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Living in Grace

In all his letters Paul commences with the prayer that ‘grace’ and ‘peace’ would be with the readers. On two occasions, in 1 & 2 Timothy, he adds ‘mercy’ to the list.¹ Peter also prays for ‘grace and peace’ as does John in Rev. 1:4; 2 John has all three items and Jude simply has ‘mercy peace and love’. Now, from this we may conclude that there was a certain convention when writing letters, just as we may address someone as ‘Dear ...’ even if they are our most vicious opponents. And there is ample evidence of such a convention. For example:

The form of Greek and Latin letters in general was as follows:

(1) Opening or Prescript. This was composed of three parts: the sender, the addressee, and an expression of greeting (often expanded by a wish for good health). Various qualifications might expand on the identification of the sender and addressee. The simplest and most common greeting was ‘Hail’ (*chairein*).²

But a comparison of the letters of the New Testament and those of the Graeco-Roman world reveals that by and large the New Testament letters used the conventions for their own purposes.³ When Paul says, ‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2; Phm 1:3), he has changed the *chairein* (greetings, Hail) to *charis* (grace), but the difference is more than his use of similarly sounding words; it is what he says of grace in his letters that makes us realise that this word carries vast implications for him (as for the other writers) and so for the readers.

Of course, Paul and the other New Testament authors stood in a long line of men and women who were conscious of ‘grace’. For example, in 2 Timothy 1:8-10, Paul wrote:

...join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God,⁹ who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Later in the same letter, he told Timothy that the elements of this salvation were all in the ‘sacred writings’, what we know as the Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:15). Also, to Titus, Paul said that ‘the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all Men⁴(Titus 2:11), meaning all humanity. By this we may understand (i) that, before creation, God’s ‘grace plan’⁵ was in place, ensuring that nothing which would arise to contradict the declared purpose would or could ever amount to anything; (ii) that throughout history grace was operative in the action of God to redeem Israel with a view to the final redemption of all humanity and, so,

¹ Possibly also in Titus, see the variant readings.

² Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1993, p. 115.

³ With the exceptions of the two letters of James, in Acts 15:23 and James 1:1, where the form ‘A to B, greetings’ (*chairein*) is followed; see Carson, Moo and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament.*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1992, p. 232.

⁴ Gk. *Anthropois*.

⁵ Brian Arthur’s phrase in his hymn, ‘God is all gracious’, number 9 in *New Creation Hymn Book*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1990.

(iii) was declared in the Scriptures by which we know those actions and, then, (iv) definitively and climactically revealed in the appearing of Christ and the consequent formation of the redeemed humanity in him.⁶

All this no doubt (hopefully) sounds thoroughly orthodox, but still it does not explain why Paul and the others should write as they did. They were not ‘theologians’ in the sense which that title conveys today, namely people who think deep theological thoughts in order to have the ‘i’s’ of others dotted properly and their ‘t’s’ crossed.⁷ They were passionately concerned for their readers as those, in Peter’s words, ‘who have received a *faith as precious as ours* through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ’ (2 Pet. 1:1).

When they spoke of grace, what did they mean? It is important that we ask that question, because it is sometimes surprising how much we are dependent on ‘ clichés’⁸ and not on the Scriptures themselves. For example, take the definition of grace as ‘unmerited favour’. Could it ever be considered that there is such a thing as ‘merited favour’?⁹ Could it be that, before they sinned, Adam and Eve had some claim on God by virtue of their own accomplishments?

Much is made of the idea of merit in the way people think and in a lot of Christian writing. In the second century, for example, some were speaking

as if conversion and baptism bestowed only forgiveness of past sins and a measure of divine strength. Subsequently individuals, with God’s assistance, must earn further blessings and eternal life. If they sin, repentance and other virtuous acts may provide atonement. In dealing with penance, Tertullian systematized these notions by employing the Roman legal terms *meritum* (merit) and *satisfactio* (satisfaction). When someone sinned, God was regarded as occupying the position belonging to the injured party under Roman law. Such injury could be set right only by punishment or pardon. But pardon could not occur without a satisfaction, a meritorious act, being paid. For Tertullian, one could not expect forgiveness without paying a price—through confession, self-humiliation or fasting.¹⁰

I would suggest that, ‘Roman legal terms’ aside, this is still the way many people think. Furthermore, when discussing the work of Christ, the subject is often couched in terms of his meriting forgiveness for us.

For orthodox Protestant theology, however, the notions of merit and satisfaction have remained central in explaining Christ’s work. God is still regarded as the supreme lawgiver, who can accept sinners only on the basis of the substitutionary merits earned by Christ.¹¹

⁶ See Ian Pennicook, *The Riches of His Grace*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1988, pp. 19-72, and Geoffrey Bingham, *Great and Glorious Grace*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1988, pp. 15-33.

⁷ That does not imply that such people may not have a rich contribution to the life and ministry of the church, especially when the tendency of so many is to treat the Scriptures in a very superficial way. But the notion of someone engaging in the theological process in isolation from the life and ministry of the church seems generally to be in mind.

⁸ Such a title is not intended to imply that all such phrases are incorrect, simply that they are generally unexamined.

⁹ This is in contrast to merited covenant blessings, another matter entirely.

¹⁰ T. N. Finger, ‘Merit’ in W. A. Elwell (Ed), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984, p. 709.

¹¹ Finger, ‘Merit’, p. 710. For a fuller discussion of the meritorious work of Christ, see Calvin, *Institutes*, Book II, Chapter XVII.

But the meaning of such a phrase as ‘the substitutionary merits earned by Christ’ is not clear. For example, are his merits earned for us by his obedience to the law? (Is this not another way of asking if Adam merited anything from God before the fall?) The answer to that question must be, No!

There is no question that Jesus’ whole life was in obedience to the law. When Paul wrote that Jesus was ‘born under the law’ he meant more than that Jesus was born a Jew. He meant that he was born to live as a true human being (‘born of a woman’) and that as a Jew that meant he was to be in subjection (not in bondage) to the *Torah* of Israel in order to bring redemption to those living under that law. But by being in subjection to the law he was doing no more than any other member of Israel was obliged to do. He was not especially virtuous by being obedient.

Furthermore, his obedience did not always appear to be such. The Pharisees, who placed so much stock in Sabbath observance, dietary regulations and circumcision, were scandalised by the apparent indifference of Jesus (and his disciples) to their priorities. But when he responded to their accusations concerning his failure to keep to their dietary regulations, he pointed out that their traditions were actually in opposition to the commandments of God (see Mark. 7:8-13).

At his baptism, he told John that he must be baptised ‘for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness’ (Matt. 3:15). While there is some debate over the implications of this phrase,¹² I take it to mean that in the baptism of Jesus the whole process of bringing righteousness to a climax¹³ is commenced. This is the righteousness of the whole creation which the prophets, and later the apostles, looked for (for instance, 2 Pet. 3:13 cf. Isa. 65:17 and 66:22) but which would only come as the servant suffered to the point of death (Isa. 53:10-12). This righteousness would be far in excess of the pernicky demands of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20), against which Paul later boasted his blamelessness (Phil. 3:6).

The law of God (Rom. 7:22, 25; 8:7; 1 Cor. 9:21) is the law declared by the heavens (Ps. 19:1, 7) and written on the human heart by creation. As such it is the expression of the righteousness of God (Ps. 97:6). This, I assume, is what Paul referred to in Romans 2:15 when he said that what the law requires (that is the Jewish law, *Torah*) is written on Gentiles’ hearts. All are stamped with the law of God and so are by creation aware of the demands of God (and, incidentally, under obligation to repent, Acts 17:30) and, therefore, can hardly boast if they have acted consistently with that law.

The various comments about the possibility of eternal life being gained if the commandments are kept, must not be understood to mean that obedience to the law will merit ‘heaven’. The Gospels were written by men who understood what God was about in history, living as they did in the fullness of the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost; but that understanding was expressed in terms of their own context. Matthew, Mark and Luke are, each in their own way, recording the ministry of Jesus within the flow of God’s action in and for history through Israel. Matthew begins with announcing that Jesus is to ‘fulfill all righteousness’ (3:15), follows with the declaration that ‘the (eschatological) kingdom of heaven has come near’ (4:17), and then proceeds to call people to follow him (4:18-22). He then defines those for whom the kingdom is coming, namely, ‘the poor in spirit’, ‘those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake’ (5:3, 10). All this is because he has come to

¹² Cf Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, IVP, Leicester, 1992, p. 64f. etc.

¹³ The significance of the Aorist tense of ‘to fulfill’.

not 'to abolish the law and the prophets ...but to fulfil' (5:17). In the remainder of 'the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus (i) 'radicalises' the law, that is, takes it back to its essential elements (cf. 7:12), (ii) indicates that that true members of Israel are those who live in the conscious presence of God the Father, trusting him to meet their needs and (iii) points to himself as the focus of the climactic action of God. He is the one who brings in the kingdom so those who would inherit the kingdom must follow him.¹⁴

Jesus' summons to follow a new way of being Israel comes to a climax, as far as the synoptics are concerned, with the story of a rich young man.

He came with a question: 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' This was, of course, the question of the kingdom: what must I do to have a share in the age to come, to be among those who are vindicated when YHWH acts decisively and becomes king? (It is not, that is to say, the medieval or modern question: what must I do to go to heaven when I die?)¹⁵

The question, then, is what does it mean to *be* a member of the people of God. It does not, as it never could, mean that obedience to the law would earn entrance to 'heaven'. On the contrary, the whole subject implies that Jesus is speaking from the inside (and exposing that the ruler was not). There is no question of merit, only of the true nature of those who belong to the kingdom.

If anyone inherits the kingdom, it will not be through any merit but will be a gift (cf Matt. 21:43). And that is the way it is with Jesus. All he has, he has as a gift from the Father. This made most clear in John's Gospel. For example, when John the Baptist saw the popularity of Jesus, he responded, 'No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven' (John 3:27) and John the author observed, 'The Father loves the Son and has placed¹⁶ all things in his hands' (John 3:35). Even the suffering of the Cross was the Father's gift (Jn. 18:11) to him.

Note that all of this lies outside the gift of salvation. It is simply establishing the fact that nothing can be earned from God, ever! The most anyone, including Jesus, could ever do is live consistently with the truth of God. Jesus was not being at all ungracious when he told the disciples to have a clear view of who ought to be grateful to whom.

Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? ⁸Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? ⁹Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?' ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' ¹⁹Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.' (Luke 17:7-19)

¹⁴ See the way 'the law of God' is 'the law of Christ' in 1 Cor. 9:21.

¹⁵ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, SPCK, London, 1996, p. 301.

¹⁶ Gk. *dedoken*, 'has given'. See also, John 5:22, 26, 27, 36; 6:39; 10:29; 12:49; 13:3; 17:2, 7, 8, 9, 12, 22, 24; 18:11.

It was the evil of Israel that it had turned *Torah* into an apparent means by which to have God in their debt. Of course, Israel is ‘everyone writ large’.

...Paul views the Jewish experience with the Mosaic law as paradigmatic for the experience of all people with ‘law’. Israel stands in redemptive history as a kind of ‘test case’, and its relationship with *the law* is *ipso facto* applicable to the relationship of all people with that ‘law’ which God has revealed to them (cf. 2:14-15).¹⁷

Paul insisted that no one could ever have God as their debtor.

‘...who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?’³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:35-36)

It is not that for every gift we give God, he will outgive us; rather, that there is nothing that we have that we could ever give to him, since it has all come from him. David recognised this:

Then David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; David said: ‘Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. ¹¹Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. ¹²Riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name.

¹⁴‘But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.’ (1 Chronicles 29:10-14)

Of course, we can and do give to God (see Gen 4:3; Ex. 8:26; 10:25 etc) but true giving is in recognition that any gift is a response to his generosity and any effectiveness in the offering lies in God’s pure generosity. Thus,

For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and *I have given it to you* for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement. (Leviticus 17:11)

So, ‘What do you have that you did not receive?’ (1 Cor. 4:7).

If grace has nothing to do with merit, or lack of it, what is it?

In secular Greek [*charis*] is ‘what delights’, and is used with reference to things that bring joy (*chara*), especially gifts ... It can be used of the ‘favour’ of the gods ... an occurs frequently in the Hellenistic period to denote instances of a ruler’s ‘favour’.¹⁸

Charis means, basically, goodwill or favour and the word is also used as the response to that favour. This is seen, for example in Romans 6:15-17.

What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under *grace*? By no means! ¹⁶Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

¹⁷ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996, p. 417.

¹⁸ Moo, *Romans*, p. 228, n. 43.

¹⁷But *thanks* be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted...

So what does Luke mean when he observes that

With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and *great grace was upon them all* (Acts 4:33)?

When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and *urged them to continue in the grace of God*. (Acts 13:43)?

Or Peter?

But *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

Plainly this was more than some favourable disposition of God. It was a powerful reality that had first broken in at the birth of Christ and which continued to be upon each person and upon the whole church. As mentioned earlier, Paul had described the birth of Christ as ‘the grace of God appearing for the salvation of all men’ (Titus 2:11). True, grace means favour, but within the Scriptures, it has a specific context. It is that of the favour shown to men and women in the light of their sin and their shame, as God gives himself in a quite particular way to restore all that was lost at the fall and to bring humanity and the whole creation to the goal which he had originally established.

Interestingly the first use of *charis* in the New Testament applies to Mary (Luke 1:30), and then the next two to Jesus himself, ‘The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the *favor* of God was upon him’ (Lu. 2:40) and then Jesus is said to have ‘increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human *favor*’ (Luke 2:52). It is not that Jesus was a sinner needing salvation; it was that the favour of God for all humanity was being revealed in Jesus, so that, later, when Jesus spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth,

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words [lit. *the words of grace*] that came from his mouth. (Luke 4:22)

A similar picture emerges from the Prologue of John’s Gospel.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. ...¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:14-17)

As the only Son of the Father, the incarnate Word has the Father’s glory and, thus, is full of grace and truth. But that fulness is with a view to grace and truth flowing richly through Jesus Christ (cf. John 4:13-14; 7:37-38).

This flow of grace is described by Paul in Ephesians 2:1-10.

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward

us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Grace has flowed: it is all gift. And the benefits of this which flow to us are described in Ephesians 1:3-8.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us.

Grace has brought us to the 'new creation' (see 2 Cor. 5:17), with the good works planned beforehand being all things which relate to living in that new creation. But whereas human beings in guilt see good works as a means to remove guilt, or at least hopefully to minimise its effects, and so see them as something of a burden imposed on us, the man or woman who stands in grace (Rom. 5:2) sees that good works are directed by the perfect law, the law of liberty and so are great blessing (James 1:25) and obedience a privilege.

The grace in which we stand, it must be stressed, is God giving himself to us for our good. Grace, then can never be miserly or partial. Salvation does not come to us in dribs and drabs, but in great abundance. Grace has been lavished upon us, it abounds towards us.

If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive *the abundance of grace* and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17, see also vs. 15)

That explains the language of Romans 6:1, 'shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?' The answer is a resounding, No! Look what grace has done. We have died to sin and been united to the resurrected Christ. That is why Peter urged his readers to set their hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring when he is revealed (1 Pet. 1:13), the grace of resurrection *for us* (see also Phil. 3:10-14).

But even now, while still in this body of death, 'Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace' (Rom. 6:14). The age of grace is now fully present, and 'great grace is upon the church'.

Grace has brought forgiveness. If grace means God giving himself for us, then it must mean that God is for us.

since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. (Romans 3:23-25)

It was God who put Christ forward as a propitiation, a sacrifice of atonement by which God's wrath was removed (Rom. 1:18; 5:9); it was God, 'for us ... who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us' (Rom. 8:31-32). Furthermore the giving does not cease: 'will he not with [his Son] also give us everything else?' In other words, 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.

How then, do we live in grace? Two matters demand our attention.

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! ²The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ³Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? ⁴Did you experience so much for nothing? —if it really was for nothing. ⁵Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? (Gal. 3:1-5)

Here, first, is the insistence that we cannot justify our justification. As Paul said in Romans 1:17, ‘the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith’ (*NRSV*), or ‘a righteousness that is by faith from first to last’ (*NIV*). If we cannot justify our justification, neither should we try. The attempt to *prove*¹⁹ our standing in grace is actually a complete contradiction. In fact, any attempt to measure our standing by anything other than the declaration of God will involve us in either pointless despair or unreasonable, self-deceived, satisfaction. Apart from faith there is only law and the law condemns.²⁰

Living in grace does not mean living in uncontested bliss. Our adversary the devil is the accuser of the brethren, and he is constantly out to lay accusations of guilt on the conscience. Of course it is irrelevant whether his accusation is based on a fact of failure or not; often it seems to be based as much on the suggestion of failure or even the fear of future failure. Either way,

Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. (Rom. 8:33-34)

Second is the nature of the transformation which God's grace has brought about.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom. 8:1-8)

‘No condemnation’ means that law does not condemn. But, as we have seen, law is a revelation of the character of God, so that freedom from law does not imply lawlessness. That would, illogically, imply that we were free from God. The reverse is, of course, the case. Justification means freedom from the law of sin and death for God has condemned sin in the flesh. The purpose of this judgment is, verse 4, ‘that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit’. The reality is that with the removal of guilt, we are now in the realm of fulfilled law. Not only have the law's requirements been met, once for all²¹, but there has been a

¹⁹ Note that the *RSV* of John 15:8, ‘and so prove to be my disciples’ is inaccurate. Jesus said only ‘Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye *be* my disciples’ (*AV*). *NRSV*, ‘and *become* my disciples’ is probably not much of an improvement, see *note l*).

²⁰ See the quotation from Luther below.

²¹ The verb ‘might be fulfilled’ is in the Aorist tense.

change in us. We are now those who set their minds on the things of the Spirit, and stand in contrast to those who set their minds on the flesh. But those who do the latter are those who do not and who cannot submit to the law of God (vs.7) and who cannot please God (vs. 8). We, on the other hand, are those who now are set to obey the law. Whatever hindrances we may find in our ‘flesh’, we have been changed.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, *with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.* (Romans 7:25)

The law of God is the law of the God who is for us. That law is now our delight (see Rom. 7:22: Pss. 1, 19, 119) because God is our delight. Obedience is now ‘natural’. It is the way people of grace live, never the way we *become* people of grace or *prove that we are* people of grace.

What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. (Rom. 6:15-19)

Why do the apostles pray that grace may be upon their readers? It is not because grace is a commodity to be requested but because they know that they and we are utterly dependent on God and that while we may rightly assume God’s grace we may not and cannot presume upon it. Grace can only be known within the intimacy of our faith unity with God himself.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen. (Rev. 22:21)

NOTE: It must be stressed that faith does not mean that we must somehow struggle to convince ourselves that something is so. To set our feelings as a standard is equally an appeal to the realm of law. The following is helpful.

Luther's Works, Vol. 26, p. 380f.

Crying: Abba! Father! (Gal 4:6)

Paul could have said 'God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, praying "Abba! Father!"' But he purposely says 'crying', to indicate the trial of the Christian who is still weak and who believes weakly. In Rom. 8:26 he calls this crying 'sighs too deep for words'. 'Likewise', he says, 'the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.'

It is a very great comfort when Paul says here that the Spirit of Christ, sent by God into our hearts, cries 'Abba! Father!' and when he says in Rom. 8:26 that He helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. Anyone who truly believed this would not fall away in any affliction, no matter how great.

But many things hinder this faith. In the first place, our heart was born in sin. In the second place we have the innate evil in us that we are in doubt about the favour of God toward us and cannot believe for a certainty that we are pleasing to God. Besides, 'our adversary, the devil, prowls around, issuing terrible roars' (I Peter 5:8); and he says 'You are a sinner. Therefore God is wrathful with you and will destroy you forever.' We have nothing to strengthen and sustain us against these great and unbearable cries except the bare Word, which sets Christ forth as the Victor over sin, death, and every evil. But it is effort and labour to cling firmly to this in the midst of trial and conflict, when Christ does not become visible to any of our senses. We do not see Him, and in the trial our heart does not feel His presence and help. In fact, Christ appears to be wrathful with us and to be deserting us at such a time. Besides, in this trial a man feels the power of sin, the weakness of the flesh, and his doubt: he feels the fiery darts of the devil (Eph. 6:16), the terrors of death, and the wrath and judgement of God. All these things issue powerful and horrible cries against us, so that there appears to be nothing left for us except despair and eternal death.

But in the midst of these terrors of Law, thunderclaps of sin, tremors of death, and roarings of the devil, Paul says, the Holy Spirit begins to cry in our heart, 'Abba! Father!'. And His cry vastly exceeds, and breaks through, the powerful and horrible cries of the Law, sin, death and the devil. It penetrates the clouds and heaven, and it reaches all the way to the ears of God.

Living in Mercy

Perhaps the word ‘mercy’ could be understood as primarily relating to the action of showing compassion to those who are unable to assist themselves. It stands closely related to the word ‘pity’ which seems to be more limited to the feelings we have towards those same people. In common use, to ‘show mercy’ means very much the same as to ‘take pity’, whereas in Classical Greek the notion of sympathetic feeling seems to dominate over the idea of merciful action¹. If this is our understanding of ‘mercy’, how would we, then, understand the prayer for ‘grace, mercy and peace’ (1 Tim. 1:2)? What is it that Paul and others expect to happen in answer to this prayer?

The Greek word used in the New Testament for mercy is usually *eleos*.² There is another word, *oiktirmos*, pity or compassion, also used in a similar sense. Thus James 5:11 has ‘the Lord is compassionate and merciful’; ‘compassionate’ here translates the word *polusplanchnos* which means, literally, full of inward parts, that is heart, liver, lungs etc. While this may sound very strange to us, it need not if we recall that the Greek language used symbolism just as we do. We talk about loving something with all out heart³ or having a broken heart without any intention to refer to the organ which pumps blood about the body, especially in the latter term. Likewise James is using a term which means that the Lord feels very deeply for us.⁴ James’ word for mercy here is *oiktirmos*.

By and large, only Jews living in Judea spoke (or read) Hebrew. The others read their Bibles in the Greek translation called the LXX. There, *eleos* was mainly used to translate the word *chesed*, although the word *rachamim*⁵ was occasionally translated by *eleos*, though also by *oiktirmos* and *splanchnos*. What all this shows us is that there is a large range of words all contributing to the general concept which we describe as mercy. As we have seen, we too have a range of words upon which to draw.

But it is this very range of words which brings us to see that the mercy for which Paul prays is something very rich. By using *rachamim* the Old Testament demonstrates that ‘the personal God has a heart’.⁶ By using *chesed* it shows that the mercy of God is not expressed in any haphazard way but is clearly focussed on the goal that God has set. When mercy is seen this way, then, it is a cause of deep gratitude and joy. Thus, for example, Paul gave his own testimony to the mercy of God.

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service,¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.¹⁵ The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am

¹ See R. Bultmann, ἔλεος in TDNT, II, pp 477-485.

² Verbs and adjectives are assumed with the nouns.

³ The language has, of course, derived from the Biblical terms.

⁴ Compare the NRSV of Philippians 1:8 ‘For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus’ with the AV, ‘For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ’.

⁵ This word may be related to the Heb. *rechem*, meaning ‘womb’, with the meaning that mercy is the deep compassion best expressed by ‘motherly feeling’ (see NBD, 1962, p 809), hence it was also translated by *splanchnos*.

⁶ Karl Barth. CD, 11, 1, p 370.

the foremost. ¹⁶But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:12-17)

‘But I received mercy ... the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus’!

When he said that he received mercy *because* he acted ignorantly in unbelief we ought not to read this as if Paul was suggesting that his ignorance somehow made him worthy of mercy. Far from minimising his sin and the horror of his previous behaviour, Paul was saying that he was genuinely ignorant of Christ. He thought that by persecuting the Christians he was ‘offering worship to God’ (Jn. 16:2). However, now that mercy has come to him, he stands as a demonstration of the great patience of Jesus the Messiah and so as an example to all who believe in Jesus. This same picture is given in Romans 11:30ff, where Paul speaks of the Gentiles coming to faith as a result of the Jews’ rejection of their heritage.

Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³²For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

³³O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Romans 11:30-33)

The mercy of God is a cause for overwhelmed worship.

What does it mean to say that God is merciful? Jesus firmly insisted that ‘your Father is merciful’ (Luke 6:36) and Paul said that ‘God ... is rich in mercy’ (Eph. 2:4). However, These were not new observations. Both Jesus and Paul could say this because the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had already revealed himself as ‘merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love ...’ (Ex. 34:6f).⁷ God is compassionate, merciful; he feels our need. The Greek Stoics did not think that mercy was an appropriate element for a wise man. To be moved to compassion was regarded as a weakness, as if one had lost control over the responses.⁸ On the contrary, the Scriptures never present God as being moved by some power (our need) outside of himself. It is only because God is merciful *of himself* that he shows mercy. Karl Barth, speaking of ‘the perfection of divine mercy’ put it this way.

But the personal God has a heart. He can feel, and be affected. He is not impassible.⁹ He cannot be moved from outside by an extraneous power. But this does not mean that He is not capable of moving Himself. No, God is moved and stirred, yet not like ourselves in powerlessness, but in His own free power, in His innermost being: moved and touched by Himself, i.e., open, ready, inclined to compassion with another’s suffering and therefore to assistance, impelled to take the initiative to relieve this distress. It can be only a question of compassion, free sympathy, with another’s suffering. God finds no suffering in Himself. And no cause outside God can cause Him

⁷ The Hebrew has, ‘a God *rachum* and *henun* ... keeping *chesed*.’ The LXX has ‘a God *oiktirmon* and *eleemon* ... and doing mercy/*eleos*’.

⁸ See Bultmann, *ἐλεος* p 477f.

⁹ Without passions.

suffering if He does not will it so. But it is, in fact, a question of sympathy with the suffering of another in the full scope of God's own personal freedom. This is the essential point if we are really thinking of the God attested by Scripture, and speaking only of Him. Everything that God is and does is determined and characterised by the fact that there is rooted in Him, that He Himself is, this original free powerful compassion, that from the outset He is open and ready and inclined to the need and distress and torment of another, that His compassionate words and deeds are not grounded in a subsequent change, in a mere approximation to certain conditions in the creature which is distinct from Himself but are rooted in His heart, in His very life and being as God. ... it is always a question, no more and no less, of the heart, the innermost being of God. This is not closed but open to feel the distress of man. God cannot be moved from outside, but from inside His own being He shares it in sympathetic communion. It is here that we see the power of grace. This means, of course, that in fact it is not merely a gift of God, but God Himself the Giver who gives Himself as the gift.¹⁰

This is the point: the mercy of God is not his patronising attitude towards his creation but his total giving of himself to relieve its need. The Latin *miser cordia*, heart suffering, indicates that the mercy of God is the suffering of God for and with his creatures who are *miserable*, that is, in need of his mercy.

The Biblical picture of humanity is not pretty. While recognising that Man remains the image of God, the fact is that Man is caught in the misery of guilt. This is surely the thrust of Genesis 3-11; the fracturing of the relationship between God and Man, the arrogance of the suggestion that the creature could be 'as God', has resulted not just in Man standing against God as some opposing, if smaller, force but as Man being robbed of his high dignity and now, of himself, incapable of knowing the truth of his being. 'Arrogance is seen as pitiable folly, the usurpation of freedom as rigorous bondage, evil lust as bitter torment'.¹¹

Passages such as Romans 1:18-32 indicate the awful corruption of humanity, all flowing from the continuous need for men and women to suppress the truth. There is no peace for the wicked, they 'are like the tossing sea that cannot keep still; its waters toss up mire and mud' (Isa. 57:20-21). To Titus Paul wrote:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. (Titus 3:3)

Of course there are pockets of peace, even now, and there are happy marriages and families, but the reality is that the peace is fragile. In fact, no rest for the wicked means just that. That men and women are caught in the constant turmoil of suppressing the truth, unsuccessfully, but cannot and will not acknowledge that this is so. Hence Jeremiah's statement that 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?' Humanity is caught in existential guilt while all the time insisting that there is no problem. On the other hand there are those whose self-deception breaks open and who are left with nothing but despair.

Man's awful dilemma is the result of sin but there is more which must be said. Sin does not stand as entirely related to mankind. That is, the results of sin, its wages, are because sin has evoked the personal wrath of God and because God's wrath has locked men and women into that sin. Paul said that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23) but only after he has said that God has given men and women up to their sin (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). Jesus put

¹⁰ CD, 11, 1, p 370, 371.

¹¹ Barth, CD, II, 1, p 371.

it that 'everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin' (John 8:34) and that must be understood to mean that sin has its power by virtue of the nature of the offence. That offence is not against 'the laws of nature' or against any pragmatic rules by which human nature functions (which is, of course, true, as far as that goes) but is against the very being and nature of God. The various statements in the Scriptures which describe sin, for example, 'whatever is not of faith is sin' (Rom. 14:23) and 'sin is lawlessness' (1 John 3:4) are not definitions but descriptions of the way sin expresses itself. Sin is deceitful (Heb. 3:13) and hence 'the multiplicity of biblical expressions'.¹² For this reason, any definition of sin will probably be inadequate. Sin, to be known as sin, must be seen in the light of a revelation of the holiness against which it stands so defiantly. That was the experience of Isaiah (6:1-5) and Peter (Luke 5:8). Neither of these men were (we presume) outwardly immoral; as we saw, what Paul later saw as such evil was initially understood to have been done in the service of God. That is why Jesus said that it is the Holy Spirit who convinces the world of sin (John 16:8). Possibly the most we can say is that sin is the disposition of the human heart and will which is set to reject, by whatever method fits the situation, the place of God as Father, Creator and King. Certainly we must say that sin is not merely actions. 'The wicked go astray from the womb, they err from their birth, speaking lies' (Ps. 58:3); 'I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me' (Ps. 51:5). It is the disposition which is set against God and which calls forth his anger: 'Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight' (Ps. 51:4a).

It is because 'God is angry [with the wicked] every day' (Ps. 7:11 AV), because he is 'a God who expresses his wrath every day' (NIV) that David said, 'I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me' (Ps. 51:3). The anguish which results from guilt is the personal action of God in order that the self-deceived cannot know true serenity. Thus, Psalm 32:1-4.

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

²Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and *in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

³While *I kept silence*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

The pain which comes is in 'the bones which *you* have crushed' (Ps. 51:8b).

David's prayer in Psalm 51:1-2 is important.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Forgiveness will be mercy to a man who is in misery. This is what the prophet Habakkuk recognises; he sees Babylon's army as the judgment of God, whose 'eyes are too pure to behold evil and [who] cannot look on wrongdoing' (1:13). His prayer is not merely for national deliverance or the restoration of prosperity (cf. 3:17, 'Though the fig tree does not blossom ...'). It is far deeper:

O LORD, I have heard of your renown, and I stand in awe, O LORD, of your work. In our own time revive it; in our own time make it known; *in wrath may you remember mercy.* (Hab. 3:2).

¹² See G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1971, p 255.

This wrath of God, which is continuously poured out on rebellious humanity is not because 'God is wrath'. There is no statement in Scripture which would support such a notion. But, as we have seen, God is merciful. That is why all, both Jew and Gentile, have been locked into their guilt and misery, in whatever form that may take.

Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience,³¹ so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy.³² For God has imprisoned all in disobedience *so that he may be merciful to all.* (Rom. 11:30-32).

There are two significant songs in the commencement of Luke's Gospel, The songs of Mary (the Magnificat) and Zechariah (the Benedictus).

Mary said,
 My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
 Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."
 (Luke 1:46-55).

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he *has looked* favorably on his people and redeemed them.
⁶⁹He *has raised* up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David,
⁷⁰as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
⁷¹that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.
⁷²Thus he *has shown* the mercy promised to our ancestors, and *has remembered* his holy covenant,
⁷³the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴that we, being rescued from the
 hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear,
⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
⁷⁶And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to
 prepare his ways,
⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.
⁷⁸By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,
⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the
 way of peace. (Luke 1:68-79).

Mary recognised that God has always acted in mercy (verses. 50 and 54) and that the favour now shown to her is consistent with all that has gone before.¹³ Zechariah likewise looks at Israel's past. Verses 68-75 look back to all that God did in the past. The words in italics are significant. Although they are English perfect tenses, indicating an action in

¹³ Cf. D. W. B. Robinson, *Faith's Framework*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1996, pp 87-90 for a discussion of these two songs. He notes that Mary makes no reference to the birth of the child Jesus or to anything that God may do through him. My comments are based on his.

the past which has effects in the present, they are actually Greek Aorist tenses. The action was in the past. Zechariah is rehearsing God's mercy to Israel. God looked favourably on his people and redeemed them; he raised up a mighty savior in the house of David. He promised, by the prophets, to do this and so he showed (lit. *did*) the promised mercy to the ancestors. This is what God did in the past; now he will do it to *us*! The compassionate mercy of God is now about to break upon us.¹⁴

Later, Simeon praised God when he saw the baby Jesus. He was waiting for the *consolation* of Israel and now he sees the salvation which God has prepared for both Jews and Gentiles (Lu. 2:25, 28-32). Yet Simeon also pointed to the pain that was to be associated with that salvation.

...Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed — and a sword will pierce your own soul too.' (Lu. 2:34-35).

The mercy of God is now in action for all peoples, but it will be a moment of great significance. As we have seen, mercy is in the context of deep misery because that misery is in the context of holy wrath. If there is to be mercy, it cannot be apart from the satisfaction of offended holiness. The wrath of God cannot be ignored. Whichever guilt remains the anguish of the human heart cannot be removed.

The prophet Isaiah powerfully anticipated this. In Isaiah 51:17-22 there is the promise that the wrath being experienced by sinful Israel will be removed.

Rouse yourself, rouse yourself! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering.¹⁸ There is no one to guide her among all the children she has borne; there is no one to take her by the hand among all the children she has brought up.¹⁹ These two things have befallen you — who will grieve with you? — devastation and destruction, famine and sword — who will comfort you?²⁰ Your children have fainted, they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of the LORD, the rebuke of your God.

²¹Therefore hear this, you who are wounded, who are drunk, but not with wine: ²²Thus says your Sovereign, the LORD, your God who pleads the cause of his people: See, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; you shall drink no more from the bowl of my wrath. (Isaiah 51:17-22).

But the removal of wrath, which will mean the removal of the misery, must involve the removal of the guilt..

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.³ He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

⁴Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ...

¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the

¹⁴ Some MSS have this in the Aorist tense, thus the AV, 'the dayspring from on high *hath visited us*'.

LORD shall prosper. ¹¹Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. (Isa. 53:1-6, 10-11).

The servant is a man of sufferings, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. As Motyer puts it,

If verse 3 stood alone we would be left to think that the Servant was burdened with a morose temperament and a sickly body, but verses 4 and 10 fill out the picture. The Servant was not an incessant sorrower and sufferer but he was notably so, not by reason of his constitution but because he took our sorrows and weaknesses as his own.¹⁵

Because the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all, he has taken our griefs and carried our sorrows. This is mercy. This is the compassionate mercy which Zechariah saw coming and which Paul says gripped him. The personal God has a heart. 'The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all', which means that it is the Father who has acted in such full mercy for us. This is the compassionate mercy which does not only speak to us about our misery but actually enters it for us and takes it all into himself, for the Son does nothing except what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19).

It's always the Cross in the end — God, not Almighty, but God the Father, with a father's sorrow and a Father's weakness, which is the strength of love. God splendid, suffering, crucified — Christ. There's the Dawn.¹⁶

The mercy of God means that God himself is present in the suffering of the cross. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). The mercy of God is not mere sentiment but powerful action. Yet it does involve powerful sentiment,

God grieveth in eternity
My misery beyond measure,
He called to mind His mercy mild,
To help me was his pleasure.
He turned to me His Father's heart,
'Twas not for Him the trifler's part,
He gave His costliest treasure.

For mercy now the time has come,
To His own Son confiding,
Away, heart's crown, from heaven's throne,
Salvation now providing.
To help poor man from sinful loss,
Endure for him the bitter cross,
And be his life abiding.¹⁷

Mercy means that forgiveness has come, not as a mere statistical adjustment but as the relief of our misery, for he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Thus Psalm 78:37.

¹⁵ J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1993, p 428.

¹⁶ G. A. Studdert Kennedy, quoted in J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, SCM, London, 1981, p 35. By 'Almighty' there seems to be the implication of distant, detached sovereignty, whereas what Moltmann and others is suggesting is that the power of God is the power not only to take but which actually does take our sorrows and sins into himself. It is the power to become weak at the Cross. There is a certain danger, however, in allowing the emotive language to override the full Biblical picture.

¹⁷ Quoted in Barth, CD. II, 1, p 372.

Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not true to his covenant. ³⁸Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them;

and Isaiah 54:7-10

For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. ⁸In 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. ⁹This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. ¹⁰For 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. (Isaiah 54:7-10).

Mercy, then, must mean that God in Christ has borne the wrath. It is the great mystery of this mercy that the wrath of God is removed from us precisely by that wrath being expended fully on Christ. Apart from his suffering the wrath of alienation and judgment there can be no freedom from sin. But if the work of the cross means that he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows then the implications are enormous.

It is to be noted that when we confess God to be merciful it is not even remotely possible to demonstrate this as a logically deducible truth. All that we can do is to acknowledge the actual reality of God. What else can we produce as a proof of this confession except the fact that God has given Himself to be known by us as merciful in the name of Jesus Christ? How can we try to recognise the reality of the mercy of God except in this name?

The revelation of this name as the epitome of the expectation of Israel and the recollection of the Church is also in Holy Scripture the epitome of the reality of God's mercy. We cannot get behind this name to learn why God is merciful. But we can infer from this name with unshakable certainty that He is. In this recognition and confession everything depends on the fact that by the Word and Spirit of God we are linked to this name, that in and with this revelation, attested to us by the Word and Spirit, the revelation of the mercy of God stands immediately before us, that by this name we are divinely and therefore incontestably and irresistibly comforted. We are comforted by an acceptance that not merely our creatureliness, not merely the need and the misery of our existence in its sheer dependence, but the very heart of this misery, our revolt against Him on whom we are utterly dependent, is in fact the object of His own participation, His care, His suffering, and therefore also His assistance and intervention. Before we are touched or can be touched by any pain which we have brought on ourselves by our sin and guilt, before we are sorry for or can be sorry for our sin, before death and hell can frighten us, and before we feel the greater terror that we are such sinners as have deserved death and hell, already in the One against whom we sin and are guilty and whose punishment threatens us we have to do with the God who Himself suffers pain because of our sin and guilt, for whom it is not an alien thing but His own intimate concern. And as God is far greater than we His creatures, so much greater is His sorrow on our behalf than any sorrow which we can feel for ourselves. If we recognise God's mercy in Jesus Christ, this means necessarily that we can no longer try to experience and bear in the sorrow which we have to experience and bear for ourselves an, as it were, divine, eternal, irremovable weight of sorrow. Because God is merciful a divine pain of this kind is not only taken away from us, but forbidden to us as something presumptuous—a tragic consciousness to which we may not pretend. The height and depth, the inwardness and outwardness of our sorrow is really God's concern—and ours only as it is seen and borne by God. What is our suffering when we recollect that God has Himself felt it so keenly as to give His only begotten Son in order to remove it? Our suffering for sin has not touched us, and cannot touch us, as it touches Him. So we can never take it to our hearts in this way. When we realise the full depth of our sorrow as it is seen and borne and suffered by God Himself, any complaint of ours as to the form in which it confronts and affects us is silenced. Our lamenting comes too late and is always relatively too weak. Indeed, it is always ineffective and in the end untrue. For what is the use of our lamenting when the heart of our

misery is that we are sinners and debtors to God, in face of whom we cannot do anything to make good ? Who can complain when God has to complain, when the right to complain is His right alone ? It is His heart, not ours, which is suffering when we think that we are the sufferers and that we have a right or obligation to lament. His heart is wounded, and wounded through our heart. How can we reverse the relationship and behave as though we have to suffer, as it were in the void, divinely, eternally, or on our own account ? In the recognition and confession of the mercy of God, what we are accustomed to take so seriously as the tragedy of human existence is dissolved. There is something far more serious and tragic, viz., the fact that our distress—the anguish of our sin and guilt—is freely accepted by God, and that in Him, and only in Him, it becomes real agony. That this is the case is due to the mercy of God. In the face of this mercy we must be silent. In the bearing of our pain, we must be modest and unassuming, as also in our lamentation and protests against it. We not only must, but may. For it is the third and crucial factor in our misery that we think that we ourselves must bear our agony, the agony of our sin and guilt, that we must accuse and judge and cleanse ourselves, and then take pity on ourselves for the consequences of our sin. Sin attains its true form as opposition to the grace of God. It becomes hopeless as such, and its consequences are hopelessly painful. But at this point the grace of God intervenes as the mercy of God. Jesus Christ enters human existence as the great joy which shall be to all people. He breaks down this resistance to grace by Himself appearing as grace triumphant, as the royal removal of our sin and guilt by the action of God Himself. Because our sin and guilt are now in the heart of God, they are no longer exclusively ours. Because He bears them, the suffering and punishment for them are lifted from us, and our own suffering can be only a reminiscence of His. As He takes to Himself our sin and guilt in His Son, we are freed from the necessity of seeing and suffering and lamenting except as His and by faith in Him, i.e., except as a burden of sin and guilt which is lifted from us by Him. It remains for us only to be the sinners whose place He has taken and who must therefore really have their life in Him.¹⁸

Self-pity is not only unnecessary but an arrogant assertion that God's mercy is inadequate or, itself, unnecessary. In such a situation we can never enjoy the freedom which is ours.

What, then, does it mean to live in mercy? For what do the New Testament writers pray? First it must mean that we live as men and women who have received mercy and therefore as those whose pain has been taken up into the cross and borne by him. Furthermore, it means that there is no pain which comes to us which he has not taken and so which he will not bear. Some years ago, in an incredibly painful situation in life, when all of life seemed to be disappearing, it was said to me, 'It only hurts if you don't let go'. And so it is. The Father has taken us into himself and, while he may discipline us for our good, and while that discipline may sting, as it should, the simple response of faith in him and his purposes means that we accept that the anguish and uncertainties of life apart from him are all removed and that what seems only painful is in fact God working all things for our good.

Secondly, it must mean that for us to enjoy the mercy of God we must ourselves be merciful. If the harshness of law has been removed from us then it has been removed from all men and women, whether they accept that or not. God was in Christ, reconciling the *world* unto himself! To a self-righteous Israel Jesus said, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' (Matt. 5:7) and Jude wrote that, in the face of incredible weakness in others, 'have mercy on some who are wavering' (Jude 22), since we are ourselves looking forward to the great climax of mercy (Jude 21), when every tear is wiped from our eyes,

¹⁸ Barth, CD. II, 1, p. 373-4.

when death is no more and mourning and crying and pain are no more, for the first things have passed away (Rev. 21:4). For this is the substance of it: by his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3).

- 1 OUT of the depths I cry to Thee,
Lord God! O hear my prayer!
Incline a gracious ear to me,
And bid me not despair:
If Thou rememberest each misdeed,
If each should have its rightful meed,
Lord, who shall stand before Thee?
- 2 'Tis through Thy love alone we gain
The pardon of our sin;
The strictest life is but in vain,
Our works can nothing win;
That none should boast himself of aught,
But own in fear Thy grace hath wrought
What in him seemeth righteous.
- 3 Wherefore my hope is in the Lord,
My works I count but dust,
I build not there, but on His word,
And in His goodness trust.
Up to His care myself I yield,
He is my tower, my rock, my shield,
And for His help I tarry.
- 4 And though it linger till the night
And round again till morn,
My heart shall ne'er mistrust Thy might,
Nor count itself forlorn.
Do thus, O ye of Israel's seed,
Ye of the Spirit born indeed,
Wait for your God's appearing
- 5 Though great our sins and sore our wounds,
And deep and dark our fall,
His helping mercy hath no bounds,
His love surpasseth all.
Our trusty loving Shepherd, He
Who shall at last set Israel free
From all their sin and sorrow.¹⁹

¹⁹ Martin Luther, *The Methodist Hymn Book*, N° 514.

Living in Peace

‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’.

The wish for ‘peace’ is well known. It pre-dates Paul’s expression of it: Jesus told the seventy disciples

Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. (Luke 10:5-6).

However, this seems more than a wish or an idle greeting.¹ Jesus expects that in saying ‘Peace to this house’ something will be truly communicated—or rejected. As early as Genesis 43:23 ‘Peace be with you’ was used as a greeting although, again, the context of the various uses shows that it implied often that the opportunity was being extended to relax or cease being worried. In our own time ‘peace’ is both a Jewish greeting (*shalom*), an Arabic (etc) greeting (*salaam*) and has even figured as a word implying drug induced euphoria. The word is also in common use in liturgical churches where, presumably, those who exchange the *Greeting of peace* are conscious that they are saying far more than ‘hullo in the name of the Lord’.²

So what is the ‘peace’ for which Paul prays? Peace is ultimately the state of wholeness which is known within the Godhead and into which we are drawn and in which we share.

THE PEACE OF GOD

A study of the words translated by peace in the Scriptures leads to the conclusion that peace is well-being, wholeness, health or even rest. In classical Greek, it does not refer primarily to the relationship between persons but rather to a state of being.³ The idea of peace as a relationship between persons is often taken to mean no more than ‘the passionately asserted, emotionally felt and palpable opposite of [war]’.⁴ When used in this way, the notion is basically negative. To have ‘peace with God’ means that we do not have his wrath upon us; to be at peace with one another means that we do not fight each other.

The ideas of wholeness, health or rest have more positive connotations. But even then we cannot fully appreciate the dimensions of peace within the Scriptures; such peace will still be approached within the context of our human experience. Wholeness would be the absence of dislocation, health the absence of illness or whatever and rest the absence of trouble.

What is peace? To that we must observe Paul’s statement in Philippians 4:6-7.

¹ By this is meant that the words used are genuine but have lost their full intent. For example, ‘Goodbye’ originally meant ‘God be with you’, but is hardly used in that way today.

² See *An Australian Prayer Book*, AIO, Sydney, 1978, p 144f (Item 18) and p 154, note 10.

³ For a detailed examination of the word εἰρήνη (*eirene*) and its Hebrew equivalent מוֹשָׁלָם; (*shalom*) see G. Von Rad and W. Foerster, εἰρήνη κτλ in *TDNT* Volume II, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1964, p 400ff. A thorough study is also found in Joseph P Healey and William Classon, ‘Peace’, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 5, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p 206ff.

⁴ Foerster, *TDNT*, p 401.

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And *the peace of God*, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What is meant by the phrase ‘the peace of God’? Does it only mean the peace which comes *from* God or does it also refer to the peace which is within the triune being of God? The phrase ‘the peace of God’ appears nowhere else within the New Testament, although a similar phrase is found in Colossians 3:15, ‘Let *the peace of Christ* rule in your hearts’.

We must surely assume from the context that the peace of God is such as to dispel all anxiety. ‘Do not worry about anything’. To worry is to assume the responsibility for the things of life. The Sermon on the Mount shows this to be a foolish position to take. Matthew 6:25-34 is emphatic.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you--you of little faith. ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

The picture of God in absolute sovereign control forbids worry. But the picture is more complex (not complicated) since the one who has absolute control is the Father, ‘your heavenly Father’. He is the one who knows what you need before you ask, meaning that he does not need to be pestered into responding to our needs (Matt. 6:7-8). The way to pray is to recognise the true state of things and to function within that. Thus,

Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
(Matthew 6:9-10)

The Father’s will is done in heaven. We would understand this to imply that there is total harmony within the Godhead, the Father commanding in love and the Son obeying in love and the Spirit serving in love. Thus Jesus said that the Father loved him before the foundation of the world (Jn 17:25) and that he had glory in the Father’s presence before the foundation of the world (Jn. 17:5). Furthermore, when the Father commands in love there is no distance between the persons: ‘the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing’. The Father and the Son are intimately involved in the same action.

Likewise we can see the Spirit as one with the Father and the Son in the same action. It was the Spirit who was present in the action of creation and who continues in active presence in the application of the purpose of God (Gen. 1:2; 3:8 etc). When the Word becomes flesh, the Spirit is the one who enables him to work in totally harmony with the Father, from his conception to the present exercise of Lordship with a view to the *telos*, the goal of God. In this, the Spirit is called the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20 etc) and the

Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6) and Paul could appeal to the Romans ‘by the love of the Spirit’ (Rom. 15:30).

‘The peace of God’ is, then, the total harmony within the three persons of the Godhead and must, surely, be understood as a feature of their total unity as the one God. It is ‘that peace which God himself possesses or has, the serenity in which he lives ... God himself is not beset with anxieties’.⁵ However, it is probably best not to speak of peace as some thing which God himself ‘possesses or has’ so much as to say that God is ‘the God of peace’ (Phil. 4:9; Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20). That is, peace is not a thing or a substance which God has; peace is the way in which the three persons of the Trinity function in their unity.

Paul has already given an expression of this in Philippians 2. The exhortation to unity of thought and action in the church derives from the unity of thought and action between God and Christ Jesus.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness.
 And being found in human form,
⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death
 — even death on a cross.
⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:5-11).

The wording of verse 6 in the *NRSV* (and the *RSV*) is probably not helpful. As it stands it seems to imply that *though* he was in the form of God, Jesus made a concession in refusing to exploit his status.⁶ On the contrary, ‘being in the form of God’, far from making a concession, he did what was totally ‘natural’ in the circumstances. The Father had commanded and he ‘became obedient unto death’ (vs. 8). The mutuality of the action is seen further in verses 9 and 11. God ‘highly exalted him’ with the result that, in the recognition of his lordship, God the Father is glorified. This is consistent with the prayer of Jesus in John 17:1, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you’.

Peace is, therefore, seen most clearly in God himself. Each person knows his own position and gladly commands or submits in love. ‘The peace of Christ’ (Col. 3:15) must, then, be the wonderful serenity which flows from free submission and absolute willingness to let the Father rule in all things.

⁵ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, NIGTC, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991, p 496.

⁶ O’Brien, *Philippians*, p 214: ‘[This clause] ought not to be rendered as a *concessive* clause (‘who *though* he was in the form of God’), but as causal: ‘precisely *because* he was in the form of God he reckoned equality with God not as a matter of getting but of giving’.

CREATION AND REDEMPTION

When responding to the divisions within the Corinthian church, Paul finally came to the matter of the disorder which seems to have been a feature of their gatherings. Each person 'did his or her own thing', so that there was no evident harmony, especially as this related to speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:23) and the activities of those claiming to be prophets (1 Cor. 14:26-32). Paul's conclusion (1 Cor. 14:40) is that 'all things should be done decently and in order'. The reason for this is simple: 'God is a God not of disorder but of peace' (1 Cor. 14:33). Paul's reasoning is that the character of God ought to be seen in the people of God. That is what is implied by Paul saying that 'the fruit of the Spirit is ...peace'. Where the Spirit of God is the character of God will be evident in those who are in 'the new man, created according to the likeness of God' (Eph. 4:24).

Now if God is the God of peace, then we would expect to see all his works reveal that. This is so at creation. The finished creation was 'very good', that is, it was an harmonious entity which served the creator's purpose. The creation was not 'perfect' in the sense of being complete. Creation was always 'goal directed'.⁷ The harmony was dynamic as creation, man included, moved forward in the presence of God.

Sin, in contrast, dislocated the elements of creation. The result of the Fall is seen in the inability of creation to function in the harmony, the peace of God.

The harmonious created order of Genesis 2 is fractured by the fall, resulting in a reversed order in Genesis 3. As established in Genesis 2:18-25, the original order of relationships was God, the man, the woman, and the animals. With a reversal of that order, chapter 3 begins. The animal world, in the shape of the serpent, takes the lead by persuasively inducing the woman to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and thus to become 'like God' (v. 5). That the serpent's suggestion is no idle boast is confirmed by God himself in verse 22: 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.' In verses 6-7 the woman and then the man eat the fruit. In verses 14-19 God pronounced judgment on the trio in a reverse of the established order: on the serpent, on the woman, and then on the man. The reversed order strongly suggests that sin is not merely a moral lapse; it is a deliberate human assault upon the established order of creation.⁸

Another way of seeing the peace of God expressed in the creation is by looking at the Sabbath. Coming after six days of activity, the Sabbath is the day in which all creation was intended to function. The Sabbath was not primarily the day on which creation rested but that in which God rested. On the seventh day, God is secure that his work of creation is totally adequate for his purpose. The day is holy (*hallowed*) because it is God's day and everything that participates in it must recognise his presence. Later, the seventh days are called by God 'my sabbaths' (Ex 31:13; Lev. 19:3 etc) and the Israelite observance was

... a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. (Ex. 31:17).

The gift of the sabbath to Israel (and the obligation to observe it) was a statement of the true nature of creation and so of Israel's and the world's hope. The first account of the commandments highlights that sabbath observance by Israel is a reflection of creation and its purpose (Ex. 20: 8-11) and the second that redemption from Egypt continues that. Specifically, Exodus 31:17 (above) says that the sabbath with its prescriptions and

⁷ See William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order - Biblical Eschatology in Focus*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1994, pp 20-22.

⁸ Dumbrell, *Search for Order*, p. 26f.

proscriptions is 'a sign forever *between me and the people of Israel*'. Later Jewish preoccupation with the things of the Law focussed on three main areas, food laws, circumcision and sabbath observance. These were regarded as the 'boundary markers' of Israel and so as the requirements for those outside Israel who wanted to share the blessings of Abraham. As touching sabbath observance and dietary laws Paul wrote to the Romans, who were apparently experiencing a Jew-Gentile clash, that

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. (Rom. 14:5-6).

His reason is that 'the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'. The kingdom of God is not found in Israel and its observances (though Israel with its observances may well be in the kingdom of God); righteousness peace and joy have already come in the Holy Spirit. The peace of creation, of the true sabbath, has now come to the new creation in Christ.

Of course, Israel ought to have seen this. Her very being was determined by God's intention to restore creation. This intention was first stated in Genesis 12:1-3 where the disharmony in creation, as finally expressed among the nations in Genesis 11:1-9, is to be removed. That is why the word 'peace' (*shalom*) becomes so significant within Israel. Peace means well-being, salvation. It implies prosperity and not judgment. As God's priestly nation, Israel is informed that *shalom* comes through living consistently with God's choice and call.

If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, ⁴I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. ⁵Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land. ⁶And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land. (Lev. 26:3-6).

It was plain that peace always came from God; it was his gift. 'The LORD is peace' (Judges 6:24). The high priest was to bless Israel with the words,

The LORD bless you and keep you;
²⁵the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
²⁶the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you *peace*. (Num 6:24-26).

The climax of Israel's history came in the reign of Solomon. There all Israel was seen as the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham. He was promised descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand of the sea (Gen. 15:5; 22:17) and so it was under Solomon.

Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. (1 Kings 4:20).

The picture is of Israel, initially at least, living in the *shalom* of God, prosperous under his generous hand —

During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees. (1 Kings 4:25).

This situation was emphasised by noting the name of Israel's king. David named him Solomon and attributed the name to an association with the promise of God.

See, a son shall be born to you; he shall be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. ¹⁰He shall build a house for my name. He shall be a son to me, and I will be a father to him, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever. (1 Chron 22:9-10).

Then there was the city. Jerusalem is a name with uncertain origins. Melchizedek was king of Salem⁹ and Hebrews 7:2 identifies him, therefore, as 'king of peace'. This would fit with the traditional view that the name Jerusalem means 'city of peace'. With the Temple built in the city of peace by the king whose name is associated with God's promise of peace, prosperity and salvation were seen and enjoyed.

This was how the false prophets interpreted history, too. In spite of the corruption within the nation and the warnings of the judgment of God in the books of the Law, they persisted in treating 'the wound of my people carelessly, saying "Peace, peace" when there is no peace' (Jer. 6:14; cf. Ezek. 13:16). For them, peace was a political peace in the face of the threat of invasion. Isaiah lamented that Israel had rejected the true peace.

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the LORD your God, who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the way you should go. ¹⁸O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your *prosperity/shalom* would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea; (Isaiah 48:17-18).

The genuine prophets constantly argued that mercy comes in judgment (see Hab. 3:2) and therefore their word of peace was expressed in strong terms. There can only be peace/salvation/prosperity/well-being when God grants it to those who return to him in humility and contriteness. But for the wicked there can be no peace, only continuing dislocation and trouble (Isaiah 57:15-21).

With this in mind, the genuine prophets looked forward to the day when *shalom* would be restored. This peace involved a massive transformation, not only of Israel but of all things. While this hope was more easily expressed after the horrific judgments of 597 and 586BC, the promise was always there. For example, Isaiah 2:2-4 anticipated the restoration of harmony among the nations as the nations came to learn from a renewed Israel. The kingdom of David will be established again:

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace*. ⁷His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be *endless peace* for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:6-7).

This will be the restoration of the whole creation (see Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:17-25). As such it means that Israel will be redeemed and her *shalom* restored in abundance. Thus:

⁹ The identification of Jerusalem with Salem is uncertain, see W. S. Lasor, 'Jerusalem' in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982, Vol. 2, p 1000. It matters little whether either Solomon or Jerusalem *literally* mean 'peace' or not. It is sufficient that that was how the names were understood in popular parlance.

For thus says the LORD: I will extend *prosperity/shalom* to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. (Isaiah 66:12).

In the same way Micah added to the words of Isaiah 2:2-4 the words:

but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:4).

The future hope of Israel and so of the world is expressed in terms of the great peace which Israel had known under Solomon.

PEACE AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Within the New Testament as well as the Old there is the use of peace in ways which imply no more than silence. For example, Jesus 'held his peace' (Matt. 26:63 AV). It also implied lack of division among men and women (Luke 12:51), as Jesus warned that his presence would bring polarisation, to the point where violence would occur (Matt. 10:34). At this point the way the meaning of the word peace can slide from its ordinary meaning into the 'religious' meaning already expressed in the Old Testament is demonstrated. Of course Jesus did come to bring peace, but not simply as political tranquility (however localised). For many the presence of the Prince of Peace will involve suffering and even death.

In Luke 1:76-79 Zechariah prophesies at the birth of his son John and defines his future activity.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The context (especially the first part of the 'Song' verses 68-75) demands that we see John's future ministry as being in line with all that God has done in the past in the salvation of Israel. God will again save his people and that salvation will be through the forgiveness of sins. As such, this salvation will bring peace, the full salvation so long anticipated.

The angelic worship in Luke 2:14, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and *on earth peace* among those whom he favors!' makes immediate sense. However the last phrase is translated, the peace referred to is seen as the climax of the plan of God to restore his people and to bring salvation to the nations. This is precisely what Simeon recognised:

Master, now you are dismissing your servant *in peace*, according to your word;
³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. (Luke 2:29-32).

Simeon is not only saying that he can now die contented but that he can die in the promised salvation which has come for Israel and the nations.

There is a sad contrast to this in the cry of the crowds when Jesus entered Jerusalem on 'Palm Sunday'. There was no doubt a considerable degree of religious fervour among the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the Passover. They were already singing psalms of salvation (which, to many, had strong political and nationalistic connotations,

possibly demonstrated in the response of the Pharisees; cf. also Zech. 9:9ff), among them Psalm 118 (see verses 21 to 27). Luke describes the occasion.

As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen,³⁸ saying,

‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!’

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’ ⁴⁰He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.’

⁴¹As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴²saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

⁴³Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.’ (Luke 19:37-44).

Their cry, ‘peace in heaven’, stands in contrast to the angels’ song of ‘peace on earth’. The response of Jesus to this jubilation is his observation that they have, in fact, not recognised the day of their visitation from God. Peace, *shalom*, has come on earth in the Prince of Peace; their salvation is present, but they do not recognise him.

On the other hand, there are those who are ‘sons of peace’, as in Luke 10:5-6. They are no doubt those like Simeon and Anna who are looking for the comfort of Jerusalem (Isaiah 66:13; cf. Luke 2:25, 38) and like Joseph,

a good and righteous man ... who, though a member of the council,⁵¹ had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. (Luke 23:50-51).

These are, surely, the ‘peacemakers’ who will be called ‘sons of God’ (Matt. 5:9). They are men and women who know the blessings of the covenant of peace (cf. Isaiah 54, esp. vs. 10; Ezek. 34:23-25 and 37:26).

Jesus promised peace for the disciples; it is his gift.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:27).

The significant feature of this peace is that it is associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit (see verse 26). His peace is distinctly different from the peace which the world gives. In fact the peace which the world *gives* was the peace which the world *imposed*. The peace of Rome was won by the sword. Neither is the peace which Jesus gives mere absence of hostility; indeed it is often the opposite.

If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world — therefore the world hates you. (John 15:18-19).

But there is an element which conditions this.

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world! (John 16:33).

The peace which Jesus gives was won by the victory of the cross. He conquers the world by absorbing into himself all the hatred and hostility, so that the hatred of the world is ultimately ineffective. Later, Peter told Cornelius,

You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ — he is Lord of all. (Acts 10:36).

The promised *shalom* has come in Christ. This was seen first in the actions of Jesus during his earthly ministry.

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (Acts 10:38).

Twice the actions of Jesus were accompanied by the command to ‘go in peace’. In Mark 5:34 and Luke 8:48 the command was given to the woman with the haemorrhage. She had been ritually unclean through her condition and now she was able to enter fully into the worship of Israel. In Luke 7:50 the woman who came to Jesus and washed his feet with her tears was told to go in peace. Her faith had brought her forgiveness, the essential feature of the new covenant (Jer. 31:34).

In the post-Pentecost church peace had come. ‘We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 5:1). This means that men and women have been reconciled to God (see Col. 1:21-22). This reconciliation is through the cross of Christ and has resulted in the renewal of creation, at least as far as believers are concerned.

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

This reconciliation is not without its opposition. Peter warned his readers to be sober and watchful since their adversary the devil was prowling around intending to destroy them (1 Pet. 5:8). The picture in revelation 12 is of the red dragon, the devil and Satan, being violent in his hatred of the children of ‘the woman’ (see Rev. 12:13-17). They do of course overcome him by ‘the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony’ (Rev. 12:11) but it may involve them losing their lives (cf. Rev. 6:11). However, the hope to which they move is expressed by Paul in Rom. 16:25., ‘The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under *your* feet’.

Reconciliation with God through the removal of guilt is, of course, the gift to Israel (see Jer. 31:31-34; 50:20). When speaking of the law’s fulfilment, Paul wrote that ‘to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and *peace*’ (Rom. 8:6). What needed to be stressed within the New Testament is the fact that this peace was always intended for all that nations, Israel included.

There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. (Rom. 2:9-10).

When dealing with the friction between Jews and Gentiles in Romans, Paul pointed to the true nature of the kingdom: It is not (as we have seen) founded in Jewish dietary

regulations but in ‘righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14:17). The obvious conclusions to that is:

Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. ²⁰Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. (Rom 14:19-20).

In the letter to the Ephesians the matter the unity of Jew and Gentile is given full treatment.

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’ — a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands — ¹²remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. (Eph 2:11-18).

‘He is our peace’ reminds us of Judges 6:24, ‘The LORD is peace’. Peace has come because both Jews and gentiles are in the new man, the new Adam (2:15). Their unity is not a contrived thing; it is an ontological unity, because of the unity of the Godhead. Hence they are urged to

[Make] every effort to *maintain* the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of *peace*. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all’. (Eph. 4:3-6)

In his closing greeting to the Ephesians, Paul prayed, ‘Peace be to all the brothers/the whole community’ (6:23).

Living in peace, then, is living in the reality of the *shalom* which has come in Christ to us all. It is seeing that the Father has reconciled us to himself and so to each other and refusing to allow divisions to destroy the work of God. As far as it lies in our power, then, we must live peaceably with all (Rom. 12:18). As in Hebrews 12:14, we should ‘pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord’.

But, to return to the matter we raised at the beginning, to live in peace with God means living in the full blessing of the salvation which has been given to us. This salvation has involved us being brought back to the Father through the Son. In Jesus Christ we are now sons of God through faith (Gal. 3:26). This means that we now participate in the intimacy of the Godhead. True hierarchy is now our possession and if the submission of the Son was ‘the peace of Christ’ then we must simply live in that, let it rule in our hearts. While peace is a far bigger blessing than mere lack of anxiety, it also must, and does, result in that. As *the* Son knew no anxiety, neither ought we. The details of this we saw in the Sermon on the Mount and the words of Philippians 4:6-7 re-enforce it for us (as do the whole of Phil 4:8-20 as well).

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Living in Faith

It is a fundamental principle of the New Testament that salvation (with all the implications of the *shalom* we examined in the previous study) is ‘by faith from first to last’ (Rom. 1:17 *NIV*). The major area of disagreement within the early church was that which arose when people attempted to impose ‘law’ on the believers in order to complete the salvation which faith had begun. In common parlance, ‘faith’ is a particularly religious word, conveying some sort of idea either of a set of facts to which one has some sort of allegiance or of a general feeling of ‘belief’ especially without clear evidence controlling the situation.¹ In more religious settings, faith is understood as being at or between the extremes of an undoubting certainty (intensity) that God will do certain things on the one hand and an intellectual acceptance of ‘divine truth’ on the other. This latter has been summed up in the words of Thomas Aquinas: Faith is the act of the intellect when it assents to divine truth under the influence of the will moved by God through grace.²

What, then, is ‘faith’? At the outset it must be said that the word ‘faith’ is the noun which corresponds to the verb ‘believe’. This actually tells us very little, since we then must ask what does it mean to believe. There is a famous little section in Bo Giertz’s book, *The Hammer of God*. In it, a young assistant Lutheran pastor arrives in his new appointment, only to be confronted by the old rector:

Fridfeldt seated himself on the sofa. He felt that he must not put off confessing where he stood. This strange old man with his brandy and his soldiers should at least learn what kind of assistant he had gotten.

‘I just want you to know from the beginning, sir, that I am a believer,’ he said. His voice was a bit harsh. He saw a gleam in the old man’s eyes which he could not quite interpret. Was approval indicated, or did he have something up his sleeve?

The rector put the lamp back on the table, puffed at his pipe, and looked at the young man a moment before he spoke.

‘So you are a believer, I’m glad to hear that. What do you believe in?’

Fridfeldt stared dumbfounded at his superior. Was he joking with him?

‘But, sir, I am simply saying that I am a believer.’

‘Yes, I hear that, my boy. But what is it that you believe in?’ Fridfeldt was almost speechless. ‘But don’t you know, sir, what it means to be a believer?’

‘That is a word which can stand for things that differ greatly, my boy. I ask only what it is that you believe in.’

‘In Jesus, of course,’ answered Fridfeldt, raising his voice. ‘I mean—I mean that I have given Him my heart.’

¹ See Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology, An Introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, p 125f. where he summarises Kant’s argument, saying that ‘faith (*Glaube*) is basically a belief which is held on grounds that are subjectively adequate, but objectively inadequate. Faith is thus seen as a firm commitment to a belief which is not adequately justified on the basis of the evidence available’.

² *Summa Theologica II.II.q2.a.9*, quoted in Joseph P. Healey, ‘Faith’, in D. N. Freedman (Ed), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 2, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p 744. However, Aquinas also described faith as agreeing with the work of God: ‘Not that righteousness is merited through faith, but rather the very act of believing is itself the first act of righteousness that God works in someone. From the fact that he believes in God who makes righteous, he submits himself to God’s righteousness and thus receives its effects.’ (Commentary on Romans, 4:5, quoted in F. Martin, ‘Faith, Gift of’ in Burgess and McGee (Eds), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1988, p 300.

The older man's face became suddenly as solemn as the grave. 'Do you consider *that* something to give Him?'

By this time, Fridfeldt was almost in tears. 'But sir, if you do not give your heart to Jesus, you cannot be saved.' 'You are right, my boy. And it is just as true that, if you think you are saved because you give Jesus your heart, you will not be saved. You see, my boy,' he continued reassuringly, as he continued to look at the young pastor's face, in which uncertainty and resentment were shown in a struggle for the upper hand, 'You see, my boy, it is *one thing* to choose Jesus as one's Lord and Savior, to give Him one's heart and commit oneself to Him, and that He now accepts one into His little flock; it is *a very different* thing to believe on Him as a Redeemer of sinners, of whom one is chief. One does not choose a Redeemer for oneself, you understand, nor give one's heart to Him. The heart is a rusty old can on a junk heap. A fine birthday gift, indeed! But a wonderful Lord passes by, and has mercy on the wretched tin can, sticks His walking cane through it and rescues it from the junk pile and takes it home with Him. That is how it is.'³

Giertz focuses on one significant aspect of the biblical presentation, namely faith as an accepting response to all that God has done in Christ. But the words faith and believe, as they appear in the Scriptures convey a far richer picture.

FAITH AND ISRAEL

Hebrews chapter eleven is a definitive statement of what has always been true in history; God has always had men and women of faith. The reason for the chapter is seen in Hebrews 10:39

But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.

The readers are tempted to shrink back from the risk associated with faith in Christ. But they are nonetheless those who are in the community of faith and so are shown to stand at the end of the long line which began with Abel.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.² Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. (Heb 11:1-3).

It has been said that 'faith is described rather than defined in the Hebrew Bible'⁴ and I suggest that the same applies here. This statement is not so much a definition as a description of what faith does. Faith makes the things hoped for (that is, the things which God has promised) *substantial* and has clear evidence of things which, by nature of the case, are unseen. Faith, as it were, taps into the reality of all that God is about. This is what gave the ancestors their place in the great testimony of Scripture. And, of course, the testimony of Scripture to creation being by the utterance of God is only perceived by faith. There is no other evidence than God's own speech to us.

The list of men and women of faith which follows starts with Abel. 'By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's.' The story in Genesis 4 does not indicate why Abel's sacrifice was more acceptable, but Jesus' comments in Matthew 23

³ Bo Giertz, *The Hammer of God*, Augsburg Press, Minneapolis, 1960, p 146f.

⁴ Healey, 'Faith', p. 745. The description approach is adopted by Paul Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews (NIGTC)*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1993, p 566f.

and Luke 11 may shed some light on the subject. Luke 11:50-51 indicates that Abel was killed because he was a prophet. This would mean that he was a man who, to use Jeremiah's words, 'stood in the council of the Lord so as to see and to hear his word' (Jer. 23:18), for the issue for any prophet was whether or not what he or she said was truly 'the word of the Lord'. If, then, Abel was a man of faith, we would ask 'faith in what?' or 'in whom?' The answer would be that Abel's faith was his response to what God had said.

Hebrews then turns to Enoch, observing that he was a man who did not see death and that he had pleased God. Enoch's 'pleasing God' is related to the principle that

... without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Heb 11:6).

Literally, 'must believe that he exists' is 'must believe that he is'. Everywhere in Hebrews, as in the rest of the Scriptures, the existence of God is simply assumed. It is unlikely that his existence is part of the issue of faith, not because God can be seen but because

in the early Christian period, atheism, in our sense, was not an option. 'Atheists' were either Epicureans who denied the gods' providence, but not their existence, or Jews and Christians who worshipped their own God, while denying everybody else's.⁵

'That he is' implies his active presence and 'that he rewards those who seek him' indicates that he is present in moral power. He will do what he has said he will do. Enoch stands in contrast to those described in Romans 1:18ff. who, knowing God's eternal power and deity, suppress what they know *by wickedness*. In other words, they do not only know of God's existence, but of his moral being and they choose to suppress *that* knowledge. Enoch is representative of those who submit to the revelation which God has given. The same is true of Noah, he walked with God (Gen 6:9). God warned him what would happen and Noah built the ark.

Abraham is given extended treatment in Hebrews 11:8-12 (& 17-18).

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. ¹²Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, 'as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.'

The faith of Abraham was expressed in his obedience to the call of God. Stephen, in Acts 7:2f, told his judges that 'the God of glory appeared to our ancestor Abraham... and said to him...'. The faith of Abraham was not self-generated; God met him and spoke to him and Abraham responded appropriately. But the truth of the matter was that Abraham's faith was humanly illogical. He was old, his wife was old and unable to bear children and when he left Ur he 'set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going'. Specifically, his faith was in the 'faithfulness' of the one who had spoken to him (verse 11). Verses 17-18 build on this. God had promised to make

⁵ Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Penguin, London, 1986, p 30. The matter of 'practical atheism' is quite different; when the psalmist says 'The fool has said in his heart there is no God' (Ps. 14:1a) he means that he or she does not count God as a factor when deciding on a course of behaviour (Ps. 14:1b, 3ff).

a great nation from Abraham, through Isaac. Yet God told Abraham to sacrifice his son. The apparent illogicality of this command was countered by Abraham's dependence on the faithfulness of God to his promise. This is similar to Paul's assertion that 'the one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it' (1 Thess. 5:24).

Within the Old Testament, and there are many other examples of faith given in Hebrews 11, faith is actually faithfulness to the God who has spoken. For that reason, faith and obedience belong together. Plainly there is an intellectual element, but faith is bigger than this: knowing what God has said and promised men and women obey, in spite of whatever circumstances may seem to call the logic of that into question.

What does it mean when Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham 'believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness'? Normally, righteousness is defined in terms of moral conduct.⁶ It is the person who does right who is reckoned as righteous. Here it is Abraham's faith, his belief in the promise of God concerning his descendants, which is counted as sufficient for him to be regarded as righteous. Later he is described as chosen to 'do righteousness' (Gen. 18:19).

In the Old Testament, righteousness, as it relates to human beings, has to do with right standing and consequent right behaviour within the covenant community.⁷ The first two uses of the word in the Bible are concerning Noah (who we have seen was a man of faith).⁸

These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. (Gen 6:9)

Then the LORD said to Noah, Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation. (Gen 7:1)

As it relates to God, righteousness describes God's total consistency with his own character and purpose and so with the faithful execution of that purpose.⁹ Naturally, if God is righteous then he would expect to see his righteousness expressed within his creation. Assuming that creation came into being in covenant with God¹⁰ then we would understand that Adam is the leader of the covenant community of creation. As such we would expect to see righteous behaviour, that is, behaviour which is consistent with the purposes which God has for the creation. Within the limits of Genesis 1-2, surely that is what we do see. Adam lives in intimacy with God and at one with his purposes. He and God are one (cf. John 10:30). We may assume that he had heard the word of God and lived consistently with that. His behaviour was righteous and so, therefore, was he. However, it is obvious that Adam's behaviour did not initiate the covenant relationship, it only expressed it.

⁶ Gordon J Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word, Milton Keynes, 1987, p 330.

⁷ See N. T. Wright, 'Righteousness' in Ferguson and Wright, *New Dictionary of Theology*, IVP, Leicester, 1988, p 590ff.

⁸ Ellingworth points out that 'the author assumes righteousness, even here righteousness by faith, as a basic element in Christian belief; yet the implied contrast is not, as in Paul, with works-righteousness but with sin' (*Hebrews*, p 580).

⁹ N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Lion, Oxford, 1997 *passim*. Wright says that God's righteousness relates to his 'saving activity' (p 103) but says little regarding what righteousness may mean prior to the effects of sin within creation.

¹⁰ This is a big topic and one of great significance though not given sufficient attention as the implications are momentous. See Geoffrey Bingham, *Love's Most Glorious Covenant*, Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 1997; William Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984.

The Fall of Man brought devastating effects on humanity and the whole creation. Yet, what it did not do was alter the existence of a covenant community. The placing of a curse on creation in Genesis 3:14-19 is a covenant response by God which in no way allows that the community is finished. On the contrary, within the curse on the serpent is the promise that the offspring of the woman will continue in opposition to the covenant rejecting offspring of the serpent.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel. (Gen 3:15)

Abel, then Seth, in whose time 'people began to invoke the name of the LORD' (Gen 4:26), Enoch who walked with God (Gen. 5:24) were all in the line of the offspring of 'the woman'.

Noah is specifically one in that line who is expected to bring blessing to the cursed creation (Gen 5:29). His righteousness is his blameless behaviour over against the sin of the world, but his blameless behaviour is the result of his membership in the covenant community. This is significant in that the language used of Noah and the covenant is that God will establish or confirm with Noah the covenant which he had with creation (so Gen. 9:9 etc).

From Noah comes Abraham. It is probably irrelevant whether the descent is literal and physical; it is certainly spiritual, a point which is later forcefully applied to the descendants of Abraham in Galatians 3:6-9, 27). As we saw, Abraham's relationship with God was based on God's initiating call. At that time Abraham was an idolater (Josh. 24:2) a point exemplified in the practices of his relatives (Nahor, the father of Laban, was Abram's brother) who maintained the worship of family gods (Gen. 31:19-35). With a view to the restoration of the blessing to the creation, Abraham was called into community with God. In other words, he knew God, he heard God speak to him and he responded. The declaration that he 'believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness' (Gen 15:6) took place before the confirmatory covenant ceremony took place (Gen. 15:7-21). That covenant ceremony was within the relationship which had already been established with Abraham.

The same was true for Israel the nation. Their formation as a nation with all the privileges which attended that had nothing to do with their behaviour (which was generally appalling in the light of their redemption). God formed them as a nation because of his prior covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that is, his formal declaration that he would remove the covenant curse on the creation (Ex. 2:24). The obligations laid on Israel were *because* they were redeemed. Obedience was the way Israel was to express her identity as the covenant people of God.

The notion of justification by faith as we have understood it has little place at this point in the story. Actually a better phrase would be 'justification by grace through faith', and here it would mean that God has chosen this people for his own, in order to fulfil his purposes for the whole creation, and all they can do is accept that fact and live out the reality and the amazing privilege which has now become theirs. The history of Israel as it is told in the Old Testament is the history of the people for whom the covenant is a present reality, even if their own refusal to submit to the implications of it are regularly the cause of the curse provisions being applied.

The climax of Israel's blessings came under David and Solomon. David was the anointed one (that is, the *Messiah*, 1 Sam. 16:13; Ps. 2:2) and he was the one through whom God would give victory to Israel. The famous story of David and Goliath demonstrates this. Israel was completely helpless in the face of the Philistine opposition and David, the anointed one, won the victory over all the enemy. All Israel could do was accept the fact of that victory. Their Messiah was Israel at that point. The victory was vicarious but victory nonetheless. Israel may have even continued to smart under the recollection of the failures against their enemies, but that could not alter the fact of their victory, which was of course the victory of God. God had triumphed in the Messiah of Israel.

Yet that victory was not the fulfilment of the goal of God. It could only be at best an anticipation of the restoration of blessing to the creation (as in Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25 etc) and, for those in Israel who chose to presume on their privilege, at worst a taunting reminder (cf John 8:32-33 contrasted with the eager question, 'Are you the Messiah?', see John 1:19f etc).

The victory of God would come through (and not because of) a purified Israel. That victory had not come; even though Israel was in their own land they were still in bondage. Far from the nations being drawn to Israel for blessing, as anticipated by Isaiah (Isa. 2:2-4), the nations had come as conquerors.

JESUS AND THE VICTORY OF GOD¹¹

The message of the New Testament is not really one about being justified by faith. It concerns the fact that sin and death have been conquered in the death and resurrection of Jesus, Israel's Messiah. All that Israel had anticipated was fulfilled in him. Paul's discussions in the synagogues were on exactly this point.

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, ³explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.' (Acts 17:2-3)

Indeed, in proclaiming the Messiah, Paul was conscious that the Messiah himself was speaking through him. Thus, when the Jews generally rejected his message of Jesus' Messiahship he turned to the Gentiles, explaining his action in terms of what the Servant of the LORD would do in Isaiah 49:6 (see Acts 13:42-48). His role was that of the Servant who was first Jesus the Messiah and then those in the Messiah (and so, ironically, in Israel). When he wrote to the Corinthians he asserted that 'Messiah is speaking in me' (2 Cor. 13:3). To both Jews and Gentiles the early church proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection. The message was that grace was given in 'Messiah Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Messiah Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Tim. 1:9-10). This the triumph of God and the it seen as the Messiah brings it to light through the gospel, of which Paul is 'a herald and apostle and a teacher' (vs. 11). But the great gospeller is Jesus. He is the one who proclaims the victory of God which God has won in him and, therefore, the forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:38). This was Paul's message to the Corinthians. When expounding the reality of the resurrection he concludes:

¹¹ This is the title of N. T. Wright's book (SPCK, London, 1996).

What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’

⁵⁵Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus [the] Messiah. (1 Cor. 15:50-57).

I have chosen to translate the word Christ as Messiah¹² principally because the word Christ, with which we are so familiar, is basically meaningless without its Jewish background. When, earlier, specifying his focus in preaching, Paul wrote that he wanted to ‘know nothing except Jesus the Jewish Messiah and him crucified’ (1 Cor. 2:2). The plan of God had always been to reach the nations through Israel and Paul never lost sight of that. Gentiles cannot know ‘salvation’ apart from what God did through Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. More than that, the Messiah of the Jews is Adam at last. In him the restoration of all creation takes place. If anyone is in the Messiah, he is a new (or, renewed) creation (2 Cor. 5:17), so that as in the first Adam all die, in the Messiah all are made alive (1 Cor. 15:22).

This is the point in Ephesians 2:11-22. Jews and Gentiles, once separated by the law are now reconciled to each other and to God through the death of the Messiah, who has replaced Israel and the Gentiles with a new humanity in himself.

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’ — a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands — ¹²remember that you were at that time without the Messiah, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in the Messiah Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah.

¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with the Messiah Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Of course the title ‘Christ’ will remain, but it is helpful to understand that it always carries the understanding of the method of God in history to save the world.

¹² Actually ‘Christ’ is only a transliteration of the Greek word *Christos*, which means ‘anointed’ and the word ‘Messiah’ is the Hebrew with the same meaning. Were the word ‘Messiah’ to be as familiar as ‘Christ’ as a title for Jesus we would no doubt have to make the point another way. The word ‘anointed’ does not seem to carry the same connotations as ‘Messiah’.

How does anyone, Jew or Gentile, come to an experiential knowledge of this salvation? The answer is simply, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household' (Acts 16:31). Of course the Lordship of Jesus is through his resurrection, but the meaning is simple: believe in him and in what he has done. He has been raised from the dead, having died for the sins of the whole world (the cause of the curse on creation), so now if anyone believes in him they know forgiveness of all their sins and are sharers in his resurrection life.

But what does it mean to *believe* in him? Is that something which you do? The answer is a resounding 'No!' While there is a strong sense of appeal to unbelievers in the New Testament, the appeal basically comes not from the preacher but from God.

... if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we [preachers/apostles?¹³] might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

God made Messiah/Christ to be sin because he was in Messiah/Christ reconciling the world to himself. So anything the preacher says is effective because God makes his appeal through them. But the reconciliation has already taken place. The war *is* over.

Another way of saying this is in Acts 13 where, as I indicated earlier, Paul identifies his role of taking the message of the resurrection(13:30-39) with that of the Servant of Isaiah 49:6 (13:47). The conclusion is that

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. (Acts 13:48)

This is the same as we saw with all those in the covenant community in the Old Testament. They were not there as a result of any action (including 'believing') of their own. They were there totally because the initiative and the action were God's. Believing could only ever be a recognition of what God had done. That is why Paul could say that both Jews and Gentiles have been saved by grace through faith, with even the faith being a gift, because we are his workmanship, a new creation in Messiah Jesus with a view to the doing of good works which God had always intended to be done by his covenant community (Eph. 2:8-10).

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

There is a problem within the New Testament Churches which may be, in principle, similar to a problem faced by Christians today, but certainly in detail it is quite unique. It was the problem raised by the insistence that Gentile believers must submit to the Torah of Israel, in particular, for males, to circumcision.¹⁴ As household responses were understood as normal (see Acts 16:31; 1 Cor. 1:16), it was to the males as heads of the households that

¹³ See N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 104f.

¹⁴ A great deal of attention was given to this topic in the 1997 studies on 'Jews, Gentiles and the People of God'. It is not possible to go over that material again here.

this demand was no doubt directed. But it was this very demand that aroused the fierce reaction of Paul. It is true that salvation comes through the Jewish Messiah, but that does not mean that one must become a Jew in order to be saved. When Jesus told the Samaritan woman that 'salvation is from the Jews' (John 4:22), he was speaking of the historical outworking of the plan of God. Indeed, he insisted that 'neither on this mountain *nor in Jerusalem*' will you worship the Father (John 4:21). The role of Israel as custodian of the revelation of God is finished. So Matthew 21:33-44.

Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ³⁴When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? ⁴¹They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.' ⁴²Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"?

⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

Israel, by killing the Son, would have the kingdom of God taken away from them and it would be given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. So a return to the distinctive elements of Judaism is a return to a framework which has been brought to an end. The great debate of Acts 15 confirmed this.

The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. ⁷After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. ⁸And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; ⁹and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. ¹⁰Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.' (Acts 15:6-11).

This is the issue being faced by the Galatians. They began by faith, but by returning to law, that is, to circumcision (Gal. 2:3; 5:1-6) and Jewish dietary regulations (Gal. 2:11-12), they were in fact returning to something which was never intended to have this role. Those laws were the way Israel was expected to demonstrate what God had done in calling her and giving her that role; they were not the way others were to come into the blessings which were to come through Israel's Messiah any more than they were the way Israel was to come into those blessings. The way was always and only by faith. Hard as it may be, the Jewish believers had to recognise that there was no longer any place for the old distinctions; in the Messiah the old things have passed away, the new has come.

LIVING IN FAITH

If the problems in the New Testament churches are not directly ours, we must still see ourselves as men and women who come to the Messiah by faith. The way we describe our present situation may lead us beyond the biblical language, but the biblical constraints will still be there. Put another way, the New Testament used language appropriate to the issues of the time. We may not face those same issues, so simply quoting texts at each other may not be of great help in the long run (except in so far as God may graciously act through our weakness). Our task is to understand the underlying principles of the scriptures and to express them in terms appropriate to today. Paul's language about law reflected one situation; how would he have dealt with our situation, since we are not being pressured to have our males circumcised as marks of our salvation etc?

Perhaps this is why theologians have such a weighty responsibility. They/we are the teachers who are responsible to understand the Scriptures and to expound them (as distinct from merely exegeting them) to men and women today.

So what does it mean for us to live by faith? Well, in principle it must mean for us what it meant for the New Testament church. And that principle is that God has always required faith from men and women; more, that faith is 'natural' when God has removed our guilt and created a dynamic community in his Son. This is what it means to be a new creation. Living by faith does not just refer to living without an income. Unbelievers may do that and just count themselves 'lucky'. Living by faith means *living* by faith. It is a recognition that God himself has come to us and made us his own and that we are in him and he in us. Karl Barth said that 'Faith is the special event that is constitutive for ... The Christian ... existence'.¹⁵ By calling faith an 'event' he means that faith is not something you have, it is God's action of apprehending us and setting us free.

What happens in the event of faith is that the Word of God frees one man among many for faith itself. This is the motivation of faith; something is 'moved,' and something really 'takes' place. By God's Word, together with the life-giving power and the unique sovereignty of the Spirit, one man among many is permitted to exist continually as a free man. He is freed to affirm this Word as something not only thoroughly comforting and helpful, but also binding and indisputably valid for the world, the community, and finally for himself. He is freed to put his whole joyful trust in this Word and to become unreservedly obedient to what this announcement of God himself expresses about his love for the world, his people, and also for the theologian. No one can take such action by his own power. A man can do this only when he is overcome by God's Word and its Spirit of power; when he is resurrected and recreated by it for such an act. But along with this origin in God's free Word and the direction toward this Word, this act is genuinely and freely man's own. The one who affirms, trusts, and obeys is not, as it were, God in him, but he himself, this little man. Also, the events of affirmation, trust, and obedience exclude the idea that man might be acting in some sort of enthusiastic delirium. No. He believes, receives, and follows God and his Word as a man, by the enlistment and use of his normal human understanding (although not leaving out his human fantasy!), his human will, and no doubt also his human feeling... And when this event, as such, is revelatory and this deed, as such, is enlightened, faith has the fundamental character of knowledge. As the *intellectus fidei*, it is knowledge of its object—that object which is the very origin of faith. From this origin and object, faith receives its concrete and distinctive content and is allowed to become knowledge of God and man, of the covenant of God with man, and of Jesus Christ. Certainly this is not only an intellectual knowledge, but what interests us here is that it *is also* knowledge executed in concepts and spoken in words. Faith is

¹⁵ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1963 (1979) p100.

allowed to reoccur repeatedly when it is *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith laboring quite modestly, but not fruitlessly, in the quest for truth. This is the way the object of theology lays claim to a man, allowing him to perceive, inquire, think, and even speak theologically. This process remains inconceivable and inexplicable... But it is nevertheless capable of being described, since it involves the healing of one who was previously blind, deaf, and dumb, but who now sees, hears, and speaks.¹⁶

Faith knows about God because faith knows God (and not the reverse). *Fides quaerens intellectum* is a Latin phrase meaning ‘faith seeking understanding’. We do this because we recognise that we have been overcome by God himself. He has set us free and faith moves out in that freedom to discover all that can be known of God, which means far more than just what can be known *about* God.

That must mean, then, that living by faith is living on the move, simply because God is always in action. God is speaking to us, directing us and taking us with him to the consummation of all that he has planned.

But here we face the same problem faced by Abraham and by the readers of the letter to the Hebrews. Faith rests on the promise of God, but that involves us in risk. Because we cannot see the goal we can only trust him.

... faith is a risk and venture. It is the readiness to enter confidently into the darkness of the future (Luther). The risk element in faith is conveyed in this rather free translation of Isaiah 50:10: “He who walks in darkness, to whom no light appears, let him trust in the Name of Yahweh, let him rely upon his God.” There are no rational guarantees in the life of faith. The Levitical priests carrying the ark over the Jordan river had to stand in the midst of the Jordan before the waters receded (Joshua 4). What Karl Barth says is very apropos concerning the nature of true faith: “Faith is not, therefore, a standing, but a being suspended and hanging without ground under our feet.” We are not only justified by faith alone, but we must also walk by faith alone. The man of faith clings to the promises of Christ in Scripture even though he may not have a direct awareness of the divine presence. He ventures forth without any outward security even though he may not understand the direction in which God is leading him. He ventures forth sometimes against all logic and reason out of fidelity to the inward call that comes to him from God. His believing is a joyous daring upon the unknown and untried goodness of God (Luther).¹⁷

Living by faith means living as free men and women even when everything we see calls that into question. And what we preach, Christ and him crucified, is a mystery. We are saying that all the blessings of God are found in the place of deepest ignominy and shame and that only faith can see and know those blessings. The temptation to ‘prove’, either to ourselves or to others, the reality of what we preach by the evidence of the eyes is to move out of faith. The measurement of results is what Luther called a ‘theology of glory’, which stands in contrast to what he called a ‘theology of the cross’. Geoff Bingham has recently put it this way:

The reason we look at Luther’s *theologia crucis* is that it involves what Luther calls ‘the hidden God’ and in effect he is speaking about ‘the hidden cross’. If, in history, the Cross had been seen by all to whom it has been proclaimed, then even the outward state of the world would have been vastly changed, beyond what it is now *appearing* to be. We cannot assess the fruits of the Cross by sight: we can only assess them by faith. Luther saw the Cross as the focal point of God’s revelation of Himself. ‘In the theology of the cross, the cross becomes a methodological key to the whole of theology’. Those who see the Cross do not see God if ‘they believe not’. Human reason

¹⁶ Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, p 100f.

¹⁷ Donald G. Bloesch *Essentials of Evangelical Theology, Volume 1*, Harper, San Francisco, p 226.

at the best would place it as just another event in history, and at the worst would see it as trivial, and certainly not 'as the power of God' and 'the wisdom of God'. The reason we note this is to show why millions do not enthusiastically acclaim the Cross when it is proclaimed. Many theologians debate Luther's doctrine of 'the hidden God', but Paul makes it clear in I Corinthians 1:17-31 that the religious person (the Jew) and the intellectual (the Greek) do not see the Cross as 'the wisdom of God' and 'the power of God'. Certainly those who hold a theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*) do not see it as *the* revelation of God's nature and as the basis of all theology. To quote Braaten:

Luther did not teach that there was no knowledge of God to be found in metaphysical, mystical, and moral approaches, or in other religions. But that all these he labeled as a theology of glory, because they all lead us to a glorious God (*Deus gloriosus*), a God who would not be caught dead on the cross of the man in whom there was no form or comeliness (Isa. 53:7)¹⁸

The temptation to either intellectualism on the one hand or to search for tangible evidence on the other actually leads us away from faith. Not that there is no knowledge in faith, only that that knowledge is only genuinely known within the intimacy of 'the event' of faith. Nor that we may not see great things take place, only that those great things will only be seen to be of God by a man or woman who lives in the intimacy of 'the event' of faith. Others, seeing what we call the gifts of Christ through the Spirit, may only say we are mad. To recognise God in these things requires that we be met by him (so 1 Cor. 14:23-25).

To that extent, we can never 'have' faith. We can only ever have Christ himself, which means that living in faith is living in constant communion with him. Thus, while we may have ample evidence for a doctrine of forgiveness, we have no evidence for *our* forgiveness other than the word he speaks to us but, against all the *apparent* evidence, we rest on *his* unchanging word. He has come to me and he has gripped me and he has made me his own. The new covenant people are those who have been caught up into the Messiah of Israel and who hear and obey him, not out of any fear but out of the wonder of the intimacy with the Godhead into which we have been drawn.

© Ian Pennicook, 17th April 1998

¹⁸ NCTM Monday Pastors' Study Group, 2nd March 1998, p. 6f.

Living in Hope

'Now faith hope and love abide, these three ...'(1 Cor. 13:13)

On a number of occasions in the New Testament the 'triad' of faith, hope and love appear and there is every reason to believe that the grouping of these three together was a common practice in the early church. For example,

...for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel. (Col. 1:4-5)

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

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. (1 Thess 5:8)

But now He saith, "Their leaves shall not fade." This meaneth, that every word which proceedeth out of your mouth in faith and love shall tend to bring conversion and hope to many. (Epistle of Barnabas 11:8, early 2nd Century)

These things, brethren, I write to you concerning righteousness, not because I take anything upon myself, but because ye have invited me to do so. For neither I, nor any other such one, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. He, when among you, accurately and steadfastly taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. And when absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building you up in that faith which has been given you, and which, being followed by hope, and preceded by love towards God, and Christ, and our neighbor, "is the mother of us all." For if any one be inwardly possessed of these graces, he hath fulfilled the command of righteousness, since he that hath love is far from all sin. (Polycarp, Philipians Ch 3, early 2nd Century)

It appears that the Apostle Paul and those who learned from him were aware that faith in Christ immediately restores men and women to a rich and powerful life which is directed to a glorious goal. This hope is dynamic for the one who operates in the context of God's love.

Nor is Paul the only New Testament writer who expresses this. I Peter 1:3 jubilantly declares:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Regeneration is a massive event. Men and women who were 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Eph. 2:1) are so gripped by the grace of God that they are brought to life, saved out of that death, and are thus led 'to renounce impiety and worldly passions', those elements which delineated the reality of death. Having been washed clean in regeneration, we live in the present action of self-control, uprightness and godliness, *while we wait* for the 'blessed hope and manifestation of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:11-12, 3:5). The one who has saved us will appear and so we long for that moment and actively prepare for it (see 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

WITHOUT HOPE

When writing to the Gentile believers of Ephesus, Paul reminded them that their Gentile background meant that they could not know redemption because they were without the Messiah who is found in the commonwealth of Israel. This accords with Romans 9:4-5 where Israel is noted as having ‘the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises’ so that ‘to them belongs the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah’.

This is no mere idolising of Israel on Paul’s part. It is a recognition that the plan of God to restore creation to its purpose involved the Messiah of Israel both restoring Israel to its functional role among the nations (the Gentiles) and taking the curse of the broken covenant of creation upon himself in order that all nations, Israel included, may once again be blessed in the Sabbath of fulfilled creation. If all this seems to be a theological abstraction, we should note that on a number of occasions this sort of framework, based as it is on Genesis 1-15, underlies the arguments of the Apostle Paul; it controls the way he thinks. He sees that it is the blood of the Messiah, the terrible sacrifice which saw all the horror of judgment fall on him, which brings forgiveness of sins and so redemption (Eph. 1:7). However foolish or scandalous such a statement may be, it remains that this is the only way by which Jews and Gentiles can be released from the curse and so from the ravages of guilt to which the curse commits us (see Romans 1:24, 26, 28; 2 Thess. 2:11).

Until that guilt is removed from us, that is, until the work of the cross is applied to us and received by us (Eph. 2:8-10) we Gentiles, along with the Jews, are without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). To be without hope is a frightening situation, although one which men and women will hardly acknowledge. Their senseless minds are darkened, for claiming to be wise they have become fools and live in opposition to the wise plan and action of God. As a result, their end is destruction (Phil. 3:19) or, as the proverb puts it, ‘there is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death’ (Prov. 14:12).

Part of the deception lies in the fact that fallen Man is still in the image of God but he is now perverted, so that his drives for true humanity are still present and active but the ways in which Man attempts to express those drives are far from the true nature of things. Romans 1:18-32 is significant in outlining the dramatic effects of refusing the true image of God. Human beings are created to be the reflection of all that God is, but now choose to control their own gods. Far from succeeding, God gives Man over to his own degrading choices. If Man chooses to suppress the truth of God in unrighteous acts then he is more deeply entrenched in those acts, whatever they may be, whether the sexual impurity which carries its own particular consequences, or the equally evil perversions listed in verses 29-31.

Of course, when Paul says that Gentiles were without hope, he does not mean that they had no future; he speaks of the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10),

when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might. (2 Thess 1:7-9)

In the light of this future, death results in grief without hope (1 Thess. 4:13), ‘a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries’ (Heb 10:27).

The way that leads to death is not a way which simply will climax in the grave; it is a way which will lead to the judgment of God, for ‘it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment’ (Heb. 9:27). This is why men and women live in bondage to the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). Paul Tillich’s statement is instructive.

It is man’s destiny to be mortal and immortal at the same time. And now we know what the sting of death is, and why the devil has the power of death: we have lost our immortality. It is not that we are mortal which creates the ultimate fear of death, but rather that we have lost our eternity beyond our natural and inescapable mortality; that we have lost it by sinful separation from the Eternal; and that we are guilty of this separation.

To be in servitude to the fear of death during our lifetime means being in servitude to the fear of death which is nature and guilt at the same time. In the fear of death, it is not merely the knowledge of our finiteness that is preserved, but also the knowledge of our infinity, of our being determined for eternity, and of our having lost eternity. We are slaves of fear, not because we have to die, but because we deserve to die.¹

‘DETERMINED FOR ETERNITY’

To say that men and women are ‘determined for eternity’ must be to suggest that there is something quite dynamic about a human being. Adam², that is, Man as male and female, was created to function within the very good creation in the blessedness of the holy Sabbath (Gen. 1:31-2:3). But although creation was ‘very good’, that does not imply that it was complete. What we can say is that creation was very good because it corresponded to the purpose which God had for it..

...the emphasis in the narrative of creation in Genesis 1 is upon the complete correspondence between the divine intention and the universe, which was suitable to fulfil the purpose for which it was brought into being.³

Creation is very good for it is the stage upon which God will bring about the goal he established before the foundation of the world. That the goal did not just focus on Day 7 of the creation events is made clear in the New Testament, where the great events of the incarnation of Christ, namely his life and ministry and especially his death, resurrection, ascension and his pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost, give clarity to all that God has previously revealed.

Thus Paul commenced his letter to Titus this way:

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness,² in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised *before the ages began* — ³in due time he revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior, (Titus 1:1-3).

To the Ephesians he wrote,

¹ Paul Tillich, ‘The Destruction of Death’ in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1949, p 172.

² Initially ‘Adam’ is not the name of the male individual in Genesis, but the word for ‘humankind’. Not until Genesis 2:18 does ‘Adam’ clearly refer to the male. See Mark J Fretz, ‘Adam’ in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume I*, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p 62ff.

³ William J Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1994, p 23.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ *before the foundation of the world* to be holy and blameless before him in love. (Eph 1:3-4).

Before there was a creation, there was the plan of God to have a people who are holy and blameless before him and that plan was always related to Christ. Creation was but the commencement of the action. It was intended to climax, not in itself but in the glory of the goal, with all that takes place in subsequent history being related to the accomplishment of the goal.

He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph 1:5-10).

We should note here two significant points: (i) there is nothing, including our sin, which does not find a place in the outworking of the goal. The plan is for the fulfilment in the Messiah which, in particular, includes redemption through his blood. Nothing, therefore, interrupts the plan; God has never had to say 'Oops!' in all history.

(ii) Adam must have had a hope. Plainly, until Messiah came, that hope was not fully explicated, but if the plan was in place then Adam was created to function in that plan, not functioning mechanistically but personally engaging, *with* God, in the action of history. The entrance of sin meant that now he was engaging, *against* God, in the action. But we should understand that his identity, as created, was amazing.

In Acts 17:26 Paul indicated that all the nations were in Adam, a point which emerges in the genealogies of Genesis 1-11. In other studies we have seen that Adam was also given the task of tilling and keeping the garden of Eden, which meant that he was actually fulfilling the priestly role of leading the creation in worship. In embryo he was leading the nations in worship. We can see, then, the relationship between the command to 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over' everything (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:6cf/ Heb. 2:8) and the final words in Matthew's Gospel:

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (Matt 28:18-20).

Whatever role these words may have had elsewhere, they are the words of the second Man moving on to the goal.

While there may be questions we could ask about Adam in the garden (and we will receive no answer), we can say that as created Adam was the protological Man, that is, he was the first word in humanity. There will come another who is 'the last word in humanity' (the eschatological Man) but Adam was created to have that goal in view. Otherwise, we (from our perspective) could imagine that tilling and keeping the ground of Eden would sooner or later appear as mindlessly repetitious. Somewhat irreverently, I could imagine that, even with his task being worship, without the goal Adam could find the lack of

change debilitating. But with the goal, the worship which he led would always be alive and growing, with the nations bringing their ever increasing richness and diversity into it.

As ‘Man’, Adam has a hope, and so we may assert that all who derive from Adam are created for that hope, ‘determined for eternity’. The *angst* which we see within fallen creation was defined by Augustine:

Man is one of your creatures, Lord, and his instinct is to praise you. He bears about him the marks of death, the sign of his own sin, to remind him that you thwart the proud. But still, since he is a part of your creation, he wishes to praise you. The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you have made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.⁴

This is why regeneration is such a massive event. We are born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That death, the marks of which are such a constant torment to men and women, has been finished in the resurrection of Christ.

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, ¹²and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. (2 Tim 1:8-12).

Paul knows that his calling was according to God’s own purpose and grace, and that that purpose is seen when he preaches the gospel, because Christ Jesus who has abolished death brings life and immortality to light in the preaching of the gospel. Yet there is present suffering, but all with a view to ‘that day’.

HOPE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The question of what is the theological centre of the New Testament is one which has many answers. Some suggest that it is ‘justification by faith’, others ‘reconciliation’ and so on. But what is often not mentioned is the presence of hope as one theme which fills out the others. For example, Paul wrote that ‘through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness’ (Gal. 5:5; ‘righteousness’ and ‘justification’ translate the same Greek word), so that justification is both a present and powerful reality and a goal to which we are moving.⁵ James Dunn puts it:

Clearly expressed here is the ‘future tense’ of justification — to be justified/counted acceptable to God, not simply as an initial act (conversion), but as a sustained relationship with God culminating in the favourable verdict of the final judgment.⁶

That does not mean that there are two ‘justifications’ but that justification is not a thing which we have as much as a relationship in which we live with a view to the goal of God.

⁴ *Confessions*, I.1.

⁵ See Ronald K Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1988, pp 224-228 for a discussion of the various possibilities raised by this verse.

⁶ James D G Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Hendrickson, Peabody, 1993, p 268f.

This is strongly represented in Romans. Indeed the word hope appears fifteen times in this letter.

The argument is that justification for both Jews and Gentiles is by faith alone and the prime example, applicable to both groups is Abraham, since he is

the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them,¹² and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised. (Rom. 4:11-12).

But when we read of his faith, we discover that it was a faith which believed the *promise*.

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations') — in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations,' according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.' ¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. (Rom 4:16-21).

Now having set that as the pattern for all believers, the letter then goes on to describe the results of justification by faith in chapter 5. The hostility has been dealt with, there is peace with God and we stand in grace. But we also, therefore, 'boast in our hope of the glory of God' (Rom. 5:2; cf. Ps. 8:5; Rom. 3:23; Col. 3:4 etc). Furthermore, if we have such a hope then we do not cave in before sufferings, whatever form they may take. But we boast of them also because we know that suffering, responded to positively, produces endurance. Endurance is not some fatalism which 'puts-up' with whatever comes in some resigned way; rather it is the 'spiritual fortitude' which is trained by and made stronger by those sufferings. The result of this is a character which has been tested and proved. This is similar to Peter's statements 1 Peter 1:3-9.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷so that the genuineness of your faith — being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9).

Peter's point, like Paul's, is that suffering is not really an optional extra but is the means by which our faith is purified. As with Jesus, there is no glory where there is no suffering (1 Peter 1:11; Luke 24:26).

Tested character results in increased confidence in our hope. So far from being ashamed of our hope we boast in it all the more. What is more, there is no cause for fear that on that day our hope will cause us to be ashamed since right now the love of God

has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. This love is demonstrated or proved in the action of the cross (Rom. 5:8) and so it is the present gift of the Spirit bringing all the work of redemption through his blood into us that gives us certainty.

It is the *present gift* of the Spirit because the gift is always in the person of the Spirit and not in some thing or experience. In Galatians 3, Paul asked the Galatians to look back to the moment when they received the Spirit (Gal. 3:2) but proceeded to insist that God goes on supplying the Spirit (Gal. 3:5). It is not sufficient merely to look back to a past experience, significant as that may be. Hope, in Galatians it is 'ending' or 'reaching the goal', is known as a reality only in the present moment of intimacy with the Triune God.

Romans 5:9-10 makes it plain that having been justified we will be saved through Christ 'from the wrath of God... by his life', that is, his present resurrection life which is the guarantee of our own future (cf. Col. 3:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:12-23).

If the guarantee of our future is Christ and not our works, what should be our attitude towards sin? Since grace is abundant and righteousness a free gift through the one man, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17), why not continue in sin that grace may continue to abound (Rom. 6:1)? The answer to this question lies in the nature of our hope. First there is the fact that we have died to sin so that to continue to live in it is stupid (Rom. 6:2). Verses 3-5 then indicate why this is so.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom 6:3-5).

That we have died to sin is evident from our baptism. It is not the rite which is in mind here but the whole conversion experience, of which water baptism was as much a part as was the baptism in the Spirit. Baptism was our incorporation into Christ's death.⁷ When he died, we died and when he was raised we were brought into newness of life. The expectation is that, as he lives, 'we too might walk⁸ in newness of life' now. However, there is more, for the newness of life in which we now walk is not all there is. Indeed, as the letter goes on it is plain that newness of life is often deeply covered under an overwhelming sense of failure. But the truth is that newness of life will issue in a resurrection like Christ's (cf. Phil. 3:10-11).

This sense of failure is prominent in the argument in chapter 7. In setting law in its context, Paul shows that any appeal to law only exposes a dreadful inability and failure to obey. The man who has been established in newness of life cries out that he is unable to function fully (almost 'at all') in it.

For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. ¹⁵I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not

⁷ It is not a sacramental idea of baptism which is in mind here. Baptism is an outward declaration of faith and it is by faith that we are incorporated into and justified by Christ's death.

⁸ The Greek Aorist indicates not a once-only walk but a commencement which leads to continued action.

want is what I do. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin. (Rom 7:14-25).

He has been changed in that he now desires to be obedient, but the body in which he lives is ‘flesh’, that is it asserts itself over against God and powerfully demands to be satisfied. So his cry is for deliverance from this body of death (vs. 25). Who will do it? The answer is that God will do it through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Romans 8:1-8 the argument continues that while the body/flesh has made it impossible for the law ever to liberate, there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus because God has dealt with sin ‘in the flesh’ of Christ (vs. 3) so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk⁹ according to the Spirit. The Spirit who flooded our hearts with the love of God has brought transformation. So while the flesh is hostile to God, we are not in the flesh; we are in the Spirit, since the Spirit lives in us. And if that is so, then it follows that the presence of the Spirit is a guarantee of our inheritance, namely the resurrection of our (sadly) mortal bodies.

That is why he soon points out that the Spirit who causes us to cry ‘Abba! Father!’ bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God and so *heirs* of God and *fellow-heirs* with Christ’ (Rom 8:17). Of course, the suffering which is indispensable for him is indispensable for us.

However, a fixation on the suffering is not what is in mind. Yes there is suffering, and from Romans 8:35-36 it is seen to be grievous, but it is not the final issue.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Rom 8:18-25).

If the sufferings are indispensable to glory, then look at the glory! We think we suffer now, but understand that our suffering as believers is a common suffering experienced by all creation. It along with us is longing for our resurrection, for then creation will be set free to fully serve the family of God as it was intended to do. We groan in anticipation and not in misery, because we have the first fruits of the Spirit, the foretaste of what will be.

If we are caught in the body of death now, we should know that our weakness is no hindrance to our receiving the inheritance. The Spirit himself, whom God has given to us, intercedes for us at a depth which we can never know this side of glory (Rom. 8:26-27). That is why we know that all things work together for good for those who love God; they are called according to *his* purpose and his purpose is our glory and that glory is assured

⁹ See n.8

because Christ has already been glorified (Rom. 8:28-30). Christ, the glorified Son ever lives to intercede for the large family of God (Rom. 8:34) and since God gave his Son for us, he will give us everything else (Rom. 8:32).

We ought to notice, too, that in Romans 9-11 Paul's hope is far more than personal. He sees the goal of God as coming to a climax with the full number of the Gentiles coming in to their inheritance in Abraham. (The full reason for this lies, of course, in the argument of the letter.) What is more, when the full number of the Gentiles, the nations, has come in, then, too, all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:25-26). Redeemed Israel will then stand alongside the other redeemed nations (of Matt. 28:18-20) in the new heavens and the new earth.

Creation will have then reached its goal. All that is impure and anti-God will have been purged from creation in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8), so that all that remains is creation in its pristine eschatological glory. Then the nations will fully and freely worship in the Eden of God (Rev. 21:22-24). With this vision of what will be comes the declaration, 'Surely I am coming soon' and the resounding response, 'Amen. Come Lord Jesus'.

LIVING IN HOPE

Although the answer is obvious, the question needs to be repeatedly put: How do we live if we have such a hope? I John 3:1-3 is plain.

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Great hope evokes holy living. The love of the Father has brought us into the family now and yet there is more: we will be like 'him'. Whether this refers to the Father or to Jesus is not immediately clear. In one sense it refers to both, since Jesus had said 'He who has seen me has seen the Father; (John 14:9), though there is evidence that either could be in mind; for example, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God' (that is, 'the Father', Matt. 5:8) or 'Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him...' (Rev. 1:7). But however we understand it, John's primary point is that if that is our hope then we will not rest satisfied in sin. 'You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin' (1 John 3:5). For that reason, 'I write this to you so that you may not sin' (1 John 2:1). Of course there is forgiveness for sin (1 John 1:7, 9; 2:1b-2) but the reality is that 'He who is born of God does not sin' (1 John 3:9). Whatever difficulties may lie in this statement, the principle is clear. 'If we say that we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness we lie and do not do what is true' (1 John 1:6)! If we hope for that eschatological purity, then we must by all means live purely now.

We may also see such passages as 1 Peter 1:13-2:3, where the hope of coming salvation (1 Peter 1:9) must issue in disciplined, holy living.

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. ¹⁴Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. ¹⁵Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.' ¹⁷If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. ¹⁸You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, *so that your faith and hope are set on God.* (1 Pet 1:13-21).

Likewise there is Romans 13:11-13.

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Rom 13:11-14).

The answer is obvious but must be restated continually because we are not yet glorified and our present salvation is constantly being contested, not only by the world and the devil but by our own flesh. And yet, the demand for holy living is no burden when we are living in the context of the salvation which has come to us. 'You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.' That great salvation has brought us into a living hope. Therefore,

Let us hold fast to *the confession of our hope* without wavering, for he who has *promised* is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the *more as you see the Day approaching* (Hebrews 10:23-25).

But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; ²¹keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. ²²And have mercy on some who are wavering; ²³save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies. (Jude 20-23).

Hope and holiness are inseparable partners. And as we have seen, to thus live in hope is not 'unnatural', however it may be *unusual*. Quite the contrary, living in hope is ontological living. It is the way Man was always intended to live up to the consummation of all things. He chose us, in Christ to be holy and blameless before him.

And yet, our holy living will and must always be in the awareness that holiness is God's gift in Christ. Consistent living does not result in salvation; salvation results in consistent living. And salvation is God's work from beginning to end, just as, from our side, it is by faith from first to last. He who began the good work will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). He gave us new birth to a living hope and he it is that will keep us right to the goal. Hence our great worship.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing,²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25).

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Living in Love

The apostle John spoke of those who ‘abide in love’ (1 John 4:16) while Jesus instructed the disciples to ‘abide in my love’ (John 15:9, 10). In 1 John, the love is ‘of the Father’ (1 John 3:1) and in the Gospel it is ‘of Jesus’. We will expand this later but, as a beginning, we ought to note that to abide in love is to abide in God and to know the reality of God abiding in us. Whatever else this may mean, it certainly indicates a profound intimacy between the Father and the children of his love. The same point is made in John 15, where the instruction to abide in Jesus is of fundamental importance. Anyone who will not abide in him ‘is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned’ (John 15:6). In contrast, ‘If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you’ (John 15:7). Here, again, the issue is one of intimacy. The contrast is not, coldly, between reward and punishment, but between the rich intimacy of love and fruitless living.

LIVING IN GOD

In Isaiah, God’s own declaration is that he is

...the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. (Isa 57:15).

Over against this is the recognition that human beings are mortal¹. While Psalm 8 recognises the high glory of man, Psalm 144, from the same starting point, makes the following declaration:

O LORD, what are human beings that you regard them, or mortals that you think of them? ⁴They are like a breath; their days are like a passing shadow. (Psalm 144:3-4)

There is, as Keirkegaard² described it, ‘an infinite qualitative distinction’ between God and his creation. This is his holiness. His thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways not ours.

Likewise Paul wrote,

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim 1:17).

and added

he ... is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. ¹⁶It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:15-16).

He dwells in unapproachable light. While he may be unapproachable because of man’s sin, we must add that there are aspects of God’s being which remain secret: there are secret things which belong to the LORD our God (Deut. 29:29). He is our Father *in heaven*.

¹ As stressed in the *NRSV*’s use of this word for ‘Man’.

² Quoted in S. J. Grenz and R. E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age*, Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, 1992, p 91.

That it is not merely our sin which sets God off from us is demonstrated in the person of Jesus. In Acts 1:7, he indicates that there are certain things (times and periods) which the Father has set by his own authority and which the disciples may not know. But neither may the Son himself.

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Mat 24:36).

Holiness does not primarily refer to moral purity over against immoral impurity; it has to do with God's total distinction from all else. When God creates he remains 'totally other'. That means that God is not an 'object' which Man may examine, for that would imply that God has ceased to be 'other' and now stands alongside other objects for our perusal. When some theologians speak of God's 'freedom' they are referring to the fact that he is not *bound* to remain other. Not only is there the richness of the life of God apart from us, there is also the freedom of God to come to his creation. He is the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity and dwells in the high and holy place *and*, without any limitation of his being, he also dwells with those who are contrite and humble in spirit.

The proper response to this holiness of God is worship. This is what is seen in Revelation 4. There, there is a vision of God in his holiness and, as a result, all animate creation, which stands in distinction to his majestic presence, exclaims in worship,

Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come. (Rev 4:8)

And with them are the elders, who sing,

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. (Rev 4:11)

The question which ought to be asked is this. How can these elders sing such a song? How is it that they know that they stand in such a relationship to the God who is totally other? The answer is simple. As we have seen, God is not bound by his transcendence but has in his freedom come to us and revealed himself. In the splendour of his freedom he has revealed himself while not losing anything of his majestic holiness. Our knowledge of God does not limit him, as our knowledge of another human being does.³ When Scripture speaks of 'the mystery of God' (1 Cor. 2:1[?]; Rev. 10:7), it does not speak of a riddle which, having solved, we understand; it speaks of a depth before which, even when it is proclaimed, we are still constrained to worship.

So what do we see in this self-revelation? There are two defining statements in Scripture; Isaiah 6:3, 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory', and 1 John 4:8, 'God is love'. So, perhaps it may be better asked, By whom are we confronted in this self-revelation? The answer is that we are confronted by the one who is holy love and who loves in holiness. We cannot of ourselves penetrate the holiness, but, when the veil is drawn back a little, we see love, not simply *loving* feelings towards us but love itself. God loves in his holiness.

Throughout the history of the Old Testament, there is evidence of God's love and holiness, but it is with the incarnation of the Son that we are given a fuller exegesis of

³ To know a person sometimes seems to give us some sort of 'hold' over them. Otherwise we are forced to admit that 'we really do not know them'.

God (John 1:18) and it is with the gift of the Spirit, who reveals the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10), that we are able to understand that exegesis.

This revelation comes because the Son reveals the Father. That is, he does not first bring the Fatherhood of God to us, but he brings us to the inner being of that holiness. We see the Father, Son and Spirit mysteriously one in love. When John says that 'God is love' he means first of all that God is love *without us*. God's otherness, his transcendence, is full and complete. The revelation is of love in holiness. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing and the Son loves the Father with free obedience. Nor is this just something which takes place as a result of the incarnation. This is the way it has always been.

So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. (John 17:5)

Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

Genesis 1 and 2 describe the creation of all things and, in particular, of Man. The point is that Man is created to reflect all that is true of God, as his image, but that he can only do so when he lives as the creature of such a creator. Psalm 104:27-30 highlights the utter dependence of all things upon God;

These all look to you to give them their food in due season;
²⁸when you give to them, they gather it up;
 when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
²⁹When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
 when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
³⁰When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
 and you renew the face of the ground.

When Paul, in Acts 17: 28, quotes the poet Epimenides, saying, 'In him we live and move and have our being', he saying the same thing. Man is only truly Man when he lives in dependence on the holy God. Hence he is to love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and to love his neighbour as himself, because that is the way God himself functions.

God's holiness, his otherness, is not reduced or limited when he is continually present to his creation (cf. Ps. 139:1-18). He freely chooses to be in intimacy with the creation. The love of Father, Son and Spirit flows out from that holiness so that Man and all creation could live in holy love. In the words of the Westminster catechism, 'Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him for ever'.⁴

KNOWING LOVE

The story of the Bible is the story of redemption. Man, created to enjoy God for ever, has been cut off from him by sin. God has not changed.

See, the Lord's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.
²Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God,

⁴ The answer to Question 1 of the *Larger Catechism*.

and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. (Isa 59:1-2)

The great problem is that God's holiness is now a threat, indeed a terror, because Man has opted to live, if such were possible, in independence of God. The continual presence of God is a torment (see Gen. 3:8-10) as well as an acknowledged necessity (Gen. 4:13-14).

Eberhard Jüngel's phrase is that God has chosen not to be 'God without us'.⁵ This true of creation. Karl Barth describes it as follows.

But this means that the divine creation in itself and as such did not and does not take place for its own sake. Creation is the freely willed and executed positing of a reality distinct from God. The question thus arises: What was and is the will of God in doing this? We may reply that He does not will to be alone in His glory; that He desires something else beside Him. But this answer cannot mean that God either willed and did it for no purpose, or that He did so to satisfy a need. Nor does it mean that He did not will to be and remain alone because He could not do so. And the idea of something beside Him which would be what it is independently of Him is quite inconsistent with His freedom. In constituting this reality He cannot have set a limit to His glory, will and power. As the divine Creator He cannot have created a remote and alien sphere abandoned to itself or to its own teleology. If, then, this positing is not an accident, if it corresponds to no divine necessity and does not in any sense signify a limitation of His own glory, there remains only the recollection that God is the One who is free in His love. In this case we can understand the positing of this reality — which otherwise is incomprehensible — only as the work of His love. He wills and posits the creature neither out of caprice nor necessity, but because He has loved it from eternity, because He wills to demonstrate His love for it, and because He wills, not to limit His glory by its existence and being, but to reveal and manifest it in His own co-existence with it. As the Creator He wills really to exist for His creature. That is why He gives it its own existence and being. That is also why there cannot follow from the creature's own existence and being an immanent determination of its goal or purpose, or a claim to any right, meaning or dignity of its existence and nature accruing to it except as a gift. That is why even the very existence and nature of the creature are the work of the grace of God. It would be a strange love that was satisfied with the mere existence and nature of the other, then withdrawing, leaving it to its own devices. Love wills to love. Love wills something with and for that which it loves. Because God loves the creature, its creation and continuance and preservation point beyond themselves to an exercise and fulfilment of His love which do not take place merely with the fact that the creature is posited as such and receives its existence and being alongside and outside the being and existence of God, but to which creation in all its glory looks and moves, and of which creation is the presupposition.⁶

God creates, not out of necessity but out of the freedom of his love and he does so in order that his creation may know his love. That is why he did not simply destroy the creation when Man sinned. So, in love, he continues to work history towards the goal set before the foundation of the world.

From the very beginning, there was the promise based on the grace given 'in Christ Jesus before the ages began' (2 Tim. 1:9). At the moment of the Fall there was the promise that the seed of the woman would conquer the seed of the serpent and even unrepentant men and women knew the preserving 'steadfast love' of God. For example, when Cain was fearful for his life, God mercifully put his 'mark' on him so that he would not suffer that fate (Gen. 4:15).

Exodus 33 recounts the matter of God's revelation of himself to Moses. As a result of the incident of the golden calf, God informed Israel through Moses:

⁵ Eberhard Jüngel, 'What does it Mean to Say, "God is Love"?' in Trevor Hart and Daniel Thimble (Eds) *Christ in our Place — The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World. Essays presented to James Torrance*, Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1989, pp 309.

⁶ C. D. Vol. III Part 1, p 95f. Perhaps we may query the notion of creation as grace.

Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people ... If for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. (Ex 33:3, 5).

Moses, faced with the task of leading the people without the presence of God, complains that he needs to know what God is doing ('show me your ways' Ex 33:13). When Moses reminds God that Israel is his people, the reply is that Moses himself will know the presence of God (Ex 33:14). But, Moses continues, if the presence of God is not with *all* the people then how can they survive as the distinct people of God? Therefore he asks to have a full revelation of the glory of God. But the response seems to be that he may only receive a partial revelation of the glory.

And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' (Ex 33:19-20).

The words, 'and I will be gracious' probably indicate that while all the goodness of God will pass before Moses, it is an act of pure grace that the revelation is *not* direct.⁷ Obviously, while there is a great gap between the creator and the creature so that Moses is requesting 'an experience of which Man is incapable',⁸ the problem is that sinful humanity cannot bear a direct vision of God. The guilt would destroy him, as Isaiah recognised.

The revelation of God which Israel had was necessarily incomplete. It was a shadow and the substance was yet to come. But, as a shadow, it nonetheless contained an accurate account of the being and nature of God. The name of God, YHWH, appears in Scripture from earliest times.⁹ When Moses asked the name of God, he was told that it is 'I am who I am', the God who is always in action as 'the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Ex. 3:6) and who 'will be with you' (Ex. 3:12). He will be with them because he is faithful to the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex. 2:24).

The Hebrew words used for love include words which are also used to describe the relationship between a man and a woman (sometimes with strong sexual connotations, as in the Song of Solomon) and between a parent and a child (Gen. 22:2; Ruth 4:15) where the stress is on compassion, care and delight. Thus Israel is the one whom God loves (Pss. 60:5; 108:6); he acts for them because he has set his heart on them and loved them (Deut. 7:7-8).

The commands given to Israel are thus the commands of love. In both Old and New Testaments obedience to the law is summed up as love.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deut 6:4-5).

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:18).

⁷ See O. Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, Volume 1, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1981, p 402; cf Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, (Part 2) p 237.

⁸ John I Durham, *Exodus*, (WBC, 3), Word, Waco, 1987, p 452.

⁹ Irrespective of when the documents were written. The name occurs in either the earliest documents, which ever they may be (see Henry O Thompson, 'Yahweh' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 6, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p 1011) and in the earliest events in Scripture (Gen 2:4).

(See also Mark 12:28-33; Rom. 13:8-10; James 2:8; and Gal. 5:6). Israel (and indeed all humanity) should live in love because 'I am the LORD'. See also Ephesians 5:1-2,

'Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ²and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Within Israel, the word *chesed* plays a significant role. It refers to the constant faithfulness of God to his covenant and is often translated as his 'steadfast love'. While the word may be accurately translated a number of ways,¹⁰ within the context of the total revelation which God has given of himself, we would understand that the regular refrain in Psalm 136, 'his steadfast love endures forever' carries a rich implication. God's covenant faithfulness is the revelation of his everlasting love.

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness (*chesed*) to you. (Jer. 31:3).

The response to this love is seen, not in cold responses of legal conformity, but in overflowing gratitude and love: 'I love the LORD' (PS. 116:1).

THE FULL REVELATION

If 'the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see', how do we comprehend the magnitude of the incarnation? John 1:1-18 sets out the issues; God, who is Father and Son (and Spirit, though not referred to in this context) has come to humanity and the glory, once only partially revealed, is now fully made known. 'The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory. It is the glory of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). Furthermore, we have all received grace upon grace from that fullness (John 1:16). But how can this be? Why does this revelation not destroy us?

P. T. Forsyth makes the point that God is Father in the Old Testament. For example, In Psalm 103:13 God has compassion for his children *as a father*. But, he says, the presentation of the tenderness of God

is with many limitations. The name, for instance, is as yet imported into God rather than revealed from Him. He *is like* a father more than He *is* a father, He is Israel's father only. "Them that fear Him" means Israel. But the chief limitation is this. The name is not yet evangelized. Fatherhood is not yet brought into direct connection with holiness, sin, sacrifice, redemption—only with weakness. ... Fatherhood in the Old Testament neither demands sacrifice nor makes it, but in the New Testament the Holy Father does both. The holiness is the root of love, fatherhood, sacrifice, and redemption.

...The divine Father is the holy. And the Holy Father's first care is holiness. The first charge on a Redeemer is satisfaction to that holiness. The Holy Father is one who does and must atone. Atonement wears a new glory when read in Christ's own light. We see it flowing in grief *from that very holiness* of the Father to which it returns in praise. As Holy Father He is the eternal Father and maker of sacrifice no less than of man. He offers a sacrifice rent from His own heart. It is made to Him by no third party ("for who hath first given unto Him"), but by Himself in His Son; and it is made to no foreign power, but to His own holy nature and law. Fatherhood is not bought from holiness by any cross; it is holiness itself that pays. It is love that expiates. "Do not say, 'God is love. Why atone?' The New Testament says, 'God has atoned. What love!'" ...

¹⁰ Katherine D Sakenfeld, 'Love (OT)', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 4, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p 377.

All this and more is in that “Holy *Father*”, which is the last word in the naming of God. The Church of to-day has gained greatly in its sense of the *love* of God. There are still greater things waiting when she has moved on as far again, to that *holiness* whose outward movement is love, which love is but the passion to impart. You can go behind love to holiness, but behind holiness you cannot go. It is the true consuming fire. Any real belief in the Incarnation is a belief in the ultimacy, centrality and supremacy of holiness for God and man. We may come to holiness by way of love, but we only come to love by reason of holiness. We may be all aglow for the coming of the kingdom, but there is a prior petition it is the kingdom’s one condition “Hallowed be Thy Name”. That hallowing was done in Christ’s death which founded the kingdom. We are in some danger of inverting the order of these prayers today. “Thy kingdom come” is not the first petition. The kingdom comes from the satisfaction of holiness. It does not make it. “God is Love” is not the whole gospel. Love is not evangelical till it has dealt with holy law. In the midst of the rainbow is a throne. There is a kind of consecration which would live close to the Father, but it does not always take seriously enough the holiness which makes the fatherhood of the cross—awful, inexhaustible, and eternal, as full of judgment as of salvation.¹¹

The reason we are not destroyed is that the revelation of God comes in the full action of the atonement. Just as that was anticipated and yet fully applied in the sacrifices of Israel, so now it is seen in all its splendour. Holiness is still holiness but, far from it destroying us because of our sin, the great love of the godhead actually destroys our sin. Love is holy love. The covenant faithfulness has climaxed, even if it is not yet at the goal.

This revelation of God in Christ is so intense that the Apostle Paul called it ‘the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge’ yet which may, at the same time, be known in all its vastness (Eph. 3:18-19). It may be known because it ‘has been flooded into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us’ (Rom. 5:5). Atoning love has come to us and caught us up into Christ, ‘who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20). This is why we must say that revelation is more than propositional, that is, words and sentences. It is that, but only because it first personal. The wonder of salvation is that God reveals *himself* as holy love, as the one who not only saves but judges us in Christ, so that we are really put to death and our guilt cleared. But he not only judges us but he saves us in Christ, so that now there is no-one and nothing that can lay any effective charge against God’s elect nor separate us from the love of god in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul understood his own ministry in these terms.

I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 1:13-14)

Now,

¹⁴For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of

¹¹ *God the Holy Father*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1987, p 3ff.

Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made *him* to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:14-21)

This holy love of God is not some mystical thing on which speculate; it is the great action of the atonement before which we can only worship. Just as the elders worshipped God in his creating holiness (Rev. 4:11) so they also worship the Lamb in the same terms (glory and honour and power; Rev. 5:12-13) because of his redeeming holiness: 'you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation' (Rev. 5:9).

This balance is seen in Hebrews 1:1-4. The creator is also redeemer and he is known because he has spoken to us.

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ²but in these last days *he has spoken to us* by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom *he also created the worlds*. ³He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When *he had made purification for sins*, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Heb 1:1-4).

The point is that we know love because God has climactically revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ and that revelation is not only for the mind but for the whole person because God has come to us and filled us with his love. The work of the cross is the love which is flooded into our hearts (Rom. 5:8). There is an objective work which we both see and experience. This is implied in Galatians 3:1-2. The Galatians has heard the gospel and so 'before your eyes ... Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified' and 'you received the Spirit'. All they could do was recognise and accept what had been done. They certainly could not add to it. So, in Chapter 4, Paul wrote, 'now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God...' (Gal. 4:9). This is the extent of the revelation; 'we know because he first knew us' and so 'we love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19).

LIVING IN LOVE¹²

John wrote that 'he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him' (I John 4:16b) He said this because 'we have known and believe the love which God has for us' (vs. 16a). We might perhaps observe that where there is a deficient proclamation there will be a deficient understanding of this revelation. If either holiness or love is stressed to the detriment of the other or, worse, if neither is communicated by the preacher then, while the full action of God is not in question, a full response to it will hardly be possible. If, on the other hand, the apostolic gospel has been proclaimed without compromise and in the full experience of holy love, then the appeal of the New Testament is not hard to understand.

First, there is the recognition that 'love is of God', so that the response to him must be in terms of his own revelation.

¹² Geoff Bingham has written extensively in this area. The following are recommended:

Liberating Love (1960, 1988); *Where I Love I Live* (1977); *Ah, Strong, Strong Love* (1993); *Strong as the Sun* (1994). As with all these topics, wider reading is highly recommended. Each of our studies can only focus on one aspect of what God is doing in fulfilment of his purposes.

Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. ⁴Whoever says, 'I have come to know him,' but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; ⁵but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: ⁶whoever says, 'I abide in him,' ought to walk just as he walked. (1 John 2:3-6).

To abide in God is to abide in the Father. It is also to abide in the Son and the implication is that if we are in the Son the we ought to be as he is. He loved the Father and so the command to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength' is no imposition. Neither is the command to love one's neighbor as oneself. In fact, John continues,

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. (1 John 2:7-8).

The command to love is the command which is inbuilt in the creation. It is the law of God. So there is nothing new, that is, novel, about it. Yet it is new, inasmuch as it has been made fresh in Christ. The revelation of holy love in the cross has made the law of God a matter written on the heart (see Jer. 31:31-34). The warning of 1 Corinthians 16:22, 'Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord', is surely to be seen as the truth of genuine living. Not to love him, and so others, is not to live, but to remain under the curse of the whole covenant of creation.

In the face of the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil, such ontological living is not without its difficulties. The warning of 1 John 2:15-16,

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; ¹⁶for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world.

must mean that the things of the world are enticing and make strong demands on our allegiance. Likewise, the warnings against idolatry, covetousness and so on. The time will come when our love will be uncontested, but it is not yet.

The instructions to keep the cross central in life and thought is not merely a doctrinal necessity, for the good ordering of theology. It is another way of saying that the fullness of the revelation of God is to be found there and nowhere else. To drift from that revelation is to drift from God. Jesus warned that the love of many would grow cold (Matt. 24:12) and to the Ephesians he announced that they had left their first love (Rev. 2:4).

When Paul wrote about the fruit of the Spirit, he did so by linking these fruit with the work of the cross in the believers.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal. 5:22-24).

Love is the fruit of the Spirit's presence and so of the believer living in the reality of the cross.

The consequences of living in the revelation that love is of God is that we will want to order our lives, both personally and corporately, so that love is expressed.

He destined us in love to be his sons ...²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,²⁷ and do not make room for the devil.²⁸ Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,³² and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,² and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 1:5; 4:25-5:2).

As imitators of God, we will avoid the activism which treats others as objects contributing to our success. This was evidently the Corinthians' problem. For them the gifts of Christ through the Spirit were regarded as being *personally* beneficial, whereas the truth is that they are for the growth of the body, the church (see also Eph. 4:11-16). Paul was not contrasting the gifts with love in 1 Corinthians 12-14; he was saying that love is the way and the context in which the gifts are to be received and used. And if love is holy love, then the caricature of love as weak tolerance or sentimentality is quickly dispelled. The gentle healer and the firm prophet are not necessarily opposed to each other or to any other function. He who heals must see that he does so in love and not for self advancement nor out of sentimentality. He who brings a strong word, even if it must cut deeply, but does so because he understands that without it men and women will not know the fullness of holy love, will do so with great sensitivity, aware that it only holy love which keeps the prophet and those to whom he speaks.

Paul spoke of 'the love of the Spirit' (Rom. 15:30), of 'your love in the Spirit' (Col. 1:8) and of 'the love of God [being] flooded into our hearts by the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 5:5). Add these statements to the fact of love being the fruit *of the Spirit*, and we will see that while the Father is love (1 John 4:8-10) and the Son 'the Son of his love' or 'his beloved Son' (Col. 1:13), love is the whole of God. It is not that Father, Son and Spirit have an element called love in which they function but that they, in their unity, are love. To abide in love is to abide in the Father *and* in the Son *and* in the Spirit. Nor could we abide in one and not in the others. To abide in the Father's love is no different from abiding in the love of the Son since the revelation of God as holy love is a revelation of the full being of the Trinity. And Peter spoke of us being 'participants in the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4).

He loved us and gave us his own Son; he loved us and gave himself for us; he loved us and brought that love into our hearts. We love, because he first loved us.

© Ian D Pennicook, 24th June 1998

Living in Freedom

An Irish judge once said, 'The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance'.¹ The Apostle Paul wrote: 'For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Gal. 5:1). What is the freedom we have and how fragile is it?

Such a question must be asked because it involves the very heart of our salvation. On the one hand, there are those who seem intent on denying the totality of our freedom, as if we are presently living in a world where the powers of darkness have the upper hand and may yet win the final battle of Armageddon. On the other, we sometimes encounter a triumphalism which apparently denies even the hint of difficulty in the believer's life. Strangely these two extremes are sometimes found in partnership.

Then there is the necessary awareness that 'that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it' (Romans 7:18). But how does this statement align with the notion of a person being 'free indeed' *after* having been 'a slave to sin' (John 8:36, 34)?

Although this may seem like a world of contradictions, a realm where we 'believe' in spite of the evidence to the contrary, this is not the case. The way the Scriptures describe all that God is doing leaves us in no doubt that our freedom is not in question nor is it fragile. At the same time, the Bible does not give us any scope to push the boundaries of our freedom. It is not that we are partially free but that our freedom is the freedom of men and women and not the freedom of God. We are creatures and that is both our limitation and our high dignity.

THE HIGH DIGNITY OF THE CREATURE

'Man has sprung from God and the dust.'² An awareness of Man as a creature of dust need not mean that we should regard ourselves as in anyway deprived. It is true that 'the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground' (Gen. 2:7), that 'you are dust and to dust you shall return' (Gen. 3:19) and that the LORD 'knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust' (Ps. 103:14). It can hardly be an imposition to be what we are.

But Man is more than dust even though he is never other than dust. While we have no answer to questions such as whether Man would not have died physically had he not sinned, since it is obvious that the death spoken of in Genesis 2:17 goes far beyond mere physical demise, we must still assert that to be Man is a glorious thing. Familiarity with the Biblical stories should not blind us to the reality that the Adam who sinned was the Adam who was the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27)! He was the Man created as just a little lower than God and crowned with glory and honour (Ps. 8:5). The description of the primal rebellion is surely intended to make us cry out in horror at how far Man has fallen from the

¹ John Philpott Curran (1750-1817), on 10th July 1790. The saying has been modified to provide the motto of the RSL.

² Nicolas Berdyaev, quoted in Philip J Hefner, in Carl E Braaten and Robert W Jensen (Eds) *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume 1, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1984, p 324.

glory of God. His sin is the desecration of such great beauty that to have a direct revelation of fallen Man is to see one who is marred 'beyond human semblance'. This cannot be Man; Man is a creature of such radiance that to see him is to see the being of God expressed.

However, it is noteworthy that while the account of the creation of Man identifies him as 'the image of God', this phrase is nowhere explained. In fact the topic plays very little role in the Old Testament at all. It is left to us to speculate what is meant by 'the image of God'. There have been a number of suggestions over the centuries.³ First there is the suggestion that 'image' and 'likeness' ('in our image according to our likeness' Gen. 1:26) are distinct, so that 'image' refers to the natural qualities in Man (reason, personality, etc.) that make him resemble God, while the likeness refers to the supernatural graces, for example, love and kindness etc. A second suggestion sees the image as found in the mental and spiritual faculties that Man shares with his creator. These may include such things as his reason, personality, free will, self-consciousness and intelligence.

Thirdly, some have suggested that Man looks like God, that it is his physical appearance that is in mind, and certainly the word 'image' generally has a physical meaning in the Old Testament, while the Old Testament does say that God has 'eyes', 'a strong right arm' and so on. Fourthly, there is the suggestion that by image is meant that Man is God's representative on earth, his vice-regent, and a fifth suggestion is that the image refers to the capacity of Man to have a relationship with God, to speak to him and so on. Man is the counterpart of God.

Now a list such as this is not meant to be a distraction; certainly there are weaknesses in each of the suggestions, but each of them carries some element which is consistent with the biblical picture. We may see the dominion given to Man as expressing the rule of God over his creation through this creature. With New Testament hindsight we may see the truth of Man as male and female as indicating that the creator is in fact triune and that it is not possible to understand the person of the eternal Son apart from the bride chosen before creation. But what we must say is that, even if these suggestions are only partly true, Man is a creature of *immense* status and glory. Geoff Bingham's summation of what the image of God means is apt: Everything God is, Man is like that, but anything God is, man is not essentially that.⁴

To a certain extent, attempts to delineate the meaning of the image of God limit it, whereas the wonder is that the only limit was placed when God forbade Man to take the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). Other than that, Man 'may freely eat of every tree of the garden'. If, as we saw in the study, 'Living in Love', God is free to be and remain God and cannot be limited by the creation, then we should understand that Man is free to be and remain Man. As a creature of the Creator, Man is free to enjoy God, to enjoy all his gifts (1 Tim. 6:17) and to enjoy his role within the whole created structure.

We can go further and note that the whole creation is not static. As we have often observed, creation was not 'finished' on the sixth day, but was rather fully functional and set in motion to move on towards the great goal God had set. It is usual to focus attention on the law which prohibited the eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,

³ What follows is taken from Gordon J Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1, Word, Dallas, 1987, p 29ff. See also Hefner, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 330ff.

⁴ *The Things We Firmly Believe*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1986, p 74.

but we ought to observe the positive nature of the obedience which was required. English translations of Genesis 2:16 have ‘You may *freely* eat ...’, which, while not a literal translation, does capture the sense of the Hebrew.⁵ The man⁶ was commanded to eat! Tilling the ground, he was to enjoy all the fruit of his labour.

Hefner⁷ argues that Man is a ‘co-creator’ with God.

To be co-creator means that *Homo sapiens* shares self-consciously and responsibly in the formation of the world and its unfolding toward its final consummation under God. ... Whatever range we give to human creative activity, the destiny of that activity is to participate in and perfect the substance and goal of God’s creative activity. God’s creating is the norm for human co-creating, not in the sense that *Homo sapiens* is to equate its activity with God’s, but rather in the sense that human activity is perverse if it does not finally qualify as participation in and extension of God’s primordial will of creation. Put in this way, the created status of the human is thoroughly eschatological; that is, it is an *unleashing*, not a full blown given that has simply to be reiterated and replicated throughout time. ... Thus construed, the motif of created co-creator points clearly to the distinctiveness of humans as creatures with a high destiny, a destiny that is essential to the world if it is to bear the mark of its creator God.

Man’s high dignity lies in his high destiny. He was created to rule the creation with God with a view to the perfecting of the plan of God for the creation. This was his freedom. He was free in the garden and so free to enjoy the expansion of the garden to fill the whole earth. He was free to enjoy the male-female relationship without shame. Indeed, as it stands, the comment that they were not ashamed is an anachronism, though obviously appropriate. Freedom *from* shame was not the first issue. Freedom *for* each other was. It is only in the light of the later shame that their freedom is contrasted with its absence.

When humans ponder their co-creator status, they recognize that it includes the freedom to conceive of actions and to carry them out. This is a pleasant, even delicious, freedom; it undergirds human aggressiveness as *homo faber*,⁸ even to the large-scale technological results now around us. Beyond this freedom, however, lies the freedom in which the human agent must take responsibility for judging whether the conceived action is desirable. Then there is the responsibility for living with the consequences of the action, even if they prove undesirable.⁹

Man, the creature had unlimited freedom — to be Man. He did not need to justify his actions or to live in fear of their consequences. The male and the female together were free to be in wonderful union as they participated in the grand plan for creation. Each new day was filled with delicious possibilities. The command not to eat of the forbidden fruit was not a limitation. It was a declaration that Man’s freedom lay in being Man and not in being God.

All this caused the psalmist to cry out in wonder, ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you visit him?’ (Ps. 8:4).

⁵ The Hebrew is **מכל האכל**, a construction meaning ‘eating, you may eat’.

⁶ This command is directed to the man, the male, before the woman appears in the story.

⁷ *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 325ff.

⁸ I think this means ‘man as a being who exercises caution’, but I prefer to be careful before offering any opinion here.

⁹ Hefner, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 327.

THE DEGRADATION OF BONDAGE

As the Genesis account unfolds, we see that freedom has become fear. The man fears the woman and she him; neither can bear to be seen fully by the other. Both are afraid of God and both are shown to be manipulated by the very creation they were intended to rule. The serpent, a creature, has brought them to shame and instead of enjoying the creation and its fruits they must fight for their survival against a creation which constantly escapes their control. Instead of luxurious fruitfulness the ground now produces thorns and thistles.

The story continues by describing the depths to which humanity has fallen.

The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. (Gen 6:5)

Whether it is intended to be ironic or not, the language of Genesis 11:6 is pointed.

And the LORD said, 'Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.' (Gen 11:6).

The freedom is now perverse and unless it is restrained Man will exercise that freedom in ways which are horrible to imagine. Thus the common language which allowed rebellious mankind to function with some common purpose, was confused. While it may be an expression of the sin of humanity, the fragmentation of the world through language and culture is also a mercy. It restrains the perversity of fallen men and women. But the picture is still one of deep tragedy.

There are a number of categories under which the nature of human bondage could be considered. In what is known as 'the classic view of the atonement',¹⁰ mankind is understood to be in bondage to various 'tyrants', each having a hold on Man because of Man's guilt. Moreover, the tyranny is not passive or benign, but vicious and destructive.

This is not the place for a full description of these tyrants, but we ought to identify them since our freedom is, to a certain extent, freedom *from* these elements. First there is the 'reality' of sin itself. 'Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin' (John 8:34). We place 'reality' in inverted commas because sin has no genuine existence of its own; it is an entity which can only exist in the presence of the truth of God. In the final analysis, sin is the orientation and action of the human will by which the truth of God as Father, Creator and King is rejected and another framework of thinking substituted for it.¹¹ Of course, as we have seen, this means that humans also reject their own identity and must therefore establish another, since they do not want to have God in their thinking (Rom. 1:28). But the bottom line in all this is the utter inability of a man or woman to escape from this bondage by their own efforts. The bondage is such that none will even see that it is bondage nor will they want to escape from it even if their dilemma is explained. The old wine is intoxicating: No one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good' (Lu. 5:39).

Paul, describing the nature of human bondage, told the Ephesians that

¹⁰ See, Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor*, SPCK, London, 1931.

¹¹ The various 'definitions' of sin in the Scriptures, 'sin is lawlessness' (1 John 3:4), 'whatever is not of faith is sin' (Rom. 14:23) and so on, are in fact descriptions of sin, and are dependent on the context in which they occur.

you were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. (Eph. 2:1-3).

Just as the will is now oriented towards sin, so the world, the age, the sphere of existence in which fallen humanity finds itself, now dictates the direction that rebellion takes. It is irrelevant whether the rebellion is overt or covert, deeply corrupt or politely civilised; the point is that sin has brought death to the truth of God. Men and women cannot and will not see it. Furthermore, men and women are, in the long run, committed to serving themselves. They follow 'the desires of flesh and senses'. To be 'in the flesh' does not only refer to being human; it refers to being locked into serving oneself. Again, there will be those who are totally given over to hedonism in its most extreme forms while others may evidence the greatest human self-discipline and even self-sacrifice. The issue is not on that level. The real issue is that when the command to 'worship the Lord your God and serve only him' is presented, men and women cannot and will not obey it.

The name 'Satan' means adversary. In the Old Testament it is a fairly neutral title and may be applied to David (1 Sam. 29:4), the national enemies (1 Kings 5:4) and even 'the angel of the LORD' (Num. 22:22). In Job 1-2¹² it is the title given to a being who argues against the righteousness of a person. He is essentially a prosecutor, an accuser, in this case. However, in the New Testament there is a far more sinister presentation. Whatever Satan's origin,¹³ the incarnation of the Son of God, the second man, provides the occasion for the recapitulation of the temptation in Eden. This time, the serpent is the 'devil' (the actual identification of the serpent with Satan is not made until Revelation 12:9), who attempts to violate the purity and innocence of Jesus. He is malicious, appearing only to steal and to kill and to destroy. Alongside him are the demonic powers, who so evidently hate not only humanity but all of God's creation. While not all are 'possessed' by demons, and those who are possessed by them are often horribly afflicted (see Mark 5:2-5; 9:17-18 and Matt. 17:15), nonetheless 'the whole world lies under the power of the evil one' (1 John 5:19). Gentiles are described as being in darkness, under 'the power of Satan' (Acts 26:18 cf Col. 1:13). This bondage is related to guilt — redemption is in the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14).

Associated with this is 'the fear of death'. The devil has 'the power (strength or grip) of death' (Heb. 2:14) and, through guilt, men and women are in lifelong bondage to the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). We ought to beware of being simplistic in these matters; for instance there are those who have bravely faced death and who are rightly honoured in history. Nor is this only bravado. What the Scriptures are saying is on a different level. When faced with its full dimensions, namely holiness' judgement of guilt, death is neither noble nor an escape from suffering. It is a torment, re-enforced by every reminder of our mortality.

The way these tyrants exercise their power will no doubt vary with individuals and cultures and an exposition of them will demand much discernment lest we trivialise the human predicament. But we must understand the essential nature of the bondage. Paul wrote

¹² Also 1 Chron. 21:1; Zech. 3:1, 2.

¹³ Some see the references to the Kings of Babylon and Tyre (Isaiah 14:12ff; Ezekiel 28:2, 11ff) as cryptic references to the 'fall' of Satan.

that we believers, with all creation, are looking forward to ‘the freedom of the glory of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21).¹⁴ While ever Man lived in the truth he was free and the truth is that man was crowned with glory and honour. As one hymn writer put it,

There once was righteousness
In Eden’s happiness,
When we with God-given glory shone,
But then in wrong despite
We turned against the light—
The image marred, the glory gone.¹⁵

The bondage is degradation because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Created as son of God, Man now cringes in the face of his lost glory and his death. Yet he is not ashamed (cf. Rom. 6:21); he has become futile in his thinking with a senseless mind darkened and debased. The result is degraded bodies and degrading passions and a society filled with every kind of wickedness (Rom. 1:18-32).

Daniel, in his prayer of confession, summed up the reason why Israel of old suffered the judgment of exile,

Open shame, O LORD, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. ⁹To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, ¹⁰and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

¹¹All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you. ¹²He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers, by bringing upon us a calamity so great that what has been done against Jerusalem has never before been done under the whole heaven. ¹³Just as it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us. We did not entreat the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and reflecting on his fidelity. ¹⁴So the LORD kept watch over this calamity until he brought it upon us. Indeed, the LORD our God is right in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice. (Dan. 9:8-14).

Israel’s calamities were only what could be expected, given that the covenant God made with them at Sinai contained promises of both blessing and cursing. Israel was delivered into the hands of her enemies, receiving the curse of the law.

Blessing and cursing are covenant terms (Deut. 30:19 etc). God will have a holy people so he must judge their unholiness. God will have a holy creation so he must judge its unholiness. Thus, what Adam experienced was not the capricious anger of a frustrated God, but the righteous anger of a God who has formed creation in covenant with himself¹⁶ and who, as Creator, remains faithful to the covenant (1 Peter 4:19). There was blessing for Man in the creation (Gen. 1:28) and blessing in the Sabbath to which all was brought (Gen. 2:3). Likewise, there was the curse when creation refused to live in the blessing of obedience. The curse comes upon the serpent because it has violated the covenant order and the ground is cursed so that Man cannot know true freedom in life, that is the freedom to enjoy

¹⁴ NRSV. This is a literal translation. See also ASV and NASB.

¹⁵ St. Martin de Walkerville, 1987.

¹⁶ See W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984 etc.

the creation and move with it to the goal.¹⁷ Cain is ‘cursed from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive [his] brothers blood from [his] hand’ (Gen 4:11).

The curse comes when law is broken. Plainly it was not the law which God gave through Moses, since that was given to Israel and then only some four hundred and thirty years after Abraham. Yet Abraham, too, was told of promised blessing and cursing (Gen. 12:2-3) and was described as having ‘obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws’ (Gen. 26:5).

Covenant and law are fundamental to creation, and Israel’s law and covenant are a particular expression of all that was true in creation. So the curse of the violated covenant in Israel is a real representation of what is true among all humanity. Israel is everyone ‘writ large’. The law of God, whether in the form expressed in Israel or as declared by the heavens and written on the heart of all at creation, and there because all are created in the image of God, stands as a tyrant because of human guilt. The law holds men and women in their guilt and so brings wrath to them. That is why any vision of the glory of God is a torment and why attempts at expiation of guilt, that is, the payment of sufficient penalty to make up for a debt, is quite inadequate. The problem, ultimately, is not just a debt we cannot pay, but a curse which we cannot remove. God is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11 AV) and at the deepest level, the human conscience agrees that this is the way it must be.

IF THE SON SETS YOU FREE...

If the problem is that men and women are under the curse of God because of the violated covenant of creation, then we understand that God ‘gives them up’ to their enemies, to sin, the world and the flesh, to Satan and his associates and to the fear of death. The law of God stands as an accuser and the wrath of God is constantly being poured out on those who persistently suppress the truth. Yet Paul wrote that ‘for freedom Christ has set us free’. In the light of the fearful dimensions of our bondage, that is a momentous statement. It must mean that the curse has been removed, the wrath dealt with and the law satisfied. Equally, it must mean that Satan and the other tyrants have been disarmed.

Within the argument of the letter to the Galatians, Paul argues that he is free from the demands of Jewish law as a result of the work of Christ and that this is the way it is for Gentiles and Jews alike.

Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’⁷ so, you see, those who believe are the sons of Abraham.⁸ And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.’⁹ For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

¹⁰For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.’¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’¹² But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, ‘Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.’¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ —¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Gal. 3:6-14).

¹⁷ Perhaps Genesis 3:17-19 could be compared with Deuteronomy 28:38-40.

Although the description of Christ becoming a curse for us applies initially to his bearing the curse of Israel's rebellion, it must also mean that he has borne the curse which has come upon the whole creation. Only by that means can Gentiles and Jews both inherit the promised *blessing* in Abraham.

The action of Christ bearing the curse, indeed, *becoming* the curse for us is more than just a theological nicety. It is the very heart of all that we are about. Unless this takes place, all creation is locked into its judgment and there is nothing but wrath. But we understand that 'he bore our sin in his own body on the tree' and in so doing bore all the wrath which that sin demanded. This is what is meant by the old word 'propitiation', used in some versions of Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17 and 1 John 4:10. Wrath is removed by the offering of a gift, but the reality is that the offended holiness of God is satisfied because the offended God himself provides the gift. God is propitiated because God is the propitiator. That is the wonder of his love.

The Son sets us free because he is the gift by which the curse is removed. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all and dealt with him as all evil must be dealt with. We preach Jesus Christ and him crucified because it is in that act that all the evil of all creation and of all time was taken and judged. Wrath was poured out on guilt — totally. His cry of dereliction, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' expresses the horror of that judgment. There is Man, the last Adam, bearing the extreme agony of separation. His thirst is nothing less than the awful barrenness of humanity cut off from the fountain of living waters. In it all, the self deceit of Man is so evident, since he evokes no sympathy; he is despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering and acquainted with grief, but so deep is the grief he experiences that those for whom he suffers hide their faces from him. It is too painful to see, for the grief is the result of his bearing the wrath due to us.

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger. (Lam 1:12).

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa 53:4-6).

This is the moment in history which is the great eternal moment, when 'for our sake [God] made him who knew no sin to become sin for us' (2 Cor. 5:21).

The result of this act of judgment is that all the guilt by which the tyrants hold men and women in their grip is removed. There is none left. While there are those who do not receive the benefits of that, the truth is, nonetheless, that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). The Son sets us free by taking our guilt and bearing the judgment so that we might be totally reconciled to God.

The nature of this reconciliation must not be minimised. If the man Jesus bore our sin, he did so not only as our *substitute* but as a *vicarious* sacrifice. He did not only die in our place but, when he died, we died. We were in him on the cross and we are in him in his resurrection. All our rebellion and the hostile perversity of our minds has been taken into the cross and his death is both the ultimate expression of our evil *and* the total absorption of it by the triune Godhead until it is no more. That hideous guilt which distorted us has distorted him — (referring to the events described in Luke 9:28-36) we understand that he was

transfigured, so that he might be disfigured, in order that we who are disfigured might be transfigured. Hence Paul wrote that 'if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old things have passed away; look! they have become new' (2 Cor. 5:17).

The sins which held us in bondage, which once were like scarlet, are now like snow; once they were red like crimson, now they are like wool (Isa 1:18). It is our sin which has been drained of its accusing hue. As a result, it cannot be used against us. Thus Satan is left powerless; as the accuser of the brethren he has been thrown down. He may accuse us day and night before our God and so claim us as his own, but his claims are empty. So are those of the demonic forces, who have been disarmed and exposed. When our trespasses were forgiven and the bond which stood against us nailed to Christ's cross, the utter pointlessness of the claims of these forces was demonstrated.

This present age, with its own direction, is no longer the sphere in which we live. 'Jesus Christ ... gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age' (Gal. 1:4) and the work he did for us was communicated into us by the Holy Spirit when God awakened faith in us. So we are not 'in the flesh' either, but 'in the Spirit' (Rom. 8:9). And there is a change in our relationship to the law of God, for his death meant 'that the just requirement of the law [was] fulfilled in us' (Rom. 8:4), with the implication that we are now re-orientated towards obedience. Instead of being hostile in mind doing evil deeds (Col. 1:21), we now say that 'I delight in the law of God in my inmost self' (Rom. 7:22).

Paul wrote that God 'has blessed us in Christ with very spiritual blessing in the heavenly places' (Eph. 1:3). Once we were strangers to the covenants of promise (Eph. 2:12) but now the blessing is restored. This is because 'we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses' (Eph. 1:7). His blood is the blood of the covenant (Matt. 26:28), 'the blood of the eternal covenant' (Heb 13:20) which has come to us with renewed power and effectiveness. It is the blood of the (re)new(ed) covenant (1 Cor. 11:25), which has great power because we all now know God, from the least of us to the greatest, since he has forgiven our iniquity and will never again remember our sin (Jer. 31:31-34). There is a sense in which it is quite pointless to have a conversation with God about our sin, although, without doubt, there are others more than willing to listen and agree with any suggestion of guilt. The only sin which can be mentioned before God is forgiven sin!

This is the great blessing of the Spirit, the blessing of the new covenant. So, 'Joy to the world! the Lord is come: the Saviour reigns:

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found ...¹⁸

FREEDOM FROM; FREEDOM FOR

All that we have said may thrill us, but there may remain a sense of longing, as 'if only it were true for me'. We may sing our songs of freedom while still, deeply, sensing a present bondage. And, to a certain extent, we seem to share such a feeling with Paul, who cried out for release from his 'body of death' (Rom. 7:24). But did Paul, in fact, carry a sense of

¹⁸ Isaac Watts, NCTM Hymn Book, N° 60.

continuing bondage? Or did Peter or John or any others of the New Testament writers? The answer is that they did not, and were we to read Paul's statement in Romans 7 within the context we would see that his lament over his inability to 'do what is right', while genuine, is by no means a cause for despair.

What he is doing, in fact, is arguing that while ever he compares his position with the law he is thrown into despair, since the law will only condemn his actions. But the transforming work of Christ means that he is no longer 'in Adam'. Adam is dead (Rom. 6:6), so the sin which he sees still present is really not Paul (Rom. 7:17). His cry for deliverance from the body of death is immediately answered by 'Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 7:25). There is simply 'now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'; they are set 'free from the law of sin and death'. In other words, in the light of all that Christ has done, for us and in us, there is no point in comparing ourselves to the law.

This is the point of Paul's warning in Galatians 5:1.

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

The Galatian heresy is dangerous. It urges that maturity, our relationship to creation's goal, be measured by law. In the immediate context, it meant that Gentiles should only be admitted to the people of God if at the same time they were admitted to Israel and so Israel's law, and Paul's argument, as we saw above, was that it was not Israel but Abraham to whom they were joined. But if we go further and insist that Israel's law is the law of God in a particular form for a particular purpose, then we will say that a return to any law as a standard must be avoided. Christ set us free from law's condemnation: 'I, through the law, died to the law' (Gal. 2:19 cf. Rom. 7:4). The purpose is not that we might go back and examine constantly the failure which previously brought condemnation, but that we should understand that we have been set free *for freedom*.

It is evident that this does not mean freedom for sin or self-indulgence or whatever. For instance,

As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. (1 Peter 2:16).

And when Paul said that we had been made alive when once we were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:5, 1) it was because he was insisting that if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. In the language of Ephesians, it is that

we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (Eph 2:10).

God has re-created us in Christ Jesus; the good works are those which were always the intention of God for Man. To reduce 'good works' to mere pleasing actions would be to trivialise the whole plan of God. We have been set free to be free, to be men and women who know the reality of forgiveness, not because we can see ourselves as without sin, but because we can see that it was the work of the cross which dealt with the curse.

And here is the key to dealing with the accusations. It is quite simple to level an accusation; simply examine the action or thought or intention and measure it against the law. Then pronounce the guilt. But the liberty of the believer does not lie in freedom from failure; it lies in freedom from guilt. The purified conscience is his gift to us (Heb. 9:14) and the

command is to maintain a pure conscience (1 Tim. 1:19). While never condoning sin, it is still obvious that we cannot maintain a pure conscience by our own actions. Against what could we measure those actions?

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

¹¹But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony (Rev 12:10-11).

The successful rejection of the accusation of guilt lies in the testimony that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. So who can lay any effective charge against God's elect? Who is there who can condemn once God has justified?

It is plain that many will try to lay a charge against us; nor will it only be Satan who attempts it. It is part of the world's tactics, used by many, to accuse in order to control in some way. Husbands and wives will be tempted to use the method as will parents and children, congregations and pastors. There is even the sinister suggestion that while God may forgive me, I cannot forgive myself or, at best, that I must try to do so. But this is no less evil than the accusation of Satan. First the sin was always against God (Ps. 51:4) and secondly, if he has removed the guilt then the guilt is removed! It would be supreme arrogance to nullify the work of the cross by my again deciding what is good and evil.

THE COMING FREEDOM

If the Son sets us free, then we are free indeed (John 8:36). That means that we can never be more free than we are now. In other words, we can never be brought under condemnation again. What lies in the future is the sight. Now we walk by faith, meaning that we do not *see* our justification. Now there are accusations and we understand that they are based on our failure to live as men and women of the new creation. Yet there is a difference; the blessing is never withdrawn nor the curse reimposed. There is no danger that Satan or his hosts will arise to gain a surprise victory at the final moment. He is defeated and all talk of a coming battle of Armageddon overlooks the fact that in the book of the Revelation the only thought of battle lies in the intentions of the evil one. The battle never takes place.¹⁹ The reason is simple, it has already taken place and the victory of the Lamb has already been won (Rev. 5:5 etc).

There are present sufferings, especially as we are constantly exposed to our own weakness and failure. But there is more than just a future — there is the promise, the promise of the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Once the glory was lost, the image marred. Now we are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18), and 'this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure' (2 Cor. 4:17). One day the bride, the holy city, will appear, radiant with the glory of God (Rev. 21:11).

¹⁹ Armageddon is mentioned in Rev. 16:16, but the context is that the gathering for battle is under the sovereign control of the Lamb; it is part of the judgment which he administers. And when the scene is set for battle, all that is heard is the voice from the throne, 'It is done' (Rev. 16:17) or the invitation to the birds to eat the dead bodies of those who presume to attack the camp of the saints (Rev. 19:17-18; 20:9).

Another hymn writer²⁰ put it this way.

This is the song of a new creation,
Behold, the Lord makes all things new!
What He's begun in us He'll finish,
And we will bear His likeness true.

This is the song of a new creation,
The earth is waiting eagerly,
To see the sons of God revealed,
For then creation will be free!

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²⁰ Kay Robinson, NCTM Hymn Book, N° 197.

Living in Joy¹

If we are told to ‘Cheer up!’ when we are feeling miserable, the task is not impossible but, at the least, requires an amount of effort. Of course, there is the likelihood that someone, given such an instruction, will refuse with some degree of anger. Yet we are faced with the specific injunction to ‘rejoice in the Lord’ (Phil. 3:1). Of course, in its context it is not a *legal* requirement, but it is nonetheless strong exhortation and, if that has not been taken seriously, the apostle repeats it, with emphasis, in Philippians 4:4— ‘Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice’. Furthermore, this admonition cannot be understood simply as a call to ‘cheer up’ since the readers are to ‘rejoice *always*’. ‘Keep on rejoicing in the Lord at all times, regardless of what may come upon you’.²

It is this viewpoint, ‘regardless of what may come upon you’, which highlights the nature of joy. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines joy as, ‘vivid emotion of pleasure, gladness, thing that causes delight³’, while the Macquarie Dictionary has, ‘an emotion of keen or lively pleasure arising from present or expected good; exultant satisfaction; great gladness; delight’. However, since joy is commanded, we would have to add to these definitions the detail that true joy is as much a settled and chosen disposition as a transient emotion. The transient emotion may perhaps be better described as ‘happiness’, a word deriving from the archaic *hap*, meaning ‘one’s luck or lot; an occurrence, happening or accident’,⁴ so that happiness may be more dependent on circumstances. Of course, in popular use, the two words may not retain such a distinction.⁵

THE ORIGIN OF JOY

While joy may be commanded, the full statement is ‘rejoice in the Lord’. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16 there is the command to ‘rejoice always’ without the phrase ‘in the Lord’,⁶ but it ought not to be assumed that the command in Philippians is to another kind of joy. There is only one joy. ‘In the Lord’ may mean that the Lord is the object of the rejoicing, a meaning similar to Psalms 32:11 and 33:1. While it cannot mean less than that, it may also mean that rejoicing is grounded in our union with the Lord and is the sphere in which rejoicing thrives.⁷ That would mean that our joy, and so our deliberate choice to live in that, flows from our being in the Lord.

¹ There are not many works on ‘joy’ to instruct our thinking, but of great value are Geoffrey Bingham’s, *The Spirit’s Harvest*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1987 and his *Commanded to Joy*, 1982. Various dictionary articles provide good summaries of the biblical concepts.

² Peter T O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians, A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991, p 485.

³ As in ‘A thing of beauty is a joy forever’.

⁴ Macquarie Dictionary.

⁵ Recall the old song, ‘I am H-A-P-P-Y...’ sung by generations of Sunday School children. Probably it taught more about spelling than it did about God.

⁶ See also 2 Cor. 13:11, where the Greek verb, *caivrete*, is translated ‘farewell’ (*RSV, NRSV, ASV, AV*) or ‘goodbye’ (*NIV*), and Matt. 28:9, where it is translated as ‘Greetings’ etc. On all other occasions in the NT the word means ‘rejoice’, which is its basic meaning.

⁷ See O’Brien, *Philippians*, p 350, esp. *n 18*, where technical reasons why this may be the possible meaning are given.

But why should being ‘in the Lord’ be a ground for rejoicing? To this there is the simple answer: God is a god of joy. An example of how we see this is as follows: when Levi (Matthew) was called by Jesus, he ‘gave a great banquet for [Jesus] in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them’ (Luke 5:29; cf Mark 2:15, which has ‘sinners’ where Luke has ‘others’). Conspicuously, Jesus identified this partying with ‘sinners’ called to ‘repentance’ (Luke 5:32)! This behaviour offended the ‘righteous’ Pharisees and scribes, who were unable to comprehend the surge of life which came to those who repented. Instead, the Pharisees were like the old garment which could not take the new cloth, or the old wineskin which could not endure the ferment of new wine (Luke 5:33-39). Where there is repentance there is joy and, to put it mildly, we would understand it to be somewhat tangible.

The criticism of Jesus continued and in Luke 15 there are three stories to explain both the joy of the penitents and the miserable response of the Pharisees. The first two, ‘the lost sheep’ and ‘the lost coin’ conclude with an account of joy. The first has,

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7).

and the second,

Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:10).

His words are ‘joy in heaven’ and ‘joy in the presence of the angels of God’. In other words, when there is repentance, there is first of all rejoicing in heaven to which the angels are only observers. Presumably they do not enter in to the *whole* experience, as with the matter of salvation, ‘things into which angels long to look’ (1 Peter 1:12). They see *God’s* joy! Of course, from the vantage point of a Trinitarian understanding of God, it would not be inappropriate to see this as the Father, Son and Spirit delighting in the accomplishment of their eternal plan. The misery of the Pharisees was the result of their not knowing the true nature of God or of their inheritance. As a consequence, they enjoyed neither (Luke 15:25-32).

This is the principle expressed by Ezra and Nehemiah. After the book of the law of Moses was read to the people,

Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen,’ lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ...

⁹And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, ‘This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.’ For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰Then he said to them, ‘Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, *for the joy of the LORD is your strength.*’ ¹¹So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, ‘Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.’ ¹²And *all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.* (Neh 8:6, 9-12).

Of course this did not mean that the matter of what the reading of the law of Moses exposed should not have been taken seriously, as the following chapter reveals. But their point is that the joy of *the LORD* is the strength of the people. In his presence there is

fullness of joy and in his right hand pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11). In that presence there can be genuine repentance which leads to life and joy, but anything else would only be deadly remorse.

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. (2 Cor. 7:10)

To those who do not know repentance, the joy of the LORD will be a torment, but it does not minimise the great joy which God has in himself and so in all that he does.

We may say that the Father delights in his Son, he finds great joy in him. The words used at Jesus' baptism, 'with whom I am well pleased' (or, 'in whom my soul delights', Isa 42:1) indicate this. Likewise the Son delights in the Father: 'I delight to do your will' (Psalm 40:8 cf. Heb. 10:5-7). Also, the Spirit brings joy, to Jesus: 'he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit' (Luke 10:21) and to the redeemed ('you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit', 1 Thess. 1:6). Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Joy is known only as it is first *of* God and then *from* God. Thus Psalm 36:7-9.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
 All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
⁸They feast on the abundance of your house,
 and you give them drink from the river of *your* delights.
⁹For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

It is only from this perspective that we can understand the constant care which God has for all that he has made. The creation is his joy and participates in it. Job was given a glimpse of this:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? ... ⁷when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings [sons of God] shouted for joy? (Job 38:4, 7)

Proverbs describes God's joy in his wise plan for the creation; his wisdom speaks—

then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, ³¹rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. (Proverbs 8:30-31)

This joy in creation must surely show us that creation is not grace but gift. That is, it is not a matter of some unmerited favour⁸ but the outflow of God's deep delight in his Son through whom and for whom he generously brought all things into being (Col. 1:16).

The climax of the plan is a matter of deep satisfaction. If there is joy in heaven when one sinner repents, how much more when all creation comes to its goal?

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory *with exceeding joy*, ²⁵To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 24-25 AV).

and

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; *enter into the joy of your lord.*' (Matt 25:21).

⁸ This aspect of grace was dealt with in some detail in the February study, 'Living in Grace'.

THE LOSS OF JOY

David prayed, 'Restore to me the joy of your salvation' (Ps. 51:12). He did this in the face of the anguish of his guilt.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. (Psalm 51:7-11).

This anguish is against the background of all that we have said. Creation came into being in joy and Adam and Eve were participants in the joy of God. They were participants in the blessing which was given within the covenant of creation. Without rebellion they lived in the presence of God and knew 'the joy of [his] presence' (Ps. 21:6). However, rebellion brought loss of joy because it brought the curse of the covenant. Thus in place of joy came 'death' (Gen 2:17) with its attendant fracturing of relationships and personal dislocation. The primal joy of hope in participation in the purpose of God was replaced by the fear of death (Heb 2:15) and Romans 1:18-32 shows that when the lie was chosen over against the truth Man knew only the emptiness of his perversions. We may say that joy was gone; in its place was only unsustainable 'happiness', dependent on the manipulation of circumstances. If nothing else, the constant variations in human fortunes, whether caused by weather, illness or whatever, repeatedly expose the fragile nature of the happiness.

But this happiness is unsustainable because the ground, and so all who are dependent on it, is suffering the personal curse of God (Gen. 3:17). In other words, God will not permit joy in the presence of guilt. 'The creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it' (Rom. 8:20) and 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth' (Rom 1:18).

Instead of humble submission and repentance towards God, there is now anger.⁹ Cain was angry (Gen 4:5), angry with God for not accepting his offering. In order to relieve

⁹ The matter of human anger is of great significance and yet so often treated as if it were not often so evil. In his very valuable book, *Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1995), Geoffrey Bingham wrote:

There is a right anger. Of course there is. Paul advised, quoting from an old Scripture, 'Be angry and do not sin'. He meant, 'You have a right to be angry in some circumstances, but then don't let that anger pass over from its legitimate perimeter into something else.' Nevertheless we must not let this possibility minimise righteous anger. If we do not get angry with rape, murder, lying, evil events, genocide, and much unnecessary suffering caused by human selfishness, then we are not truly human. We have lost moral sensitivity. Our sense of injustice has become dulled. We are callous.

In the Scriptures there are many examples of right anger. In Judges 9:30ff., there is the story of the treachery of the men of Shechem, concerning which Zebul is righteously angry. When Nathan the prophet, in 11 Samuel 12:5, tells the story of a poor man's family which owns but one lamb and this is taken and slaughtered by a rich neighbour, David the king is filled with righteous anger. In fact he is unaware that in principle he himself is the rich man of the story! Moses is in righteous anger at his people when they manufacture and dance around the golden calf (Exodus 32:19). Nehemiah is angry at what is happening in regard to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 5:6), and in this he is justified. Christ, casting the moneychangers from the temple, is also righteous in his anger. Jesus, we read, became angry on a number of occasions, all of which were justified.

In the same way we often have indignation, and rightly so. Yet it can be that behind our indignation there are elements of guilt. We may even off-load our guilt on to others by the device of indignation, judging in another what is present in ourselves. Many years ago, in the Ward-Profumo case, a judge warned others against judging. He suggested

the most indignant might be guilty of similar elements, at least in the thinking of their minds, even if not in the outward actions of their lives. We see that few have a clear right to righteous indignation. (p 6f)

the burden of wrath, he attempted to change the situation which exposed his dilemma, namely the presence of his brother. However, later, Noah was told that murder was such a heinous sin because it is an attack on the image of God (Gen. 9:6). Human anger is, in the ultimate, directed towards God. This is because all sin is likewise towards God (Ps. 51:4). Cain was driven from the presence of God (Gen. 4:16), not meaning that he was away from God, but that he was apart from the presence which is full of joy and tranquillity. To those in such a condition there is only the continual revelation of wrath.

The anger of humanity is seen in many ways; Paul says that we were 'hostile in mind doing evil deeds' (Col. 1:21), even to the point of self-mutilation and self-injury, in whatever form (eg. Rom. 1:24-25). And the more God reveals himself as a God of joy and mercy, the more the irrational anger rises up. This is seen so often in the fury directed towards believers, however subtly expressed. A clear example of anger is in Jonah 4:1-11.

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ²He prayed to the LORD and said, 'O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for *I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.* ³And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.' ⁴And the LORD said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'

⁵Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. ⁶The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. ⁷But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. ⁸When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'

⁹But God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?' And he said, 'Yes, angry enough to die.' ¹⁰Then the LORD said, 'You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?'

So the proverb puts it, 'A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but passion makes the bones rot' (Prov. 14:30). The conjunction of guilt and *dis*-ease is expressed in Psalm 38:3-8.

There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin.

⁴For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.

⁵My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness;

⁶I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all day long I go around mourning.

⁷For my loins are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh.

⁸I am utterly spent and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

Of course, this analysis of the human condition does not come naturally. It requires a revelation, for 'the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can

understand it?' (Jer. 17:9). So the assertion that fallen Man cannot know joy will hardly find general acceptance.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF JOY

It is plain that what we know of the joy of the Lord we know from the scriptures. These were written out of the context of the intimacy which Israel and later the church had with God and in which he gave definitive revelation of himself. What is more, there were those in Israel and the church who did know joy.

The Old Testament is full of statements which describe the things in which a person of faith, indeed often the whole people, could and did rejoice.¹⁰ The creation, at which the sons of God shout for joy, causes great rejoicing (Ps. 104, especially vss. 33-34). The law of God is a particular cause of joy. Psalm 1:2 indicates delight in the law; Psalm 19:8 says that the precepts of the LORD cause the heart to rejoice and Psalm 119 is full of exultation in the law; 'your decrees ... are the joy of my heart (vs. 111), 'I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil' (vs. 162).

God's judgments on his, and Israel's, enemies was a cause for joy (Pss. 48:11; 96:10-13; 97:8). Closely related to this was the salvation which Israel had experienced at the exodus from Egypt (Ex 15:1-21; Pss. 103:6ff; 105; 136). God's sovereignty in these things is a matter for joy (Pss. 96:10-13; 97:1; 99:1-9), as also his steadfast love (Pss. 31:7; 90:14).

All of this is in the context of Israel's worship. Creation, providence and redemption, both personal and corporate, are all celebrated in the worship. The feasts of Israel were significant times of rejoicing and to a certain extent were legislated as such (see Num. 10:10). Psalm 95 urged Israel:

O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
²Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! (Ps 95:1-2).

The feast of Passover was celebrated under King Hezekiah after years of neglect. 2 Chronicles 30 describes the event as a time of 'great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon son of King David of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem' (vs. 26). Of course there were other elements contributing to the joy, as Ezra 6:22 indicates.

With joy they celebrated the festival of unleavened bread seven days; for the LORD had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

The feasts of Pentecost and Tabernacles were also times of corporate rejoicing.

You shall count seven weeks; begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. ¹⁰Then you shall keep the festival of weeks for the LORD your God, contributing a freewill offering in proportion to the blessing that you have received from the LORD your God. ¹¹*Rejoice before the LORD your God*—you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you—at the place that the LORD your God will choose

¹⁰ Some what follows is taken from Geoffrey Bingham, *Commanded to Joy*, p 4.

as a dwelling for his name. ¹²Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes.

¹³You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your wine press. ¹⁴*Rejoice during your festival*, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. ¹⁵Seven days you shall keep the festival for the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose; for the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate. (Deut. 16:9-15)

In this worship as well as in the regular worship in the Temple, there was the recognition that not only had God done great things for Israel, but that he was present with them. Their rejoicing was also in the continued presence.

You have put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and wine abound. (Ps. 4:7)

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, so that those who love your name may exult in you. (Ps 5:11).

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.

²I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. (Ps 9:1-2).

You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Ps 16:11).

No doubt the overriding principle was stated in Psalm 43:4.

Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.

God was their exceeding joy and they knew joy as they were united to him and expressed that in the worship.

Israel ought to have known rich joy continually. We recall the purpose of God declared to Abraham that he would bless the nations through Abraham's offspring. As the physical descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel had been redeemed from slavery, they had been given the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law and the worship (Rom 9:4), all within the rich experience of the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifices (see Lev. 17:11; Ps. 32:1). Yet, in all this, their joy was transient since the nation as a whole was not 'circumcised in heart' (Deut. 10:16; 30:6). Although redeemed, they continually brought covenant curse upon themselves by their worship of other gods. And as people under curse, they knew no fullness of joy.

By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

²*On the willows there we hung up our harps.*

³*For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'*

⁴*How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?*

⁵*If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!*

⁶*Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. (Psalm 137:1-6).*

THE PROMISE OF JOY

Under the curse Israel the nation had only the recollection of joy. But God had not changed. He had not cast off his people nor his plan for the whole creation. We could perhaps say that God's joy is goal directed, that is his joy in the creation is incomplete until the creation is complete. Israel's sin, idolatry and rebellion evoked a response of sorrow from God (see Gen. 6:6-7; 1 Sam. 15:35; Ps. 79:40 and Isa. 63:10). Furthermore, the judgment which he inflicted did not cause him any joy (Jer. 42:10). His joy is in the fulfilment of his purpose.

Hence there are the many promises of a coming joy, when the covenant is made new and God's favour and blessing is restored.

I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me. ⁴¹I will rejoice in doing good to them, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul. (Jer. 32:40-41)

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. ¹⁷The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing ¹⁸as on a day of festival. (Zeph 3:16-18).

These promises are clear. There will be a coming day of great joy.

You will say in that day: I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me. ²Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. ³With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. (Isa 12:1-4)

The coming joy is not only for Israel but for the nations also and so for the whole creation. The following verses show the breadth of this purpose: Isaiah 9:1-7 (esp. vs. 3); 25:6-10; 49:13; 55:12; 56:6-7; 60:15-16; 61:1-11; 66:10-14. Deliverance will come (Zech. 9:9) and when it does the people will be intoxicated with joy (Zech. 10:7). Simeon and Anna were two of those for whom these promises were a great stimulus in life (Lu. 25, 38).

The central issue is the proclamation of the good news, 'Your God reigns' (Isa. 52:7) and this is a song of great joy (Isa. 52:8-10).

YOUR GOD REIGNS

When Jesus and John the Baptist preached, they declared, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand' — 'Your God reigns'. All that was promised is now happening. But the New Testament begins with the restoration of the Presence, 'God with us' (Matt. 1:23), the Word becoming flesh and dwelling ('tabernacled') among us (John 1:14).

This is the moment of great joy!

...the angel said to [the shepherds], 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.' (Lu. 2:10-11).

And of course the angelic hosts could hardly be expected to restrain their delight:

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
¹⁴Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors! (Lu. 2:13-14)

This great joy is also seen in Mary (Luke 1:47) and the wise men who 'were overwhelmed with joy' (Matt. 2:10). Elizabeth (Luke 1:44), the seventy disciples (Luke 10:17) and the crowds (Luke 13:17) are all described as experiencing joy. The joy the seventy experienced was wrongly understood; Jesus had to redirect their thinking so that they rejoiced not over the submission of the spirits but because their 'names are written in heaven' (Luke 10:20). John the Baptist was a man who knew joy, especially as he knew the place which he had in the plan of God (John 3:29).

Although he was 'a man of sorrows' (Isa 53:3), Jesus, too, was a man of joy (Lu. 10:21), knowing that the Father reveals the truth in accordance with his gracious will. He spoke of 'my joy' which the disciples would know (John 15:11; 17:13). As the one without sin, we should say that he is *the* man of joy, and that the joy of God is fully revealed in him and that joy will be only known when it is restored in him.

In his ministry before his crucifixion, Jesus healed and restored men and women and although they are not often said to be filled with joy we do see them caught in awed praise.

Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.' (Luke 5:26)

We may understand that something of the promised joy is coming to them and, however they may not understand it, they are nonetheless participating in the joy of salvation being restored. This is seen in the expectation and praise which came from the crowd when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!' ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' ⁴⁰He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.' (Luke 19:37-40)

It is as if he were saying, not only must the disciples praise but that the very ground, once cursed, is now ready to express the joy of the coming salvation.

The story of the cross we know. But the cross of Christ as the point of joy for God is perhaps not so obvious. We know that Christ endured the cross 'for the joy that was set before him' (Heb. 12:2), but what joy could there have been in the awful suffering? Certainly there was no happiness. Yet can we not see the deep satisfaction of the Father, Son and Spirit in the triumph of holiness (Isa. 53:11)? 'It is finished' means that all that was purposed from before times eternal had now been accomplished. The Son, by the eternal Spirit, offering himself without blemish to the Father is, in his horrific pain, the supreme satisfaction and joy of the Godhead. Now in history all that had dared call holiness into question has been destroyed. The Bride of the Lamb has been redeemed and her glory is established (see Romans 8:30). When Jesus died, it was not in the anguish of the lost but in the serenity of the truly joyful.

JOY RESTORED

The prophet promised that ‘with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation’ (Isa. 12:3) and Peter describes the experience of salvation and suffering which the believers have.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,⁵ who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.⁶ In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials,⁷ so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.⁸ Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,⁹ for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet 1:3-9).

Salvation is both a present possession and a future hope. In a sense, the aspect of hope is of the essence since God’s purpose is not yet complete and we are saved back into participation in his plan. As said above, Adam lost his hope and knows only the fear of death; now we know the restoration of hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This present hope with its attendant blessings is a cause of deep rejoicing, even though suffering is necessary for faith to reach its final purity. Verse 8 describes the intensity of the joy: it is ‘indescribable and glorious’.

We must understand that this is not a command, it is a statement of fact. Joy has come because sin has been purged and the Spirit given to those in Christ. The Acts of the Apostles described the early church as full of joy.

As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. (Acts 5:41)

So there was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:8)

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:39)

When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; (Acts 11:23)

On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. (Acts 12:14)

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:52)

So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. (Acts 15:3)

When its members read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation. (Acts 15:31)

He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God. (Acts 16:34)

Whether the immediate context is suffering or exhortation or news of the conversion of others or whatever, the response is one of joy. David had prayed that God would restore the joy of his salvation and this is precisely what God has done. Joy is not a commodity which we can choose to have; it is the fruit of the Spirit. As the Holy Spirit brings

salvation, the work of the cross with its many elements, to us so the joy of Father, Son and Spirit comes to us. It is Jesus' joy which is in us (John 15:11) for the Spirit takes the things of the Son and declares them to us. But all that is his is of the Father (John 16:12-15) so that we may say that we are now, by faith (that is it is not yet *seen* in its fulness), 'participants in the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4).

The phrase 'an indescribable and glorious joy' is literally, 'an indescribable and *having been glorified* joy'. Our joy is the point where the coming glory and great rejoicing in the new heavens and the new earth is presently a reality. Quite obviously, that means that our immediate circumstances are not the issue, since Peter wrote of the sufferings that are needed. Paul says we boast of our sufferings (Rom. 5:3), 'the sufferings of this present time [which] are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us' (Rom 8:18) and James calls on the readers to understand their sufferings as a cause of joy because of all that suffering produces (James 1:2-4). Suffering is just that: suffering, painful and unpleasant, hardly the stuff of happiness. But it is the stuff of joy since we know that

this slight(!) momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. (2 Cor 4:17-18)

We are thus freed to recognise our circumstances without pretence. We are not being forced to enjoy our suffering or to assume that somehow we are healed when it plain that we are not. Naturally we rejoice in present healing and are glad when pain ceases, but our joy looks far beyond these things.

Our present joy is the fruit of the gospel, the fruit of the Spirit's work in us. But here we must return to the point where we began. Rejoicing is commanded. We are 'Commanded to joy', not to add some extra element to the salvation which we already know, but to function deliberately and consciously in that salvation which is nothing less than the joy of the Lord come to us. This is another facet of living by faith, of walking by the Spirit. To rejoice in the Lord always is to live as men and women who have been rooted deeply into the salvation of God, to deliberately function in the joy of the Lord, his triune delight in the outworking and certain fulfilment of his eternal plan.

Living in Gratitude

When expounding the revelation of the righteousness of God in the gospel, Paul first demonstrated the prior revelation of the wrath of God and the awful dilemma in which men and women find themselves. He writes:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; ²¹for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools; ²³and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. (Rom 1:18-23).

Two elements of human rebellion are highlighted: (i) they did not honour God as God and (ii) they did not give thanks to him. This is simply a breach of the first commandment; ‘You shall have no other gods before me’ (Ex. 20:3) but has existed, as such, ‘since the creation of the world’.¹

It can be said, then, that men and women have an obligation to live in gratitude to God and that this obligation is fundamental to humanity. In 2 Timothy 3:2, Paul lists ingratitude as one of the many features of the ‘painful times’ of ‘the last days’. His instruction that Timothy should avoid such people obviously indicates that he sees the problem as an immediate one and not merely one of the (distant) future. All fallen humanity is, among other things, ungrateful to God.

On the other hand the Scriptures are full of declarations of thanksgiving. These declarations are in fact acknowledgments of the goodness of God and are translated in a number of different ways. For example, 2 Samuel 22:50 reads

For this I will *extol* you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name. (NRSV)

Therefore I will *praise* you, O LORD, among the nations; I will sing praises to your name. (NIV)

Therefore I will *give thanks* unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name. (AV)

Also the parallelism of Psalm 35:18 (Then I will *thank* you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will *praise* you) highlights the general meaning of ‘thanks’.² Likewise Psalm 50:23 (Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice [‘Whoso offereth praise’ AV] honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God) indicates the principle that thanksgiving is fundamental to true worship.

The Hebrew word for ‘thanksgiving’ and ‘praise’ is תודה (todah). The verb from which it is derived is יָדָה (yadah). Uses such as Joshua 7:19 show that the meaning is

¹ This may assist in the matter of understanding the nature of law. In Rom. 5:12-21 Paul’s argument is that what Adam undid Christ more than re-did. Adam undid the truth of humanity, by bringing death into the world through sin, even before there was law (Rom. 5:13), ie. codified, Mosaic law. But there was law before there was codified, Mosaic law, and this comment in Rom. 1:21 bears this out. The first commandment is a codification, of that which is ontological.

² In 2 Sam. 14:22 Joab ‘blessed’ David, though the AV has ‘thanked’.

broader than just that of giving thanks. Here Achan is told to ‘give praise’ (*NIV* and *RSV*) to God, when the context indicates that he would do so if he confessed his sin, which is the way the *AV*; *ASV* and *NRSV* translate it.³ The general principle seems to be that ‘confession’ lies at the heart of the words; in confession of God, his greatness is acknowledged, while such greatness exposes and demands the confession of sin.

This תודה was expressed generally within the context of Israel’s worship. Personal and corporate vows of thanksgiving were made and paid; Psalms 7:17; 35:17-18 and 52:9 etc. all express the desire of the psalmist for deliverance and the intention to give thanks when it is received. Furthermore such thanks, which is a confession of God’s faithfulness, will be made ‘in the great congregation’.

How long, O LORD, will you look on?
Rescue me from their ravages, my life from the lions!
⁸Then I will thank you in the great congregation;
in the mighty throng I will praise you. (Ps 35:17-18).

When it is the nation that is in peril

Then we your people, the flock of your pasture,
will give thanks to you forever;
from generation to generation we will recount your praise. (Ps 79:13).

Within Israel, gratitude was expressed in the ‘peace offerings’. Psalm 50:14 commands a תודה. But this is not the regular sacrifice in Israel. It was one of the possible elements in the ‘peace offerings’ and did not form part of the regular ritual in the Temple. On the contrary, the peace offering was ‘an optional sacrifice, which a man could bring when he felt like it’.⁴ The תודה was one of three possible motives for the ‘peace offering’ (see Leviticus 7:11-18). Wenham comments—

The ‘confession’ type of peace offering was appropriate in two quite different situations: when someone was seeking God’s deliverance, either from his enemies or from sickness. In such cases he might well feel the need to confess his sins, if he thought this was the reason for his present predicament (Judg. 20:26; 21:4; 2 Sam. 24:25). Or he could offer the confession sacrifice after he had been delivered. In this case the confession would center on God’s mercy rather than on his own sinfulness. For example:

*My vows to thee I must perform, O God;
I will render (shillem) thank offerings (ie., confession offerings) to thee.
For thou hast delivered my soul from death, yea, my feet from
falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life. (Ps 56:13-14 [Eng. 12-13])⁵*

Gratitude is also expressed in song.

I wash my hands in innocence,
and go around your altar, O LORD,
⁷singing aloud a song of thanksgiving,
and telling all your wondrous deeds. (Ps 26:6-7; see also Psalm 69:30 and Nehemiah ‘2:27).

³ See also Ezra 10:1, where it is more consistently translated as ‘confessed’. cf. G. J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, N.I.C.O.T., Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p 78, who adds that תודה also includes confession of faith in God and not only confession of sin. For ‘confess’ as the translation of the verb, see 1 Kings 8:33, 35; 2 Chron. 6:24, 26 etc.

⁴ Wenham, *Leviticus*, p 74.

⁵ Wenham, *Leviticus*, p 78. It should be noted that the details of the various sacrifices within Israel are generally not provided. We really are left to speculate about much of the sacrificial requirements or, indeed, their meaning.

This idea of corporate thanksgiving is very clear in the New Testament. The twenty four elders, the representatives of all the redeemed throughout history, are continually engaged in songs of thanksgiving.

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

¹¹'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.' (Rev 4:9-11).

The same conjunction of thanksgiving and songs of worship is found also in Revelation 7:11-12 and 11:16ff. Creation, the reign of God and the defeat of his enemies and the great redemption in Christ are all matters for thanks and, therefore, worship.

In the exposition of his apostolic ministry, Paul concluded that

Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. (2 Cor 4:15)

He understands that thanksgiving is a fruit of the gospel which has been entrusted to him. We might say that gratitude is an ontological response to God which sinful humanity has suppressed but which is restored in the great redemptive work by which God restores humanity to himself. Thus gratitude is seen and expressed in both Israel and in the church, although, in both, gratitude needs to be encouraged.

THE BASIS FOR GRATITUDE

In Luke 17:11-19 there is the story of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus. Only one returned to give thanks and, conspicuously, 'he was a Samaritan' (vs. 16). This, of course, implies that the other nine were Jewish. Such a comment seems to re-enforce the picture of the Jewish leaders presented in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), where the elder brother failed to realise the amazing inheritance which was already his. 'Son you are always with me and all that is mine is yours' (verse 31). Then, in Romans 9:1-5, Paul laments the failure of physical Israel to receive the blessings of the gospel. He concludes—

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 9:4-5).

From the beginning, Israel has been generally indifferent to all that God has given. Yet the principle for Israel was that they had been given the special revelation that God is the one who gives.

This means more than just that he gives to Israel or to humanity in general. He does that, but what we experience is the consistent outflow of the giving which goes on within the Godhead. Colossians 1:16 recognises that the creation is the gift of the Father to the Son of his love. John's Gospel in particular highlights the fact of the Father giving all things to the Son. John the Baptist told his questioners that if Jesus had a more significant

following than he it was because it had been given to Jesus from heaven (3:27). In other words, Jesus was not a 'charismatic' figure in the popular sense of one whose personality and abilities is especially attractive; he was, of course, a charismatic⁶ in the true sense of the word, namely one who lived under the continual giving of God. As the true man, he spoke the words of God for God gives the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). John 5:21, 22, 26, 27 and 36 explain the relationship of the Son to the Father as one of the beloved recipient and the giving Father. The Father gives life and so the Son is able to give life because all judgment has been given to the Son. Of course the Son has life in himself because it has been given to him to have life in himself and to have authority to execute judgment. None of this implies that the Son is independent of the Father; on the contrary, the things (the works) which the Son does are all given to him by the Father.

On the larger scale, Jesus went on to announce that the Father has give all things to him (6:37; cf Col. 1:16 above) and that nothing given to him by the Father would be lost; rather it would be raised up on the last day. The chapter with the most extensive discussion of the Fathers giving to the Son is John 17. There the whole nature of the giving is seen to extend back into the 'time' 'before the world existed' (Jn. 17:5).⁷ Then even the suffering of the Cross, 'the cup', is called the gift of the Father (Jn. 18:11).

It is the nature of the Father to give. Indeed, because it is the Father's nature to give, we may say, in consequence, that the Son and the Spirit are equally involved in the action of giving and share in the nature of the one God. Ephesians 4:7-8 for example, speaks of Christ's gift.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.'

When speaking of the Holy Spirit, however, the scriptures generally refer to him as the gift of the Father (Luke 11:13; John 14:16 etc) or of the Son (Acts 2:33; John 15:26; 16:7; 20:22 etc) or of both, since the Son only does whatever he sees the Father doing and only does what the Father gives him to do (John 5:19, 36). There are a couple of occasions where the Spirit is said to give but these are open to other interpretations (see John 6:63, where only the NIV has 'Spirit', others having 'spirit'; 2 Cor. 3:6; 1 Cor 12:11 and Hebrews 2:4). More often gifts are given *through* the Spirit.

With all this in mind, the statement of James 1:17 is especially pertinent.

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Ultimately, all giving derives from the Father. Whatever generosity there may be among human beings, and there is much, it is understood to be the action of the good giving of God through them. At the same time, all giving which does not see God as the source, which is self-generated, is actually an evil thing. This should not mean that the recipient of the giving should be unthankful or the observer judgmental, but it does mean that the act is to a certain extent as much an expression of the sin of the primal couple who wished to be 'like God'. The Anglican Article puts it:

⁶ *Charisma* is one of the Greek words translated as 'gift'.

⁷ See also John 17:2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 22 and 24.

XIII. Of Works before Justification.

Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the School authors⁸ say) deserve grace of congruity: yea rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.

Of course sinful people give good gifts (Matt. 7:11), but that does not sanctify the giver. The words ‘good’ and ‘goodness’ highlight this. Although the words may be commonly used today, their meaning is somewhat ill-defined. Within the Scriptures, however, only God is good (Mark 10:18) and his goodness is his generosity.⁹ Thus Psalm 34:8-10.

O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.

⁹O fear the LORD, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.

¹⁰The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

See also Nehemiah 9:25, 35 and 13:31, where the word goodness is used in the LXX¹⁰ and where the context indicates that it is God’s generosity which is in view.

Creation is not grace. The concept¹¹ of grace within the scriptures relates it to the action of God *after* the fall of Adam and Eve to restore the creation to its pristine condition. This is true even while Paul could write that ‘grace was given before times eternal’ (2 Tim. 1:9). Creation is a gift. Primarily it is the Father’s gift to his Son and the Son’s bride. It has been said that God ‘planned no meaningless and empty universe, but a home for His family’.¹² With apostolic hindsight we can see that the ‘it is good’ and ‘it is very good’ of Genesis 1, while meaning that creation is functionally good, do not mean that it simply has pragmatic value. On the contrary creation is resonant with the generosity of the Father so that this creation lacks nothing as it is set for the great goal of the marriage of Christ and his bride.

What we call ‘providence’ is nothing less than the Father seeing creation through to its goal. That is why a true understanding of even the simple things of providence ought to drive away all fear for those who know God and who are one with his purposes.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt 6:25-33).

Furthermore, it is not only the faithful who receive the benefits of God’s generosity. He makes the sun shine on the evil and the good and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust

⁸ The School authors were medieval Catholic theologians. This article was a Reformation statement.

⁹ See Ian Pennicook, ‘The Fruit of Goodness’ in *Living in the Harvest of the Spirit*, NCTM Spring School 1988, NCPI, Blackwood, 1988, p 29-32.

¹⁰ *ajgaqwsuvnh (agathosune)*.

¹¹ I use ‘concept’ to distinguish it from ‘word’, since the word *grace*, *cavri* (*charis*), is used with a wide range of meanings within the Scriptures: gracefulness, grace, loveliness, favour, thanks and gratitude. See G Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1937, p 479.

¹² Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72 (TOTC)*, IVP, London, 1973, p 67.

(Matt. 5:45). Indeed, these generous provisions are a testimony to who he is and what he is about, as Paul and Barnabas were at pains to explain in Acts 14:15-17.

Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; ¹⁷yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.

It ought to be reasonably obvious from this why the command should be ‘You shall not steal’. Mere pragmatism is one thing, as if stealing works against the cohesiveness of society. But a refusal to receive the provision of God for our needs, and in an extreme way to assert our own choice of what is good and evil for our lives. is quite another. And while a Christian who steals may still be a Christian, he is also still a thief, with the dangers which that involves (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Hence Paul’s command in Ephesians 4:28.

Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

Faith in God means faith in the God who gives. Thus a passion to acquire and to keep earthly treasure is a root of many other evils (1 Tim. 6:10). Paul had learned to be content with God’s provision (Phil. 4:10-20) and he reminded Timothy to teach the Ephesian church the same things.

Teach and urge these duties. ³Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness, ⁴is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, ⁵and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. ¹¹But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. . . . ¹⁷As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (1 Tim. 6:2-19).

THE GREAT GIVING

I mentioned earlier that grace is restorative.¹³ Karl Barth put it that

¹³ See the February study, *Living in Grace*, for more detail.

Grace is the distinctive mode of God's being in so far as it seeks and creates fellowship by its own free inclination and favour. unconditioned by any merit or claim in the beloved, but also unhindered by any unworthiness or opposition in the latter — able, on the contrary, to overcome all unworthiness and opposition.¹⁴

Adrio König adds the following.

(a) God's grace is GOD HIMSELF

This is perhaps the most important thing that we can say about God's grace. His grace is not a 'something' that he gives us, but HIMSELF in his gracious condescension to us. Grace is not a third 'factor' intervening between us and God in order that he may be gracious to us whilst himself remaining far from us. His grace is he who smiles upon us, he who is on our side, he who seeks and helps us in his love. He with us: this is his grace which we come to know in Jesus, who did not remain distant from us, merely sending us help, but who is truly GOD WITH US (Emmanuel). This is God's grace.

Consequently we never read in the Bible of anyone praying 'Grant me grace'. No, Biblical man prays: 'May God be gracious to us and bless us' (Ps 67:1), because grace is not something distinct from God, something which he bestows on us, but himself entering into a special relationship with us.¹⁵

Grace is God giving himself in order to restore men and women to himself and so to restore creation to its true role and function. In doing so, God has decisively and personally intervened in history. Were he to be Creator only we might understand that God brought creation into being and that he sustains it. But the Creator is the Father-Redeemer also (cf. Isa 63:16; 64:8).

The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham (Acts 7:2). It was not an influence, but God himself who led Israel out of Egypt.

Then the LORD said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians ...' (Ex 3:7-8).

Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived?³⁴ Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? (Deut 4:33-34).

Jeremiah understood both creation and redemption to be the personal act of God.

Ah Lord GOD! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. (Jer. 32:17).

You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror; (Jer. 32:21).

and Ezekiel looked forward to a future deliverance in similar terms.

As I live, says the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will be king over you.³⁴ I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out; (Ezek 20:33-34).

¹⁴ C.D. II, 1, p 353.

¹⁵ *Systematic Theology*, UNISA, 1973, p 42.

Isaiah's great cry was for God himself to 'tear open the heavens and come down [as he had done before], so that the mountains would quake at [his] presence' (Isa. 64:1).

This 'coming down' is in fact a great condescension, as God in his holiness gives himself to redeem sinful, rebellious humanity. Israel had been given great gifts with a view to the redemption of the nations, in spite of Israel in itself lacking any redeeming feature (Deut. 7:7-8; Ex. 32:9; 33:3 etc). Yet Israel's national ingratitude did not obstruct the giving. The plan would be accomplished.

John 3:16 stands as a beacon.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

From within the framework of the fuller revelation in the incarnation this is staggering. Along with such statements as

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10).

He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? (Rom. 8:32).

...the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20).

and others, we must understand that God the Father has given himself in the person of the Son in order that the divine wrath may be fully expended upon God! And the giving is such that *there has been a change within the Godhead*. The eternal Son took flesh and never put it off. It is as the Word become flesh that the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. The giving was so complete that all of sinful humanity was taken up by Christ, that he became the evil which had spoiled and corrupted humanity and he bore the holy judgment of God upon it. He who knew no sin *became sin for us* (2 Cor. 5:21) as God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). König summarised it:

In Jesus Christ God makes our need his need and *our* distress his distress. He espouses *our* (lost) cause and allows our distress to touch him more intimately and more radically than it touches us! Could our distress ever cost us as much as it cost him who gives himself in Jesus Christ? God takes *away* our wretchedness and makes it his wretchedness (2 Cor. 5:21) so that we can never again see it as ours *except* as it is borne by him; our sin is *reconciled* sin. Our faith can but manifest itself in joy and gratitude, for we are reconciled!¹⁶

So when speaking of the financial gifts of the Corinthians, Paul wrote

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:9).

and he concluded, 'Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift' (2 Cor. 9:15). And it is because of the dimensions of this great giving that we are assured that all that is needed is ours (Rom. 8:32).

'The Spirit and the gifts are ours, Through him who with us sideth' said Luther.¹⁷ The Spirit is our gift as the fruit of the atonement and as the seal of the promised redemption

¹⁶ Systematic Theology, p 45.

¹⁷ *A mighty fortress is our God* (NCTM Hymn Book, N° 1, verse 4).

(Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30).¹⁸ Through the Spirit the gifts of Christ have been given to the church in order that the church may attain the maturity of Christ (Eph. 4:7-13). Thus Paul wrote—

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind —⁶ just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you —⁷ so that you are not lacking in any (spiritual) gift¹⁹ as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 1:4-7).

Any discussion of the gifts must begin with the acknowledgment that they are *gifts*, distributed totally according to the sovereign choice of the Spirit.²⁰ But, of course, this is the way it is with all things.

So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours,²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all belong to you,²³ and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.
 ...⁷For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? (1 Cor 3:21-23; 4:7)

GRATITUDE OR DEBT?

How do we live in gratitude for such giving? There can be little doubt that often we are presented with an obligation to repay the unrepayable debt. It is true that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, but how should we respond? This is an important question, since it is here that salvation can be turned into an intolerable burden.

Allowing for poetic style, we note Isaac Watts hymn, ‘Alas and did my Saviour bleed’. The final verse reads,

But drops of grief can ne'er repay
 The debt of love I owe;
 Here, Lord, I give myself away,
 'Tis all that I can do.

and Augustus Toplady's hymn speaks of a person being ‘A debtor to mercy alone’. Now it is obvious that a price has been paid which is beyond anything that we can imagine (1 Peter 1:18-19). But does the New Testament ever urge us to a life of repayment of a debt?²¹ Was Israel's ingratitude simply a failure to repay the debt of salvation? Surely the ingratitude was a failure to enjoy the salvation, and to give glory to God. *Nowhere* is there a sentiment like that in some older (especially 19th and early 20th) hymns, ‘All this I did for thee; what hast thou done for me?’ One could almost imagine us responding by saying that salvation is good; but the less I use the less I must repay. On the contrary, Paul wrote

¹⁸ This matter will be the subject of the next study.

¹⁹ The word translated as ‘spiritual gift’ is simply *carismati* (*charismati*), ‘gift’.

²⁰ This should not be taken to mean that we are passive recipients or that we should not desire the gifts. But in the light of the NT discussions, it seems that, other than tongues, few of the gifts were objects of the desire of the church, so that, if the church was to mature, the choice could obviously not be left to sinful, if redeemed, individuals.

²¹ A stimulating chapter, ‘The Debtor's Ethic: Should we try to pay God back?’ is in John Piper, *Future Grace*, Multnomah, Sisters, 1995, p 31ff.

that 'God ... richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment' (1 Tim. 6:17). The psalms, too, are full of the enjoyment of God and of his good gifts.

This matter could be examined from the angle of covenant. God's covenant is never a contract. He never holds his goodness over us as if to cower us into fulfilling our responsibilities. Quite the opposite is true: he evokes our response with overwhelming generosity and love. We may *enjoy* the blessings of the covenant or experience the curses (if such were possible) but we cannot and need not *repay* God for his goodness. Then what is the thanksgiving which we offer God?

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.

¹⁵Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me. (Ps 50:14-15).

The answer is simple. God has delivered before, so show your gratitude by calling on him again for deliverance. The Psalm 116:12 asks the question,

What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?

and responds

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD, (Ps 116:13).

The only possible response to such amazing generosity is to receive more and to luxuriate in the overwhelming goodness of the Father. But to intrude the notion of repayment of a debt is to return to the Galatian heresy, which measures salvation or righteousness by works of the law. That would make all that we have received worth nothing.

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! ²The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ³Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? ⁴*Did you experience so much for nothing?* — if it really was for nothing. ⁵Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? (Gal 3:1-5)

The contrary attitude is expressed in Romans 11:33-36.

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

³⁴For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?

³⁵Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?

³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

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Living in the Spirit

From my point of view, it is a coincidence that this study has the same subject matter as the recent Spring School. But it surely more than coincidence, since the person and work of the Holy Spirit are a present reality for all of us. In other words, we may treat the subject as a topic for discussion, even faith-directed discussion, but, whether we do or not, we cannot be other than men and women who are totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit for everything at every point. This is simply the way things are. Paul reminded the Athenian leaders that 'In him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28).

The 'him' to which Paul refers is 'God' (verses 24, 27 etc) but this leads us to a great mystery. By mystery, of course, we mean that we need revelation in order to see it and that, having seen it, we are still unable, of ourselves, to manage or control that which we have seen; we must, therefore, live continually in the presence of the God who reveals himself and who reveals all things. Our knowledge is continually dependent on God's choosing to reveal himself. Thus Paul wrote of 'the mystery of God' (Col. 2:2), meaning 'Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (verses 2-3).

The mystery of God is Christ, meaning that it is in him that the being and person of God and the truth of the purposes of God are revealed. 'In him, the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily' (Col. 2:9). By this we understand that there is a new locus of revelation in the Messiah (Christ) of Israel. So Hebrews 1:1-2 and John 1:1, 14.

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

The factor which makes Christians distinct from Israel lies in the revelation of God which has come in the Messiah. To Israel God had revealed himself provisionally, that is, he did so in a way which did not answer all the questions which that revelation raised. It was a real revelation, which resulted in a wonderful experience for those men and women of faith, but it was not the final word. Nor was it ever intended to be. That was the point recognised by Paul in Ephesians 5:32-32, where he indicates that Christ and his bride are the reality *behind* the creation of men and women and not merely the goal of that creation.

At a point in time, the birth of Jesus, there was a revelation of God which had never been seen or known before. God had been known before, but this was breathtakingly new. All Israel knew that there is one God and that the gods of the nations were mere idols, having no real existence, that is as other than human constructs. Furthermore the Christian proclamation was completely in line with that view. But they went further and said that the one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was now revealed as 'Father'. The name 'Yahweh' was now superseded. It was not wrong to know him as Yahweh but it was now shown to be inadequate. Of course, God was also 'father' in the Old Testament but the language was different from what was to come. In Israel he was the 'father' of the nation (Isa. 63:16; 64:8), or even of individuals (see Ps. 2:7) but that meant that he was Yahweh who acted *as* a father to his people. Thus Psalm 103:13.

As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

In the person of Jesus, however, the name Father took on *far* greater significance. God was seen to be eternally Father, because he was first the Father of his Son, who was with him and loved by him before the foundation of the world (Jn 17:24) and who actually had glory in the presence of the Father before the world existed (Jn 17:5). Isaiah had said that God would not give his glory to another (Isa. 43:8), so how could Jesus make the claim that he stood with glory in the presence of God? The answer is that Yahweh is now understood to be Father and the Son to be one with him, 'God of God, light of light, true God of true God', so that the glory of the Son is a revelation of the glory of the Father (see also Luke 2:8ff).

The name 'Yahweh' was usually spoken as 'adonai' in Israel, the name 'Yahweh' being sacred. 'Adonai' means 'my lord' and was also used of God in the Old Testament. However, when the Old Testament was translated in Greek in the second century BC, the translation known as the Septuagint, or *LXX*, most Jews read that translation and not the ancient Hebrew and when they did they encountered both Yahweh and adonai translated by the same Greek word, *kurios*, meaning lord. So what the *LXX* lacked in precision it made up for by representing the way most Jews, even the Hebrew users, spoke of God. In the light of this, the Christian proclamation was staggering!

We are familiar with the phrase, 'Jesus is Lord', but imagine the impact that would have on those who knew Yahweh as *kurios*, Lord. In Acts 2, Peter having described the transformation of the 120 in terms of Joel 2, reminded the audience that 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Acts 2:21). Comparison with Joel 2:32 shows that there 'the Lord' is Yahweh. But Peter's conclusion is that 'God has made this Jesus (the man!) whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36). In the resurrection of Jesus, God had definitively demonstrated that the man Jesus was in fact Yahweh and Israel's Messiah. No amount of rationalising could prove this point to the intellect. Peter and the whole church simply declared it. They knew that Jesus is Lord.

How did they know this? How could they have come to such a radical understanding of the person of God as the Father of the Son who was God and who became flesh? The answer was simple: 'No one could say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:3).

At this point the revelation of God is seen to be even more vast, because the Holy Spirit, who is often mentioned in the Old Testament, though as 'the spirit of the Lord' (and probably a capital 'S' should *not* be used there) which is another way of saying 'the presence of God', is now declared by Jesus to be a distinct (discrete) person as well as 'God'. Nowhere in the Old Testament did the spirit of the Lord speak, but now it is clear that he does. Acts 13:2, 'The Holy Spirit said...' and Paul and Silas were 'forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak' in Asia nor did he 'allow' them to go to Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). It is the Holy Spirit who cries 'Abba, Father' (Gal. 4:6) and who joins the church in saying 'Come' (Rev. 22:17). Furthermore, it is a most serious thing to treat the Holy Spirit with contempt. The 'unforgivable sin' of Matthew 12:31-32 is 'speaking against the Holy Spirit'¹ while in the New Testament church Ananias and Sapphira were struck

¹ This subject has been a matter for debate for a long time and often, I suspect, has been given a wrong prominence. It is not that the subject is not important for it is, but that it is not treated in its context. Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, Satan, when in fact he had done so by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees were thus attributing the great work of the *Holy Spirit* to the 'Lord of the flies' or 'Lord of the dung-heap'. See Theodore J Lewis, 'Beelzebul' in D N Freedman (Ed. in Chief) *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p 638ff.

dead because they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3), which was immediately defined: ‘You did not lie to us but to God’ (Acts 5:4).

The word ‘Trinity’ does not occur in the Bible; it took almost another two hundred years before the words was even invented. Then when the relationships of Father, Son and Spirit were to be defined, the greatest minds of the Christian church struggled to find language adequate to the task.² But the language of the New Testament makes it plain that the first believers had had an experience of the Holy Spirit which had transformed them and which, as a result, had given them a totally new understanding of God. The God of creation, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of David and the prophets was now understood to be ‘Trinity’ (even if the word or the later explanatory details were not yet present.). As Leonard Hodgson put it: ‘Christianity was a trinitarian religion before it had a trinitarian theology’.³

The knowledge of God as Father, Son and Spirit was brought by the action of all three persons. It was an encounter *with* God rather than speculation *about* him which set the agenda. Although we may see a progression of sorts, as the Father initiates, the Son accomplishes and the Spirit applies the work of salvation, in practice the opposite order seems to apply. In the New Testament, the touchstone for so much is the assumption that the believers have had an experience of the Holy Spirit. The following statements would support this.⁴

I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. (Mark 1:8)

Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)

And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him. (Acts 5:32)

So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit’. (Acts 9:17; cf. 22:16)

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. (Acts 10:44)

The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles . . . (Acts 10:45)

‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ (Acts 10:47)

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. (Acts 11:15)

And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ (Acts 11:16)

² See, *The History of the Trinity*, for a summary of the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

³ *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Nisbet, London, 1943, p 17.

⁴ For some of what follows, see my *Maranatha*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1998, ch. 10.

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1Cor. 12:13)

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? (Gal. 3:1-3)

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. (Eph. 4:30)

... our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; (1 Thess. 1:5)

... he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

There can be little doubt that within the New Testament the gift of salvation was associated with a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit and that those who received the Spirit were in no doubt of the fact.

But the significant question concerns *why* the gift of the Spirit was both necessary and powerful. To answer that question we must examine John 14-17, Jesus' discussion in the upper room immediately prior to the crucifixion. This is not the place for a full commentary on these chapters; however, we should note the following:

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.' ⁵Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.' (John 14:1-7).

In this section, Jesus indicates that he must 'go and prepare a place for' the disciples. Because there are many 'dwelling places' he will prepare a place for them. Having done so he will return and take them to himself. How will he prepare a place for them among the many dwelling places in the Father's house? Recalling such statements as Psalm 24:3-5,

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

⁵They will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of their salvation.

we see that the preparation of necessity involves the purification of the heart. So the preparation is the work of the cross, which was to take place within only a few hours of Jesus making the statement. Then, the work of the cross complete ('it is finished'!) Jesus says that he will return and take the disciples to himself. The result will be that the disciples will know the Father. Furthermore, he says that it will be 'from now on'. So when will he return? To answer that next question we should continue with John 14:15-18.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world

cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

Immediately associated with the return of Jesus is the giving of the Spirit. He calls the Spirit 'the Spirit of truth' and we cannot avoid observing that Jesus has already described himself as 'the truth (of the Father)' in verse 6. Verses 19, 20 and 23 continue this theme:

In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.
 ... ²³Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

That the meaning of 'you will see me' is the sight of faith through the gift of the Spirit is shown by the statements elsewhere that when Christ returns at the consummation of history 'every eye will see him, even those who pierced him' (Rev. 1:7). The fact that the world will no longer see him but that the disciples will is evidence that it is the gift of the Spirit which is in mind. This is borne out by verse 23 which says that (when the Spirit is given) both the Father and the Son will make their dwelling places (the same Greek word is used here as is used in verse 2) in those who love Christ and are loved by the Father.

After speaking of the need for the disciples to maintain their union with him (15:1ff), Jesus spoke of the ministry of the Spirit in 16:12-15.

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The Spirit's ministry is to lead the believers into the intimacy of knowing all that the Father has given to the Son. We could compare this with the statement in 1 John 2:20, 'But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge'. This intimacy is the climax of Jesus prayer in chapter 17, where he prays

not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (vss 20-24)

The climax will be the total union of the believers with Christ and so with the Father. Putting these chapters of John together we cannot but conclude that the gift of the Spirit is of such significance because to receive the Spirit is to receive the Son which is to receive the Father. More than this, to receive the Spirit is actually to be caught up into the unity of the Godhead, not as a deity but as a participant in the Son. Hence Peter wrote that

he has given us . . . his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature. (2 Peter 1:4)

The dynamic gift of the Spirit is the dynamic of Christ himself. By the gift of the Spirit all the work of the Cross is poured *effectively* into us (Rom. 5:5-8). That is, there is nothing merely *potential* about salvation, for not only the salvation but the reception of it is given to us. So Ephesians 2:8-9 and 1 Timothy 1:13-14

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — ⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

As a result, told the Galatians that ‘we live by the Spirit’ (5:25) and he told the Romans that

you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit⁵ is life because of righteousness. (Rom. 8:9-10).

THE PROMISE OF FULNESS

Now, when we turn to the Old Testament revelation we can see that this experience of intimacy with God was known by many. In the light of the fulfilment, we can see the way that the prior, provisional revelation paved the way for this later fulness.

Men and women were created for ‘fulness’. When ‘Man’ was created he was clay until God breathed into him the breath of life; then he became a living being (Gen 2:7). But the breath of life was the spirit of God (Job 27:3; Ps. 104:29-30). God was not just present *to* the creation (so Gen. 1:2; 3:8⁶) but Man was filled with the breath of God and was created ‘full’ of him. So Proverbs 4:23 urges, ‘Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.’ It is not that Man has some inner resource, but that he is full of God *as* he goes on being filled with God, and so life issues from him because it issues through him. His death comes through his attempt to self-generate the fulness.

The story of the Bible is the story of the action of God to bring creation to the goal of fulness. The promise of Genesis 3:15 is not a wish but a pre-announced certainty. He will have a people, indeed a world, which is fully restored to fulness. The ‘seed of the woman’ is the line of those who do know him and who live in him. However, they are the people of God in the midst of great opposition, persecution and suffering. Their ‘fulness’ actually provokes, often violent, reactions against them. But there are men and women who, even in their sinful weakness, are filled with God.

The story of Israel in the wilderness demonstrates both the fact of fulness and the promise of greater things to come. Moses was a man of the spirit but cannot, in his humanity, do everything needed to lead the people. So God told him to gather seventy elders and that

I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself. (Num 11:17)

⁵ Some translations have ‘spirit’, referring to our human spirits rather than to the Holy Spirit.

⁶ ‘The time of the evening breeze’ or ‘the cool of the day’ translate the Hebrew, ‘the spirit (*ruach*) of the day’.

The story which follows is, I suggest, intended to point to the future purpose of God.

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. ²⁵Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. ²⁶Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷And a young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.' ²⁸And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, 'My lord Moses, stop them!' ²⁹But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!' (Num 11:24-29).

Of course, all God's people were not prophets nor did they have the spirit. Israel remained fundamentally rebellious and, as Yahweh's bride, adulterous. Within Israel there were men and women of the spirit, but they were forced to share the judgment which Israel's sin demanded. Still, such men as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Joel, those we recognise as prophets, while announcing the cause of Israel's judgment, also told of the plan of God to have a pure people, restored to fulness and the way that, through the restored people, all the nations would indeed be blessed as God had told Abraham.

Such passages as Ezekiel 36-37, where the promise is of the restoration of the spirit of God to Israel, point to a massive transformation, especially since the promise came to those languishing in exile (see Psalm 137:1-4). Earlier, Isaiah exposed the evil of Israel (see 6:5 etc) and the great hope set before them.

I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

²⁶Accuse me, let us go to trial; set forth your case, so that you may be proved right. ²⁷Your first ancestor sinned, and your interpreters transgressed against me. ²⁸Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary, I delivered Jacob to utter destruction, and Israel to reviling.

¹But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! ²Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you: Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. ³For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; *I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring.* ⁴They shall spring up like a green tamarisk, like willows by flowing streams. ⁵This one will say, 'I am the Lord's,' another will be called by the name of Jacob, yet another will write on the hand, 'The Lord's,' and adopt the name of Israel. (Isa 43:25-44:5).

Israel will know the fulness as the spirit is again poured out. But that is hardly the final product, so Joel prophesied that the spirit would come upon *all* flesh and that all creation would be climactically convulsed.

Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. ³⁰I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ³²Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls. (Joel 2:28-32)

This climactic convulsion is not the destruction of the creation but its restoration, the removal of the corruption and curse of the fall and the establishing of a new heavens and

a new earth (see Isa. 65:17-25). And the new heavens and new earth means that, at last, 'all flesh shall come to worship before me' says the LORD' (Isa. 66:23).

LIVING IN THE FULNESS

'If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old things have passed away, behold they have become new' (2 Cor. 5:17). Of course, if you are in Christ it is because you are in the Spirit and the Spirit in you, with all that that implies, as we have seen above. Now, however much the way that the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises may be something of a delightful surprise, especially as the salvation is still only known by faith as we are saved in hope, it does mean *that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the re-establishment of a people living in fulness*. Jesus breathed on them and said 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20:22) and 'all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability' (Acts 2:4). The Son gives the Spirit and the Spirit fills them and the worship promised in Isaiah 66 is restored. They tell out the mighty works of God (Acts 2:11), evidently to God, although the people standing by can understand what is said. The gift of tongues, which appears on a number of occasions in the New Testament,⁷ is, to my mind, the restoration of worship, although by no means the only way that worship is expressed. This is important, since worship is specifically more than the vocalising of our adoration; it is the presentation of our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).

Salvation is with a view to fulness since salvation is with a view to our being in intimacy with the divine family of Father, Son and Spirit. So we would have to staunchly resist any suggestion that to be filled with the Spirit is in any way an extra element added to salvation. It is not 'icing on the cake of salvation'. That is why the stories of Paul's conversion say what they do.

So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' (Acts 9:17)

And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name. (Acts 22:16)

But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. (Acts 26:16)

The three items, being filled with the Spirit, forgiveness and vocation are all of a one.

Now, with the initial 'filling', understood as containing all that God gives, there is the simple, we might say 'logical', obligation to 'go on being filled' (Eph. 5:18). As with Paul, of course this does not mean that there is nothing further to see or experience of God's purposes ('and in those in which I will appear to you'), yet it does not mean that we can accomplish anything beyond what we already have. So in Acts 2:4 they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and in Acts 4:8, 31 we see Peter and the whole church 'being filled'.

⁷ The gift of 'tongues' or 'languages' is mentioned in Mark 16:17 (in a passage of doubtful origin), Acts 2:4, 11, 10:46 and 19:6, as well as ten times in the section 1 Cor. 12-14. There are, therefore, four places where this gift is mentioned — Jerusalem at Pentecost, Caesarea, Ephesus and Corinth.

As they are in the action, so they are filled and function in the fulness.

From the beginning of the New Testament there are men and women described as filled with the Spirit, John the Baptist (Lu. 1:15), Elizabeth (Lu. 1:41ff) and Zechariah (Lu. 1:67) but preeminently Jesus is the Man of the Spirit. As the Word incarnate, Jesus was true Man (ie. the last Adam and not just a true male) and thus must be filled with and led by the Spirit at every point, otherwise he would repeat the sin of the first Adam. Paul's principle in Romans 8:14, 'all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God', applies first to Jesus. Thus we see that he is conceived by the Holy Spirit and so called Son.

The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God'. (Lu 1:35).

The same thing is seen at his baptism by John. There he was anointed by the Spirit, becoming the Christ/Messiah (at least in so far as the action of Messiah is concerned) and was declared to be the Son (Luke 3:21-22). Following the baptism, Jesus was 'full of the Holy Spirit' and 'led by the Spirit into the wilderness' (Lu. 4:1) and he returned 'in the power of the Spirit' (Lu 4:14). He went to Nazareth where he took the opportunity to define his ministry in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Lu 4:18-19)

He was filled with the Spirit and knew his vocation. It is evident that Jesus lived in the fulness, that is, he habituated the fulness. We would not need to assume that he found any action of his vocation to be 'automatic'; rather it demanded every part of his being to be what the Father had both declared and established, namely the Son filled with the Spirit. Indeed, the temptation in the wilderness and the pressures he faced later all indicate that he had always to make those moral choices which were consistent with his true being. Then as one who was filled with the Spirit, Jesus found his joy 'in the Holy Spirit' (Lu. 10:21) and all the resources for ministry as well: '...I cast out demons by the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 12:28).

In order to endure the cross, with both its awful physical and spiritual agonies, Jesus needed to know the sustaining power of the Spirit, and this he did. 'Christ ...through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God' (Heb. 9:14). Nor could a human being raise himself from the dead. That too required all the action of the Holy Spirit. Thus,

[he] was declared to be Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 1:4)

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:16)

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death *by* the flesh, but made alive *by* the Spirit, (1 Pet. 3:18).

Following his resurrection, for forty days Jesus gave instruction to the apostles 'through the Holy Spirit' (Acts 1:2) and then, following his ascension,

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. (Acts 2:33)

So it is that the result and purpose of Jesus' ministry was the outpouring of the Spirit in men and women. As was the pioneer, so are the many sons being brought to glory (Heb. 2:10, cf. John 20:21).

Pentecost now brought into being a community filled with the Spirit, whose chief proclamation was the resurrection of Jesus. They were a prophetic community (Acts 2:17-18), 'filled with power, with the spirit of the LORD' (Micah 3:8). They are sons of God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6 cf. Mark 14:36) and as Jesus, they too must habituate the fulness they have received.

We need not doubt that the fulness of the Spirit is experienced especially in particular individual ministries, as in Acts 4:8 and 13:9. But the main focus is on the church together habituating the fulness, since 'by one Spirit you were all baptised into one body' (1 Cor. 12:13), and in Ephesians 5:18-6:9 the details apply to the whole gamut of relationships, beginning with the corporate worship.

It must be stressed that there is no such *thing* as the fulness of the Spirit. There is only the Spirit who can be known in relationship. God 'goes on supplying the Spirit' (Gal. 3:5; cf Phil 1:19), so that to habituate living in the Spirit means we habituate the life of faith. That is why the life in the Spirit makes such moral demands. We must not grieve the Spirit (Eph 4:30), or quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19); rather we must 'be aglow with the Spirit' (Rom. 12:11 RSV). These are matters of personal and corporate relationship with the Spirit, and so with the Father and the Son.

What is so patently evident is that to live in the Spirit must require constantly being filled with the Spirit. When we ask, 'What is being filled with the Spirit?' then the answer must be, 'Be totally in relationship with the Spirit. Be subject to him. Walk in him. Be led by him. Apply to him for power and help. Lean upon him for your action of life. Relate fully to him.'⁸

The fruit of the Spirit, as well as those other elements we have been discussing in these studies, are the outcome of living in this relationship. This will demand the response of holy living in all areas of life. We must be holy in all our conduct (1 Pet. 1:13ff), putting to death those things which are earthly (Col. 3:5) and refusing to let sin reign in our mortal bodies (Rom. 6:12).

In practice then we will need to walk in the Spirit, be led by him, obey his commands, follow his guidance, and be positive in the life which he supplies. To be 'aglow with the Spirit' is not necessarily an emotional matter. It is often a matter of hard practical fact, sometimes devoid of feelings of any kind. On the other hand we may, from time to time, have many indications of the Spirit filling us with himself. We may know great power in moral living, and in proclamation of the Gospel. We may even see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. We may cry, 'Abba' ('Father') with great joy and love, and we may know love in great proportion. We may witness rivers of living water flowing from us to others. We may know in great measure 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'. We may worship by the Spirit, and be 'always praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in the love of God.'

⁸ Geoff Bingham, *Spirit Baptism, Spirit Living*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1981, p 168f.

At other times we may be like Stephen, who, being filled with the Spirit, was crushed to death by flying stones, or like the apostles hauled before the Sanhedrin who received a beating. Likewise we may be like Paul whose lists of persecution, sufferings and hardships are recorded in II Corinthians 6:4-10 and 11:23-29. To be filled with the Spirit may be to be corrected or even chastised by the Spirit.

In fact to be filled with the Spirit may mean many things we do not envisage it would mean. This does not greatly matter. We simply need to be of a good mind. When we have that attitude of acceptance and obedience which Christ had to the Spirit, then we too will know what it is to be filled with the Spirit.⁹

Likewise living in the Spirit will demand that we are in constant communion with the Spirit as the one who continually makes the cross a reality in our lives, so that we refuse to live in sin committed, choosing rather sin forgiven. We will choose, too, as sons to be led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14), both personally and corporately, for 'the Lord is the Spirit' (2 Cor. 3:17); we live by the Spirit, so we must be guided by the Spirit (Gal. 3:5) knowing that the Spirit is the one who intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Rom. 8:27). Finally, living in the Spirit is living in confidence, not in our own abilities and strengths, but in the knowledge of God's gift.

Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

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⁹ Geoff Bingham, *Spirit Baptism, Spirit Living*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1981, p 170f.