by the Lord. See the following:

2:43 ‘through the apostles’.

3:16 ‘And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong’.

4:10 ‘by the name of Jesus Christ . . . by him this man is standing before you well’.

5:1–11 The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira.

5:12ff. ‘many signs and wonders were done among the people by [*de*] the hands of the apostles’.

5:19 *The Lord by an angel* did a wonder by releasing the apostles from prison.

6:8 ‘Stephen, full of grace and power [i.e. given], did great wonders and signs among the people’.

- 8:5–13 ‘the signs which he [Philip] did’.
- 9:17 ‘*The Lord Jesus . . . has sent me that you may regain your sight*’.
- 9:32–43 (i) Aeneas: ‘Peter said to him, “Aeneas, *Jesus Christ heals you*; rise and make your bed’; (ii) Dorcas: ‘Peter . . . knelt down and prayed . . . and he said, “Tabitha, rise.”’
- 12:6–11 ‘*the Lord* has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod’.
- 12:23 ‘*the Lord* smote him [Herod] . . . and he was eaten by worms and died’.
- 13:11–12 Saul and Elymas: ‘behold *the hand of the Lord* is upon you, and you shall be blind and unable to see the sun for a time’.
- 14:3 ‘*the Lord*, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done *by [dia, through] their hands*’.
- 14:8ff. ‘Paul . . . seeing that he had faith *to be made well*’.
- 15:4 ‘declared all *the Lord* had done with [*meta*, with] them’.
- 15:12 ‘they related what signs and wonders *God had done through [dia, through] them* among the Gentiles’.
- 16:18 ‘Paul . . . said to the spirit, “I charge you *in the name of Jesus Christ* to come out of her.”’
- 17:16–34 Paul preached ‘*Jesus and the resurrection*’, i.e. a sign and wonder which caused the discourse on Mars Hill.
- 19:11–20 ‘God did extraordinary miracles *by [dia, through] the hands of Paul*’.
- 20:7–12 We cannot be sure Eutychus died, but we cannot be sure he did not: in any case his revival was a miracle, for ‘Paul bent over him and embraced him’.
- 28:3–6 the viper’s poison was ineffective (cf. Mark 16:18).

28:7–10 ‘Paul visited him and prayed, and *putting his hands on him healed him*. And when this had taken place, *the rest of the people . . . who had diseases also came and were cured*. They presented many gifts to us . . .’

In the Epistles

The following references are made to signs, wonders, and miracles:

For I will not venture to speak of anything but what *Christ has wrought through me* to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that . . . I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 15:18–19);

The signs of a true apostle *were performed among you* [by me] in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works (II Cor. 12:12);

‘It [the gospel] was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while *God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles [dunamesin] and by gifts of the Holy Spirit* distributed according to *his own will*’ (Heb. 2:3–4).

See also Hebrews 6:5, ‘and have tasted the goodness of *the word of God* and the powers [*dunameis*] of the age to come’. *Dunameis* is the word used in I Corinthians 12:10, 28, and Galatians 3:5 in the Epistles, and Mark 9:39, Acts 2:22, 8:13, 19:11.

In the Book of the Revelation

In 13:14, 16:14, and 19:20 (cf. Matt. 24:24; II Thess. 2:9) signs and wonders are done by evil powers. Whilst wonders are done by God, their apocalyptic nature and

language precludes us from using them as those described in the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles.

An analysis or interpretation of signs and wonders

In the Old Testament

In the Old Testament two words are used, and often together, namely ‘sign’ (*oth*) and ‘wonder’ (*mopheth, pala, pele, temah*, of which *mopheth* is the most used). These two words are often found linked together (e.g. Exod. 7:3, Isa. 20:3, Jer. 32:20), and are virtually synonymous. *Oth* is used twenty-seven times, and *mopheth* twenty-six times. The words begin to be used in Exodus, and are remembered strongly in the Psalms and other books. To Israel ‘the living God’ was the God who acted, but His special acts had to do with deliverance of His people from their oppressors. Hence it is in Exodus 15:11: ‘*Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?*’ The meaning is that the gods are dumb and helpless, and can accomplish nothing. God, however, goes on doing His acts, i.e. acts which today we would call ‘supernatural’. In Deuteronomy 4:32ff. God shows the principle of His unique Deity. He says,

‘Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, *by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?*’

See also Deuteronomy 26:8; 29:3; Joshua 24:16–18; Nehemiah 9:10f.; Psalm 78:43; 105:27f.; Jeremiah 32:20ff.

We conclude, then, that ‘God’s signs and wonders’ in the Old Testament are to reveal Himself and His intentions (i) to His covenant people, (ii) to those opposing God and Israel, and (iii) to personally bless and aid certain persons who are in need. God may seem to move out of creation’s ‘fixed order’ (Ps. 148:6; Jer. 31:35–36; cf. Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 3:11), but in fact He is showing (i) that He is neither locked into, nor out of, this order, but (ii) that the order of the Kingdom of God transcends His creation and, without ignoring it, God rules over it according to His own will and intention.

In the New Testament

In the Synoptic Gospels

Probably all the principles of signs and wonders as we have seen them in the Old Testament apply to the New Testament situation. Particularly we see the following:

- Signs and wonders attested to Jesus. See Acts 22. These signs would include the Resurrection—the most powerful of all signs and events. The Baptism was a sign by God through His utterance, as also was the Transfiguration (though seen only by the three apostles; cf. II Pet. 1:17–19).
- By signs and wonders Jesus attested to the prophetic word which applied to him (Luke 4:17ff.; cf. Isa. 61:1f.). John the Baptist’s question in Luke 7:18–23 was thus answered (i) by signs and wonders—which attested

Messiah—and (ii) by showing these to be in line with the prophetic word. John believed the prophetic word, but needed signs and wonders to reassure him (see Isa. 29:18–19; 35:5–6).

- Jesus refused to do signs and wonders for the sceptical and unfaithful. He reproved even his disciples for not having faith in God, i.e. God's power, and His power which worked by faith, or was used for men of faith.

- His signs were linked with the Kingdom, i.e. His Messiahship (cf. Mark 3:20–26; Matt. 12:28; cf. Luke 9:1f.; 10:1.ff.). They also revealed the nature of the Kingdom, i.e. 'supernatural' power and what it effected is the true order of the Kingdom of God.

- Signs and wonders, though often revealing the nature and purposes of God to believers, were mainly done to attest the power and operations of God to those opposing Him and His people. In some cases those seeing them were changed, in some cases hardened even more. Signs and wonders, then, related both to God's grace and God's judgements.

In John's Gospel

- Signs and wonders attest to Christ as God's Son (3:2; 4:48; 5:36; 14:10–11). John 3:3ff. shows the signs are signs to, and of, the Kingdom.

- These signs are called 'works': (i) see the references immediately above, and (ii) 9:4, etc. So then, 'signs' and 'works' are all one and of the one piece.

- The signs lead men to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and so they receive eternal life. The signs are also a witness.

- The 'seven signs' of John point to the *nature* of the Kingdom, and of Jesus as the Christ, and of God as the true Father. To understand them is to be saved, but the signs do not save. Messiah (to whom they attest) is the one who saves. His word is the saving word (John 6:63).

In the Acts and Epistles

Acts 2:22 says, 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst'. This thought is repeated in 10:36–38. If we take Paul's statement of Romans 15:18–19, then the primary purpose of signs and wonders is to attest and confirm. In Christ's case it was an attestation of him (2:22). In the Acts it is (i) a revelation of God Himself, and His working His purposes through His Son the true Messiah, in which case it is a revelation also of the power and action of the Kingdom of God, i.e. a breaking into this 'fixed order' by 'the age to come' (Heb. 6:5); (ii) an attestation (confirmation) of the word of the Gospel, and the proclaimers of that Gospel; (iii) that action of God's grace to heal and to aid persons who need the ministry of Christ and his people (the church).

Conclusion to signs, wonders, and their significance

- Signs and wonders are done by God, and God alone, although He uses agencies such as His servants. These servants in the Old Testament were mainly prophets. In

the New Testament the apostles appeared to be the main agencies of them, but persons such as Stephen and Philip also work signs and wonders.

- The reasons for signs and wonders are contained in the analysis above. Note that God gave signs unasked, according to His own will.
- Signs and wonders, though often for the benefit of God's people, were generally done to show God's power to those opposed to Him and His plan and His people. People seeing the signs did not necessarily believe.
- In the New Testament the charismata, i.e. the gifts of Christ distributed by the Holy Spirit, seem primarily to be exercised amongst the church, whilst God does the signs and wonders primarily for those outside the church. It may well be that the use of gifts and the doing of signs and wonders have some overlap.

THE WRONG AND EVIL APPROACHES TO SIGNS AND WONDERS

- John 2:23—3:1–6 shows that signs are to be read and not merely seen as miracles or unusual events. John 20:30–31 shows that reading the signs aright we see Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, and receive eternal life.
- Matthew 12:38–42 tells us that 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign'. In this case Jesus had done many signs, but they (the evil generation) required an unusual sign to attest to him. Being God's people, they should have sought no sign: they should have recognized

Jesus as Messiah and come under his Kingship. No unusual sign was to be given them, because sign-demanding was a form of both accusation against Jesus and a tempting of God (Mark 8:11), for in Luke 11:16 they sought a sign from him *from heaven*. See also John 6:30, where Jesus had given the sign of the feeding of the 5,000 and they yet asked for a sign so that they might believe. They did not believe the words he had spoken, which were 'spirit and life' (6:63; cf. vv. 68–69) i.e. the word that is of the Spirit (spiritual) and gives life. Signs cannot do this.

- In I Corinthians 1:22 Paul said, 'For Jews demand signs'. He meant in the context in which he spoke, showing that the word of the cross is the power of God, and Christ is the wisdom of God. Rather than *take God's word of the cross*—which in fact involved all God's word regarding Israel, the salvation of the Jews and the nations—they demanded signs to affirm, but not the Cross to save, since the cross to them was 'a scandal'. Because in the Old Testament God had given signs, they desired signs to prove Christ's Messiahship, knowing nothing of a Messiah with the scandal of a cross.
- In John 20:26–29 (especially if we link this with John 4:48–54) Jesus is saying that just to believe God's word without seeking to prove it by any sign is what really matters.
- Signs are not necessarily good. Evil powers do these also. See Matthew 24:24 and Revelation 13:14ff. (cf. vv. 3–4), where evil captures its followers by signs and wonders. In Matthew 7:21–23 Christ counts many as evil

who have (or claimed to have) done signs and wonders. In I Corinthians 13:1–3 Paul shows that a wrong use of the charismata achieves nothing, and is hollow and empty.

6

‘Beyond the Cross’ or ‘Always in the Cross’?

IS THE CROSS ALL?

Paul’s insistence that he came to Corinth knowing ‘nothing but Christ and him crucified’, his insistence that the ‘word of the Cross’ was alone the power of God, and that his boasting was only in the Cross by which he had been ‘crucified to the world and the world to him’, all lead us to believe that Paul placed the fact and teaching of the Cross very high in his understanding and estimation. Was he misled, over-enthusiastic, and out of balance in this view? Did he later have reason to change his

emphasis? What, then, was his emphasis on the Cross? Do we have teaching in the New Testament which goes beyond the Cross?

A statement sometimes heard these days is, 'The Cross is wonderful, and the means of our salvation. Nevertheless, having been saved, there is no need for us to stay at the Cross. There is so much beyond it. There is the life of the Spirit, there is membership in the Body, there are victories to be won, gifts to be used, new truths (or truth) to be discovered—indeed a whole life of rich activity. In this sense we must go beyond the Cross.' At first sight this sounds convincing, and indeed good reasoning, but does it stand the test of New Testament teaching? We will see.

TWO QUESTIONABLE PRINCIPLES OF OPERATION

In I Corinthians 1:22–25 Paul shows that (i) Jews seek signs, and (ii) Greeks seek wisdom. Jesus had said that sign-seeking was itself a sign of an evil and adulterous generation, for Jews required God constantly to prove Himself by power, i.e. that action which was supernatural, whereas, in fact, Israel had been born in action, saved by signs and wonders, and spoken to through the media of law, the Scriptures, theophanies and prophets. They had simply to obey that word, especially now that the word had come to Israel by Christ and the Spirit (Acts 10:36ff.; Heb. 1:2; John 1:18; Rom. 10:8–10). The Greeks sought the validity of human reasoning, i.e. subjecting what was taught to human scrutiny and wisdom, so called. These are the two methods still used by human beings,

and they cannot succeed.

At the same time Paul said that Christ is the *power of God* and the *wisdom of God*. Christ is the true power and the true wisdom against human views of both power and wisdom. It is in this context that Paul said *the word of the Cross* was the power of God. No other power or wisdom was (is) required.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS

We must understand that the Cross was planned prior to history (I Pet. 1:19–20; Rev. 13:8; cf. Acts 2:22–23), prophesied in history (I Pet. 1:10–12; cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; cf. Isa. 53), was said by Christ himself to be indispensable (Mark. 8:31; 9:31; 10:32), happened in history, was preached as the message of the early church (Rom. 1:16–17; I Cor. 1:17–23; Gal. 6:14), and is still preached as its central truth. Entrance into life and salvation is only by the Cross. Revelation 5:1ff. shows that the one who rules over history is the Lamb who was slain, i.e. 'Christ crucified'. This means that the outworking of history is by the power of the Cross *and by no other power!* Historically, then, the Cross takes the central place.

INDIFFERENCE TO THE CROSS: YET ITS UNAVOIDABILITY

Paul stated categorically that the Cross was a scandal to the Jews—the sign-seekers—and to the Greeks—the

intellectuals. When Christ spoke of taking up the Cross daily, he meant we must be daily identified with *a thing of shame* and *a thing of foolishness*. It is noteworthy that no sooner are some people ‘saved by the Cross’ than they are away from it into some other thing. They skirt the Cross henceforth, or confine it to a Good Friday remembrance. This must mean they have not faced its shame and foolishness. They do not take up the Cross. Since Paul said he would not glory in anything save the Cross, then it must be central—not to be avoided. Paul says ‘the word of the Cross is the power of God’. To skirt the Cross is to seek power in some other area or means. Some place the Resurrection as central, but Romans 4:25 makes the Cross and Resurrection the one atoning event, since ‘He was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification’. The ‘power of his resurrection’ (Phil. 3:10) and the power of ‘the word of the Cross’ (I Cor. 1:18) are one. ‘Christ crucified’ and ‘Christ risen’ are the one.

ALL MUST GO THROUGH THE CRUCIBLE OF THE CROSS

Paul shows the following elements in regard to crucifixion:

- (a) The whole Adamic body of humanity has been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6).
- (b) Each believer has been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20; cf. 6:14; Col. 3:3; II Tim. 2:11).
- (c) The flesh received its crucifixion on the Cross (Gal. 5:24).

- (d) Satan received the destructive death-blow upon the Cross (Heb. 2:14–15; cf. I John 3:8; John 3:14).
- (e) The world powers were defeated on the Cross (Col. 2:14–15).
- (f) The whole world system received its death-blow on the Cross (Gal. 1:4; 6:14).
- (g) All sin and sins were defeated at the Cross (I Pet. 2:24; 3:18; II Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53). Thus man was forgiven in and through the Cross (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; I Cor. 15:3; cf. Acts 13:38–39).
- (h) Man was purified from his sins at the Cross (Heb. 1:3; 9:14; 10:10, 12, 14, 19–22; I Pet. 1:22; Rev. 7:14).
- (i) Man was justified by grace through the Cross (Isa. 53:11; Rom. 3:24; I John 4:10; Rom. 4:25; cf. Acts 13:38–39). This means that through the propitiatory sacrifice the wrath of God was expended and man need not fear punishment (Rom. 5:10–11; I John 4:16–18).

The only conclusion we can draw is that if a person is not ‘crucified with Christ’, then none of the above elements is of benefit to him, but—to the contrary—man is wholly lost through his neglect or rejection of the Gospel. He is continually under the wrath of God.

The *necessity* for co-crucifixion (crucifixion with Christ) is because nothing less than being taken up into Christ’s Cross can free us from the terrible guilt, pollution, and bondage of sin. Christ has to crucify us with

himself because there is no other way our sin can be destroyed. Every part of us must be crucified. Once done, we are set free.

THE CROSS WAS A 'ONCE-FOR-ALL' ACTION

The following references—with their tenses—indicate the action of the Cross which accomplished that work which continually proceeds in its effects:

- (a) Romans 6:6: 'We know that our old self [old man, or humanity] *was crucified* with him'. The verb (*sunestaurothe*) is an aorist indicative passive.
- (b) Galatians 5:24: 'And those who belong to Christ *have crucified* the flesh with its passions and desires'. The verb (*estaurosan*) is an aorist indicative active.
- (c) II Timothy 2:11: 'if we *have died* with him'. The verb (*sunapethanomen*) is an aorist indicative.
- (d) Romans 6:10: 'the death *he died* he died to sin'. The verb (*apethanen*: twice in this one verse) is an aorist indicative.
- (e) Colossians 3:3: 'For you *have died*'. The verb (*apethanete*) is an aorist indicative.
- (f) Galatians 2:20: 'I *have been crucified with* Christ'. The verb (*sunestauramai*) is a perfect indicative passive.

- (g) Galatians 6:14: 'the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world *has been crucified* to me, and I to the world'. The verb (*estauratai*) is a perfect indicative passive.

The first five references are in the aorist, which means the action was definite, completed, and not to be repeated. The last two are in the perfect, meaning the action which happened in the past is still going on in its effects. We see, then, that we are wholly dependent for our death having *once* been completed so that we do not have to go on being crucified. However, the perfect indicates that we can never go beyond the Cross because its effects are *ever happening* to us.

The important question is, 'How do these things keep happening to us?'. The answer must be, 'By the working of the Father in us (Phil. 2:12–13; 1:6; I Thess. 5:23–24), by Christ working in us (Phil. 1:21; Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20), and by the Spirit working in us' (see below).

THE APPLICATION OF THE WORK OF THE CROSS

The Holy Spirit the applicator of the Gospel

When we say, 'There is nothing beyond the Cross', we mean, 'You cannot go beyond the work and effects of the Cross. We always stand in need of them, and they will always be there'. There must, however, be *an application* of the work of the Cross and its concomitant, the Resurrection. The question is, 'Who applies the work of

the Cross?', and the answer must be, 'The Holy Spirit'. He first brings conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgement (John 16:7–11; this is often called 'the prevenient work of the Spirit'). He then reveals the work of Christ and the Father (John 16:12–15). His full revelation shows the need for a person to repent and have faith, and so receive the gifts of forgiveness, justification, purification, eternal life, sonship (adoption), the new birth (regeneration), the Spirit, and the love of God.

From Romans 8:1–3 and II Corinthians 3:17 we see that *the Holy Spirit applies 'the word of the Cross' in such power as to transform the person affected*. Thus a radical change is brought about *by the Spirit through the word of grace*, i.e. the Gospel or 'the word of the Cross' (Titus 3:4–7; I Cor. 6:11).

The Holy Spirit continually dwells in the believer, effecting his work

It is clear from Romans 6:9–11, II Corinthians 1:22 and II Timothy 1:14 (cf. Gal. 3:1–3; 5:16, 18, 22–26; Rom. 12:11; Eph. 1:13; 3:16; 5:18) that the Spirit dwells in every believer, and so works within them (cf. I Cor. 2:4–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12). It is he who continually applies the work of the Cross.

What of the human element in application?

In the body of Christ (the church), with its interrelated membership, with the gifts of ministry and the other gifts (i.e. the charismata), there is no doubt that the Gospel is preached, men and women are redeemed, and that they

grow in the community of the believers, but although apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher proclaim the word of life by the Spirit, yet it is the word of the Gospel which works—by the Spirit—so that no one person or thing can be a substitute for the Spirit, however much that person may be an instrument of the Spirit. The Spirit and the word communicate the power of the Gospel, thus bringing about the radical change of mind of the new person. *If ever we get between the word and the Spirit we do harm, becoming ourselves as the Spirit and the word, but being without authentic power to effect true change or give genuine aid*. The so-called aid that we will give will draw human beings to us and not to God, will place us in some measure in the place of God, and will cause a (so-called) work to happen which is of man or even occultic powers which will be glad to assist.

There is, of course, a human element in all teaching and pastoral ministry, but it must be Spirit-given and the word proclaimed must be God's word taught—through us—by the Spirit. Any attempt by us *to use* the word or the Spirit, or *to replace* the word or the Spirit, will be wrong (cf. Matt. 7:21–22; Acts 8:19; II Cor. 2:17; 4:2; II Tim. 2:15–19; I Pet. 4:11; II Pet. 2:19; Jude 4, 16).

Time and again in the New Testament Epistles the use of false teaching and false practice is mentioned. Often it has the elements of sign-seeking and human wisdom (I Cor. 1:22–24). Men can be deceitful (II Cor. 11:1–15; Gal. 1:6–9), and some can 'take their stand on visions' (Col. 2:18), thinking these are as true as the word of God. Everything must be tested (I Cor. 14:29–32; I John 2:18–27; 4:1–3; cf. Matt. 24:24; Rev. 16:13–14).

SOME SUBSTITUTES FOR THE CONTINUING WORK OF THE CROSS

Reasons why we do not see radical change in hearers

If a person has not been radically changed by the work of the Cross and Resurrection, then it will be for one or more of the following reasons:

- (a) *The true word of the Cross has not been preached, or has been preached but not truly heard.* In these cases, human persuasion may cause a decision, but the radical acts of repentance and faith have not been truly evoked by the Cross and the Spirit.
- (b) *The total nature of grace has not been proclaimed or heard, so that salvation appears to be of both man and God instead of only of God.* The person believing will always be uncertain and unsure of his (her) salvation, because one cannot place any trust in human effort.
- (c) *There has been the idea that the word of God needs to be aided by the wisdom of man, and even by human persuasion.* This is akin to saying that God is absent from His word.
- (d) *There has been the idea that the Spirit of God is not present until we encourage him to be so, or that he is apart from the word of God, or that he does not work unaided by us.* This means that God is not sovereign, is not active, and is dependent upon our working with Him.

NOTE: We ought not to say that God chooses to work apart from us, and solely through His word and Spirit, but that God *gives us grace to be His servants* at any given time in proclamation and ministry. This is vastly different from claiming that God needs us, is dependent in any sense upon us, and that we can work in such a way that we add to His word, or are in any form a substitute for, or an aide to, His Spirit.

We ought to keep in mind the fact that all humans hunger for power. Wherever we seek to have power over humans or for the aid of humans, then we are not working under grace. We are usurping the personal action of God, i.e. doing something *for* Him and *in* His place. We may unconsciously be keeping persons under our power by offering a priestly aid, when the truth itself can make them free.

The growth of support and aide ministries

If we think that the word of the Cross is simply the word initiating salvation and not attending it in all its phases until the ultimate redemption of the body, then we will have ignored the accomplished work of the Cross. We will also have ignored the continuing presence and action of the Father, Son and Spirit in the lives of God's people who are His children. We will think that the action of the word of the Cross is unintelligible without our aide ministry. Whilst it is true that God generally mediates His word through His servants, He does not require those servants to dole out homeopathic doses of 'truth' in the hope that ultimately they will be impregnated with truth!

Some Christian workers feel that a gradual (i.e. graduated) unveiling of truth will be a kind way of helping people. They feel that people need to be helped step-by-step, and so they give a diluted form of the word, trusting that gradually the listeners will come to full truth. This assumes that truth is too powerful to be received on its own level.

THE CONTINUING WORK OF THE CROSS

The following points show us that we draw continually from the work of the Cross in living our lives as believers, especially as believers beset by Satan, the world powers, the wisdom of the world, the flesh, sin, and the disabling fear of death and judgement. Simply put, we say: 'Every day we are dependent upon the Cross for a life of holiness, of growing maturity, and for hope of our ultimate inheritance.'

- (a) Every day we need to draw on the forgiveness of the Cross.
- (b) Every day we need to live in the cleansing of the Cross.
- (c) Every day we need to live as those who have victory over sin because sin's power has been broken by the removal of our guilt.
- (d) Every day we need to live in the dynamic of God's unfailing justification given by grace.
- (e) Every day we need to live in the love of God portrayed in the Cross and given to us therefore through the Holy Spirit.

- (f) Every day we need the sanctifying power of the Cross in (i) putting off the things of the flesh, (ii) putting on the things of true living. We need the effective work of the Cross to effect these things in us—every day.
- (g) Every day we need to follow the principle of the Cross which is 'death to self, and living to God', which is the principle of fruitfulness as the seed goes into darkness but brings forth great fruit, i.e. 'He shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied'.
- (h) Every day we need to live in the powerful grace of the Cross so we know that the sufferings of Christ have 'borne our griefs and carried our sorrows', so that none of these remain. We also need to know that 'by his wounds our wounds are healed'.
- (i) Every day we need to know that our past is purified, no guilt remains, and no penalty threatens. This helps us (i) to live in peace, and (ii) to proclaim what is real to us—the amazing grace of God towards sinners, i.e. grace which redeems them.
- (j) Every day we need to realize that in proclaiming this grace we will meet the fierce opposition of proud man who seeks to achieve salvation by his own efforts. This will involve us every day in the principle of the Cross, 'always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies . . . death is at work in us, but life in you' (note '(g)' above).

(k) Every day we will need to remember that Christ is outworking his victory of the Cross by using its resources to bring the kingdoms of this world to 'become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ'. This will mean we realize the principle of victory over evil by the Cross of Christ, knowing that Cross to work effectively in the midst of history.

NOTHING BEYOND THE CROSS

Let us go back to the statement made, by some, of a beyond-the-Cross situation: 'The Cross is wonderful, and the means of our salvation. Nevertheless, having been saved, there is no need for us to stay at the Cross. There is so much beyond it. There is the life of the Spirit, there is membership in the Body, there are victories to be won, gifts to be used, new truths (or truth) to be discovered—indeed a whole life of rich activity. In this sense we must go beyond the Cross.'

In truth all the things mentioned here are fruits of the Cross, not additions to it. They are concerned with the life of the Cross and Resurrection. Where there are signs and wonders they simply attest to the word of grace, the word of the Gospel. The church has been 'born crucified' (cf. Rom. 6:1–10), and owes every element of its life to that crucifixion. The power of the Spirit is really the power of the word of the Cross (I Cor. 1:17–18). The Spirit does not have a 'Cross-power' and a 'post-Cross power', for they are the one. The gifts of the Spirit minister to the body which issued from his death-and-resurrection and which remains dependent upon it. The body's

great victories over evil stem from the victory of the Cross and Resurrection. Hope is based on the effective work of the death and the resurrection, and that hope is to see Christ crucified and to share in the spoils of his victory.