

And THIS is eternal life...

Written by

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In some translations “he,” “his,” and other pronouns are not capitalized when referring to God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit.

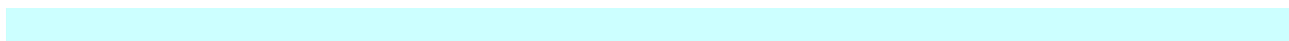
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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
INTRODUCTION	4
1 The true knowledge	7
The only source	8
The only key	9
2 The Triune God	11
God the Father	11
God the Son	14
God the Holy Spirit	16
3 Satan	21
4 Man	23
God's original purpose	23
Man's pride	26
Religion and self-righteousness	28
The Law	29
5 Grace	33
Repentance	37
Baptism	41
Rebirth	44
Holy Communion	47
6 The workings of the Holy Spirit	49
The baptism with the Holy Spirit	49
Being filled with the Holy Spirit	53
The fruit of the Spirit	55
Sanctification by the Spirit	56
The gifts of the Holy Spirit	60
Offices in the church	62
7 68	
True religion	68
The purpose of true religion	68

True religion starts with the body	70
Religion in the Christian community	71
Religion in the meetings	74
Practical application in the meetings	76
Religion in the home	77
Religion in the workplace	80
8 The last things	86
The great harvest	86
The great revival	87
The great tribulation	88
The great plagues	90
The great exodus	91
The great peace	93
The Great Day	94
The great change	95
9	96
Church and church relationships	96
Sectarianism	99
In conclusion	102



FOREWORD

Currently, the Christian book trade is experiencing an extraordinary influx of new publications and reprints of good old Christian literature. There are many edifying books, but they may not directly address the needs of believers seeking to broaden their knowledge of basic biblical doctrine. On the other hand, there are theological textbooks that are so specialized that they provide too much detail for the non-theologian.

This book is a compressed composition addressing the most important subjects of the Christian faith. For the sake of sound doctrine, we allowed the Word of God to speak for itself as much as possible. References to Bible texts have been placed in footnotes for ease of reading. For more thorough study, the texts may be referred to later on.

The apostle Paul determined to know among the Corinthians nothing except “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”¹ For the same reason we are motivated to concentrate on Christ and on the Cross. We want to encourage the reader to know God and Christ better. We sought, however, not only to present knowledge, but also to show to the praying reader that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a source of inexpressible joy.²

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, philosophers and founders of different religions have sought the answer to the fundamental questions of humanity. They all have looked to man for the answers, assuming that the solution lies in following certain rules and meeting certain conditions. Even countless Christian writers have placed the emphasis on man and things that man must do.

However, considering that man’s biggest problem is himself and that all attempts to improve humanity have failed, the uncertainty in this area is greater than ever before. We live in an age of rapidly increasing knowledge, and as the expanded

¹ 1 Cor. 2:2

² 1 Pet. 1:8

scope of what man can do – and, as a result of his depraved state may do wrong – threatens peace in many parts of the world, the general sense of frustration and fear deepens. The institutions from which answers were expected in previous centuries, namely the kings and the church, today stand powerless and at wits end. We therefore find an alarming increase in destructive behaviour and terrorism.

If there is a lesson to be learned from history as well as from current world affairs, then it is that man cannot provide any answers or solutions; therefore, we will not look to him for answers. The answers can only be found with God: *“I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no Saviour.”*¹

In the time of the apostles and during the following decades, Christians moved from victory to victory in spite of oppression and persecution. Boldness, fearlessness, joy, and a steadfast trust in the Lord characterised the early Christians. Nothing could stop their triumphal progress – not the Jewish opposition, not the Greek culture, not the power of the Roman empire, not prisons nor the mouths of lions. They were *“like the sun when it comes out in full strength.”*²

What was their secret? The answer to this question is, they were the only people in the world who truly knew God. The Jews only knew God from a legal perspective. The Romans and the Greeks believed in many gods. Only the Christians could say that they knew God because they knew the Son of God. To them Christ was the visible image of the invisible God.³ His crucifixion was the indisputable proof of God’s unconditional love. His resurrection from the dead was the evidence that Christ indeed was the Son of God, and that He had overcome the world, evil and death. The Holy Spirit was the guarantee that they were united to Christ as the members of the body are united to the head. This brought about such a strong awareness of the Lord’s presence that, just as in the days when Christ was on the earth, the sick was healed, the dead were resurrected and those who were oppressed by the devil were set free.⁴

The early Christians were filled with such a vivid realization of God’s greatness, goodness, and grace that their lives were drastically changed. Christ could be seen in them. Although, over the course of centuries, it faded, the flame has been

¹ Is. 43:11 AB

² Judg. 5:31

³ Col. 1:15

⁴ Acts 10:38

rekindled from time to time. Today, the need for this world to be saved and enlightened with the bright light of the Gospel is greater than ever. World events are rushing towards the end, and man's only option is to know God through Jesus Christ and to turn to Him.¹

⁵ John 17:3

1

The true knowledge

True knowledge of God is not simply knowing *about* God, but having fellowship *with* God. God is not a subject to be studied, but a person to be met. Because God is so great and wonderful, true knowledge is not so much knowing as it is awakening to a great God who rules our destiny.

True knowledge of God is not something that we may possess, but rather an awareness of someone who possesses us. It is not we who use the knowledge, but God using us. *“For it is God who works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”*¹ To know God does not make one haughty, but *“gentle and lowly in heart.”*² The more deeply one pursues the true knowledge, the more deeply the humbling realization, *“Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”*³

Because God is love, and because His love is completely unselfish, the main characteristic of true knowledge is love. The better someone knows God, the more fervently he will love God and his fellow man. *“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”*⁴ Knowledge without love is of no value. *“If anyone fancies he knows anything, he does not yet understand as he should; but if anyone loves God, that person is known by Him.”*⁵ Love does not search for the knowledge of the Lord, but for the Lord Himself. As true love seeks nearness and intimacy with the beloved, the true knowledge of God, through love, brings the believer into close fellowship with God. Love delves into the Word of God in order to become better acquainted with the beloved.

Because love does not search for the knowledge of the Lord, but for the Lord Himself, it brings a wonderful simplicity into the heart of the believer.⁶ Simplicity of heart is accompanied not by self-assurance, but by a strong assurance of the Lord, as David experienced. When David rejected the man-made weapons of King Saul

¹ Phil. 2:13

² Matt. 11:29

³ 1 Cor. 13:12

⁴ 1 John 4:8

⁵ 1 Cor. 8:2-3 ML

⁶ Ps. 119:130, 2 Cor. 11:3

and, in simplicity of heart, called on the Name of the Lord, he was able to overcome Goliath. The heart that depends on the Lord, receives strength from above.¹ As sunlight, when focussed through a lens, becomes fire, in a similar way the Lord shows “*His might on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.*”²

Simplicity of heart also promotes the unity of the faith. When Paul became aware of the division among the church at Corinth, he determined to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.³ He confined his preaching and his teaching to one person and one subject, namely Christ and His cross. Any other person, including himself, had to remain in the background, “*so that neither the planter nor the waterer deserves credit, but God who causes the growth.*”⁴

By placing the emphasis on the preaching of the cross, the apostle denied himself, as well as others, the right to lay more stress on other subjects. Metaphorically, Christ and His death on the cross are the pivot upon which everything hinges. Subjects like sanctification, baptism or spiritual gifts are different spokes in the wheel of which Jesus Christ is the hub. If more emphasis is placed on them, then in effect those particular “spokes” become too long, and Christ, the hub, is pushed from the centre.

The only source

God has given us His word as the only reliable source of knowledge, for the Word of God is the only stable factor in a changing world. Jesus said, “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*”⁵

For the sake of sound doctrine and for the sake of unity in the church of Christ, it is of the utmost importance to understand that the written Word of God, the Bible, is our only source of knowledge. No other book or revelation may take the place of the Bible, or even stand next to the Bible.

The Bible consists of 66 books that were written by many different authors over a period of almost fifteen centuries. The marvel of the Bible is that all these books

¹ Heb. 13:9

² 2 Chr. 16:9

³ 1 Cor. 2:2

⁴ 1 Cor. 3:7 ML

⁵ Matt. 24:35

form a unity, which can only be attributed to the godly inspiration that rested upon the different authors. This is why Jesus said, "*the scripture cannot be broken.*"¹

The divine origin of the Holy Scriptures has been confirmed by the apostles.² Throughout the ages the indisputable validity of the Bible (Old and New Testament) has been recognized by all Christians. No other book or revelation, however valuable it may seem, can claim similar authority.

Even the gift of prophecy, though the Holy Spirit uses it in a wonderful way to edify, to comfort and to encourage the church,³ must not be interpreted as an addition to the Scripture, but rather as an outflow from it. Prophecy in itself is not the measuring-rod but is to be measured by the Word of God.⁴ The written word is the fullness. The spoken word is just a part of the fullness, "*for we know in part and we prophesy in part.*"⁵

The only key

In spite of the fact that many churches and denominations accept the Bible as the only source of knowledge, we find a diversity of doctrines among them. One of the reasons is that they do not realise that Jesus Christ is the centre and the very essence of the Old and New Testament. Subsequently they do not stress this fact enough. Jesus said when speaking about the Holy Scriptures, "*these are they which testify of Me.*"⁶ After His resurrection, Jesus applied this principle when He expounded to His disciples in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.⁷ The power of the Word of God can only be unlocked once we read it with the realisation that "*Christ is all and in all.*"⁸ He is the image of the invisible God.⁹ For this reason, every exposition of the Godhead that conveys a picture of God, other than that which is portrayed by the four Gospels and the apostles, is false. If ever there was a group of people in the days of Jesus who were supposed to know everything about the Godhead, then surely it was the scribes. They had a profound knowledge of the law and the prophets. And yet, they did not know God because they did not

¹ John 10:35

² 2 Pet. 1:20-21

³ 1 Cor. 14:3

⁴ 1 Cor. 14:29,37

⁵ 1 Cor. 13:9

⁶ John 5:39

⁷ Luke 24:27

⁸ Col. 3:11

⁹ Col. 1:15

understand the Scriptures in and through Jesus Christ. Jesus said to them, *“You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.”*¹

Where this principle is not upheld, Christians get a confused idea of God. In one passage of the Bible, they find God condemning them, and in another passage, they are pardoned. Consequently, their spiritual life is unstable. They are never sure of how God feels about them. Is He angry or is He merciful? Does God love them, or does He have mixed feelings about them? Such people’s faith is shaky and uncertain because they do not know God through Jesus Christ. They quote the words of Jesus Christ, *“no one comes to the Father except through Me,”*² yet they do not go to God with the liberated knowledge that God is like His Son.³ They believe that *“no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ,”*⁴ but unfortunately, they do not see that their foundation is endangered by cracks.

Believers who have such a divided perception of God should be encouraged to read the Bible with only one purpose: to search for the grace and the love of God as revealed to us through Jesus Christ. If they do this, the glorious moment will come when they can share the words of Job, *“I heard about you from others; now I have seen you with my own eyes.”*⁵

¹ John 8:19

² John 14:6

³ Heb. 7:25

⁴ 1 Cor. 3:11

⁵ Job 42:5 ASV

2

The Triune God

God the Father

God is not a creative force, but a Person. He is the Creator of heaven and earth, the Originator, Protector and Manager of everything that exists.

God is one, beside Him there is no God.¹ He does not share His power and might with anyone, nor is His rule threatened by anyone. God sets the time and place for everything but is not limited Himself by anything. His power and His influence are the same everywhere. His word and His promises are absolutely faithful and work with the accuracy of the natural laws.

God is omnipotent; everything is under His control. God is omnipresent. *“The whole earth is full of His glory.”*² God is omniscient; He knows the end before the beginning. God is good. He is the source of everything that is good, of all that is beautiful and everything that is wondrous. His being is harmony, peace and happiness. In Him are health and indestructible life. In His hands are riches and abundance. Everything that is in harmony with God grows, blossoms and lives. Apart from Him are disharmony, unrest, damnation and death.

God’s dimension is unfathomable to man.³ God is Spirit,⁴ and cannot be seen or otherwise grasped by the senses. For this reason, the Godhead has always been a *“mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.”*⁵ God sent His Son into the world, the man Christ Jesus,⁶ so that we could see and know Him. In other words, God left His inaccessible dimension and came down to our human level. This is what is meant by the words, *“God was manifested in the flesh.”*⁷ Before Christ came into the world, God’s face that is His innermost nature could not be seen. God said to Moses, *“You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.”*⁸ Under the

¹ Deut. 6:4, Is. 45:5, 1 Cor. 8:4

² Is. 6:3

³ 1 Tim. 6:16

⁴ John 4:24

⁵ Col. 1:26

⁶ 1 Tim. 2:5

⁷ 1 Tim. 3:16

⁸ Ex. 33:20

law God could only be seen from behind. However great and however wonderful the experience of the Old Testament saints might be, with an eye on Jesus Christ they must acknowledge with the Queen of Sheba, *"the half has not been told me."*¹

As long as we see God from behind,² that is from the perspective of the law, we will stand face to face with His uncompromising righteousness, and our approach to Him is hindered, just as the first humans after the fall were hindered by the cherubs at the entrance of the Garden of Eden.³ But now God has turned round and shown His glory to the sinner *"in the face of Jesus Christ."*⁴ There, in the face of the Crucified, the sinner sees nothing but forgiving love. The glory of God in the face of Jesus does not cause him to die, but to live. God's holiness is no more the consuming holiness that it was under the law, but a life-giving holiness. The righteousness of God is no longer a matter of grim requirements, but a free gift. For God made *"Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*⁵ The cherubs are gone. The veil of the temple is rent in two. The entrance into the Presence of God is no longer barred. The pierced body of Christ has become *"a new and living way"*⁶ to the Father. Everyone who accepts the Son may go to the Father, through Him.

Through the Son, God has made Himself known as the heavenly Father who *"so greatly loved the world"*⁷ that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. God has made Himself known as the Father who loves His lost sons and who chose to sacrifice His Son, so that they might be saved and live. Considering the wonderful fact that the Father's nature has been made known through His Son,⁸ we now may understand all the attributes of God in and through Jesus Christ, for instance:

God's greatness in and through Christ's humility. He said, *"I am among you as the One who serves."*⁹

God's power in and through Christ's human frailty, for *"He was crucified in weakness."*¹

¹ 1 Kin. 10:7 ML

² Ex. 33:23

³ Gen. 3:24

⁴ 2 Cor. 4:6

⁵ 2 Cor. 5:21

⁶ Heb. 10:20

⁷ John 3:16 AB

⁸ John 17:26

⁹ Luke 22:27

God's rigour in and through the love of Christ, for while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).

The implacability of the law in and through the grace of Jesus Christ, for "*where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.*"²

God's holiness through the death of the lamb: "*and behold, in the midst of the throne ... stood a Lamb as though it had been slain.*"³

In this way we see the apparently conflicting characteristics of God's nature merged in Christ in one image – the all-forgiving, all-giving, all-loving heart of the eternal Father. Jesus was so completely one with the Father that He could say, "*the Father who dwells in Me does the works,*"⁴ and, "*he who has seen Me has seen the Father.*"⁵ When we, with this in mind, read the gospels, looking for the Father in Jesus' words and deeds, even in his emotions, we discover God. We see God carrying the burden of those who are tired and distressed, comforting the crowds, forgiving sins, healing the sick, feeding the multitudes and calming the storms, praying for mankind in the mountains throughout the night. In every word, in every gesture, in every deed we see God, and we see that God is love.⁶

Jesus has declared the Father as eternal Father⁷ who is not worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.⁸ He does not desire to be served, but to serve and to give His life.⁹ Just as the sun unceasingly radiates light and warmth, so the Father radiates His love to the world through "*the Son of His love.*"¹⁰ Like a great river on its long journey to the sea, freely and abundantly provides water to all who live on its banks, so the Father, through His Son, gives the water of life to all who are thirsting, without measure and free of charge.

Nowhere do we see the fatherly love of God more clearly than in the parable of the Prodigal Son. How human, how spontaneous is the father's love there – although the son is still far away, the father runs to his son, hugging and kissing

¹ 2 Cor. 13:4

² Rom. 5:20-21

³ Rev. 5:6

⁴ John 14:10

⁵ John 14:9

⁶ 1 John 4:16

⁷ Is. 9:5

⁸ Acts 17:25

⁹ Mark 10:45

¹⁰ Col. 1:13

him!¹ No bitterness, no reproach – just love that covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.² *“For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD.”*³

That which is foreshadowed in the Old Testament, is fulfilled through Jesus. *“Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O LORD, are our Father; Our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name.”*⁴ Because the Father did not spare His Son, but gave Him to the world as a sacrifice for our sin, Jesus addresses Him in his last prayer as “Holy Father.”⁵ Through holy love, the Holy Father is the everlasting Father.

God the Son

Christ is the only link between God and man, between eternity and time, between the unlimitedness of the Creator and the limitedness of the creation, between a holy God and sinful man. *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”*⁶ He is truly God, and truly man.⁷ He is the Saviour of the world; salvation is in no one else. He is the only source of peace and happiness because He carried the curse of sin. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*⁸

We can comprehend the love of God only by understanding what it has cost the Son of God to come into the world and to die on the cross. Not only did He have to strip himself of his equality with God and exchange it for the humbleness of our human existence,⁹ but He also had to lay down His life as a human being.¹⁰ And yet, the physical death of the cross was not the worst He had to endure. He had to abandon His innocence and become the “scapegoat”¹¹ for sinful mankind. *“The*

¹ Luke 15:20

² 1 Cor. 13:7

³ Jer. 31:20

⁴ Is. 63:16

⁵ John 17:11

⁶ 1 Tim. 2:5

⁷ John 1:1-2,14

⁸ John 3:16

⁹ Phil. 2:6-7

¹⁰ 1 Pet. 2:24

¹¹ Lev. 16:21-22

*LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*¹ He *“who knew no sin,”*² whose fellowship with the Father has never been broken, was forsaken and alienated from God. Because Jesus, in this way, took upon Himself the sin of the world,³ God reconciled the world to Himself *“having made peace through the blood of His cross.”*⁴ This peace that God made is not a truce with smouldering animosity; it is the peace that passes all understanding. The love of the cross has destroyed all hostility.⁵ By dying on the cross for sinners, Jesus has shown that the love of God is stronger than sin and triumphs over everything.⁶ God hates sin, but He loves sinners.⁷ His love is so powerful that God’s enemies become His sons and daughters, for *“as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God.”*⁸

Christ’s resurrection from the dead is the glorious proof that He is truly the Son of God.⁹ His ascension into heaven is the crowning of His work on earth. Because Christ humbled Himself and became obedient to death, the will of the Father was accomplished. *“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.”*¹⁰ God gave Him the highest honour and greatest power and seated Him on the highest place. He made the least the greatest, the humblest the highest, and Him who came as a servant,¹¹ the King of kings. This is the masterpiece of God’s wisdom. *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”*¹² The one *“who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead,”*¹³ was made like His brethren in every respect, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest *“to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”*¹⁴ Therefore, Jesus sits as the apostle and high priest of our confession on the highest throne,¹⁵ the throne of grace.¹⁶ *“He is able to save to*

¹ Is. 53:6, Matt. 27:46, Gal. 3:13

² 2 Cor. 5:21

³ Is. 53:5

⁴ Col. 1:20

⁵ Is. 54:9

⁶ Rom. 31-39

⁷ Rom. 5:8,10

⁸ John 1:12

⁹ Rom. 1:4

¹⁰ Phil. 2:8-11

¹¹ Mark 10:45

¹² Rom. 11:33

¹³ Acts 10:42, 2 Tim. 4:1

¹⁴ Heb. 2:17

¹⁵ Heb. 3:1

¹⁶ Heb. 4:16

the uttermost those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.”¹

The excellence and depth of Christ’s work of atonement can only be grasped if one realises that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man. Because He was human just like us, He could stand in for us, bear the burden of our sins, and die in our stead.² Therefore, the validity of His atonement for the sins of humanity rests on the fact that Jesus is truly man.³ The full extent of His sacrifice – that all things in heaven and on earth should be reconciled to God⁴ – is only comprehensible in terms of His godliness. In Him all things are created that are in heaven and on earth.⁵ He *“is the true God and eternal life.”*⁶ As such, He could atone for all things and reconcile all things to Himself;⁷ that is to say, the whole universe from the lowest parts to the highest.⁸

God the Holy Spirit

The true God in whom we believe is only one God.⁹ However, in His dealings with mankind, God reveals Himself as three persons: as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Three are One in essence, but not identical, unique in nature, but not as persons. This is why the Christian church from its beginning believes in the Holy Trinity – *“one God and Father of all,”*¹⁰ who is revealed through His Son in the flesh,¹¹ and who, since the day of Pentecost, is working as the third Person, the Holy Spirit. The events at the baptism of Jesus are a clear demonstration of the Holy Trinity. As Jesus emerged from the water, *“He saw the SPIRIT of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven [FATHER], saying, This is My beloved SON, in whom I am well pleased.”*¹²

The Trinity (Tri-Unity) can be compared to the sun. SUN, LIGHT and HEAT are three different entities, but can exist and be explained only as a UNITY.

¹ Heb. 7:25 ML

² Heb. 2:14-15

³ Rom. 5:11

⁴ Col. 1:20

⁵ Col. 1:16

⁶ 1 John 5:20

⁷ Col. 1:19-20

⁸ Eph. 4:9-10

⁹ Deut. 6:4

¹⁰ Eph. 4:6

¹¹ 1 Tim. 3:16

¹² Matt. 3:16-17 brackets added

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son.¹ As the Son is one with the Father,² so is the Holy Spirit one with both the Father and the Son. God the Father made Himself known through the second person, the Son. Likewise, the third person, the Holy Spirit, can only be known through Christ. Jesus said, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me.”*³ Through Christ the nature of the Holy Spirit is revealed.⁴ There is no vagueness about the Holy Spirit. He is not the spirit of an unknown god or of a God who is known in part. He is known to us as *“the Spirit of His Son,”*⁵ who said, *“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”*⁶ *“Christ is all and in all.”*⁷ Therefore, Christ is at the heart of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus says, *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* and *“where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them,”*⁸ He wants us to understand that His presence today is just as real as when He was living on earth. Through the Holy Spirit He is alive in every believer. Whenever two or three are gathered together in His name, He is present in His fullness. The only difference is, Christ is no longer limited to a human body. Through the Holy Spirit He is present in every believer and in every congregation, at any time, at any place.

It is of utter importance to understand that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not an influence. If it were, the Holy Spirit could be received in a greater or lesser measure. But because the Holy Spirit is a person, He can only be received as a whole. Therefore, God gives the Spirit not *“sparingly or by measure.”*⁹ The gift of the Holy Spirit is the fullness of God. Hence, the apostle says *“that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*¹⁰

Of course, when the Lord comes into people’s life, they do not instantaneously give their all to Him from the first moment. The Holy Spirit does not automatically possess the believer’s full attention, time and abilities. Nevertheless, through the

¹ Rom. 8:9

² John 10:30

³ Luke 4:18

⁴ 1 Pet. 1:11

⁵ Gal. 4:6

⁶ John 14:7

⁷ Col.3:11

⁸ Matt. 18:20, 28:20

⁹ John 3:34 AB

¹⁰ Eph. 3:19

Holy Spirit, Christ is present as fully in the life of a believer as He was in the life of His disciples. Although He may not receive *our* fullness, we receive His fullness the moment we accept Him. That is why all things are possible to those who believe.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth.¹ Because the Word of God is the truth,² the Spirit of truth works in complete harmony with the Word. And as Jesus Christ is the Word that became flesh,³ the work of the Spirit is to:

- (a) remind us of what Jesus said;⁴
- (b) testify about who Jesus is;⁵
- (c) convict and convince people that not to believe in Jesus is sin;⁶
- (d) reveal the future;⁷
- (e) glorify Jesus⁸ by means of the fruit of the Spirit⁹ and the gifts of the Spirit.¹⁰

The Holy Spirit is “*the Spirit of grace*”¹¹ who shows to all who believe the immeasurable love of Christ. The fact that the triune God gave the second person, the Son, and that He shares the third Person, the Holy Spirit, with all who believe, means that God gives Himself. He gave Himself through his Son to die for our sins, and He gives Himself through the Spirit to live in us. This surpasses all understanding. Even God cannot give more than Himself. Therefore, in a certain sense, the gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift without limits, and as it is God’s free gift to fallible man, it is grace without limits – grace without any measure. Paul calls it the “*abundance of grace*.”¹² “*Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.*”¹³ This is why sinners are saved, the prisoners of Satan are set free, and the children of the devil become children of God. Who can measure the abundance of grace? The word “ocean” is too small to capture the immensity of it. Only one word is comprehensive enough, the word “*all*.” That is why Paul writes “*all things are yours: whether ... the world or life or death, or things present or things to come – all are yours.*”¹⁴ The Holy Spirit is not a gift among others. He is the gift that includes

¹ John 14:17

² John 17:17

³ John 1:14

⁴ John 14:26

⁵ John 15:26

⁶ John 16:8-9

⁷ John 16:13

⁸ John 16:14, 14:12

⁹ Gal. 5:22-23

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 12 - 14

¹¹ Zech. 12:10, Heb. 10:29

¹² Rom. 5:17

¹³ Rom. 5:20

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 3:21-23

everything – the “*unspeakable gift*.”¹ This is eternal life itself, because it is fellowship with God.² Because this unlimited grace comes into the hearts and lives of the people who believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of grace.” Men and women who let the Spirit of grace reign in their lives, reign over sin.³ God leads them always in triumph in Christ. They are “*more than conquerors*.”⁴ They have access to the treasure rooms of heaven. They move in the current of grace,⁵ and because grace never stops flowing,⁶ they never stop believing. Unlimited grace creates unlimited faith – “*faith as a mustard seed*.”⁷

Because God’s grace by nature flows in the riverbed of God’s will, true faith works, as the Author and Finisher of the faith does, in perfect harmony with the will of the Father.⁸ However, this does not mean that God’s will contradicts or limits His grace. God is “*the God of all grace*.”⁹ “*All things are possible to him who believes*.”¹⁰ “*He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do*.”¹¹

The Holy Spirit is “*the Spirit of adoption*.”¹² He affirms in the hearts of believers that they are God’s beloved children, crying “Abba, Father.” He is not a spirit of rejection, but of acceptance.¹³ He makes believers aware that they are no longer servants, but children of God through Christ.¹⁴ They are no longer subject to the requirements of the law.¹⁵ “*If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law*.”¹⁶ “*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*.”¹⁷ The Holy Spirit is not a spirit of bondage to be feared.¹⁸ On the contrary, He is the outpouring of God’s fatherly love into the hearts of His children.¹⁹ Because God’s love is perfect love, all fear is expelled.²⁰ Boldness then, is the first characteristic of people who are filled with the

¹ 2 Cor. 9:15

² 2 Cor. 13:14, 1 John 1:3-4

³ Rom. 5:21

⁴ Rom. 8:37, 2 Cor. 2:14, Rom. 5:17

⁵ Ezek. 47:5

⁶ John 1:16

⁷ Matt. 17:20, Mark 4:31

⁸ John 5:19,30, 14:10

⁹ 1 Pet. 5:10

¹⁰ Mark 9:23

¹¹ John 14:12

¹² Rom 8:15

¹³ Gal. 4:6

¹⁴ Gal. 4:7

¹⁵ Gal. 3:10,13, Is. 54:8-9

¹⁶ Gal. 5:18

¹⁷ 2 Cor. 3:17

¹⁸ Rom. 8:15

¹⁹ Rom. 5:5

²⁰ 1 John 4:18

Holy Spirit!¹ When the Holy Spirit is not understood as the Spirit of grace, a legalistic spirit enters which creates a climate of constraint. The root is a lack of true love. *“He who fears has not been made perfect in love.”*² A legalistic spirit always restricts the working of the Holy Spirit, because it replaces grace with the law and negates the true meaning of the gospel.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of communion.³ Like the father of the prodigal son who hugged and kissed his son when he came home, the outpouring of the Spirit in the hearts of the believers is God’s loving embrace which welcomes His sons and daughters in His arms. Through the Spirit, the Father lovingly seeks fellowship with His children,⁴ creating in them a strong reciprocal love that yearns for intimate fellowship with the Father. In this way, the Holy Spirit draws the children closer, bringing them into perfect and continuous fellowship with God.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of the bridegroom. The love between bride and bridegroom is the strongest bond on earth. The Holy Spirit awakens Christ’s love in the believers’ hearts in order that they would love Christ with the same love as the love between a bride and her bridegroom. The Holy Spirit also creates the desire in the hearts of the believers to see Him, who purchased them with His blood from the bondage of sin, and causes them to look forward to the marriage of the Lamb with great anticipation. *‘And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And the Bridegroom answers, “Surely I am coming quickly.”’*⁵

¹ Acts 4:13

² 1 John 4:18

³ 2 Cor. 13:14

⁴ John 17:23-26

⁵ Rev. 22:17,20

3

Satan

In the beginning everything that God created was “very good.”¹ So, too, was the angel who became Satan, before his fall, a perfect being. There is a strong indication that he was a beautiful being of surpassing perfection.² He could enter God’s council and communicate with God at the highest level.³ His fall caused no small disturbance and affected the whole of creation.⁴ However, there was One who “*became ... much greater than the angels*,”⁵ Jesus Christ, “*the firstborn over all creation*.”⁶ He came into the world to overcome Satan and his angels and to bring peace.

Evil originates from the proud thought of the shining cherub, that he did not depend on God, that his beauty, wisdom and power were qualities of his own. His heart was lifted up, wilfully forgetting that his whole existence was from God.⁷ He imagined himself equal to God,⁸ assuming that, though he was a created being, he could exist without the Creator. This was and has ever been the root of all ungodliness. Through pride, this most exalted being (whom even God called “perfect”)⁹ became the greatest enemy of God.¹⁰ Pride made that the personification of completeness became the spirit of corruption and death. Pride changed the protective cherub¹¹ into a “murderer,” the father of lies.¹² The light-bringer (Lucifer) became the devil that brought darkness, deceiving the whole world.¹³

His strategy is deception and his weapons are lies. In spite of his fall, Satan retained the ability to appear as the “angel of light” that he once was.¹⁴ And so he

¹ Gen. 1:31

² Is. 14:12, Eze.28

³ Job 1:6, 2:1-7

⁴ Rom. 8:20,22

⁵ Heb. 1:4

⁶ Col. 1:15

⁷ Acts 17:25

⁸ Ezek. 28:14

⁹ Ezek. 28:15

¹⁰ Is. 14:15

¹¹ Ezek. 28:14

¹² John 8:44

¹³ Rev. 12:9

¹⁴ 2 Cor. 11:14

Satan

succeeded in convincing a third of the angels to follow after him.¹ How could this have happened? The answer is that angels and humans are more than sophisticated machines, which might have been programmed, or animals, which could have been trained. Angelic and human beings have the ability to make a choice because they have free will. Why then didn't God annihilate Satan? He could not. He would have had to use force which contradicts His nature. If God had resorted to force, He would have anyway gained only a semblance of dominion and order, which in reality would have been slavery. On the other hand, God did not see the necessity to destroy evil, because He foresaw before the creation of the world, that His ways with mankind would not end with the fall of man, but would lead to man's salvation through the love of the Cross. In the end Satan would be overcome through Jesus Christ, and God would create a new heaven and a new earth.

Jesus Christ overcame Satan totally and completely on the cross. *"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,"*² *"and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion."*³ All power is given unto Jesus Christ in heaven and in earth.⁴ That is the reason why there is salvation in His name and authority over the devil in His name.⁵

The end of Satan and his angels will be *"in the lake of fire and brimstone."*⁶ The wonderful spirit of life, by which the angels and men were created, is and will always remain God's own property. If angels or humans misuse their liberty and power against the Creator's perfect design, there will inevitably come a moment when God's power in them is changed into a consuming fire.⁷ This is what the Bible calls "the second [or final] death."⁸

¹ Rev. 12:4,7

² Phil. 2:9

³ Eph. 1:20-21

⁴ Matt. 28:18

⁵ Rom. 10:13, Acts 4:12

⁶ Rev. 20:10

⁷ Is. 50:11, Ezek. 28:18

⁸ Rev. 20:14 brackets added

God's original purpose

Believing in an omnipotent and omniscient Creator, implies that God created everything with a definite purpose. God's purpose with the creation of a visible universe was to reveal His invisible nature, so that "*His eternal power and divine nature*"¹ could be seen.

With the creation of man however, God had a special purpose in mind. He wanted to make Himself known as a person. He wanted to be seen in man as in Jesus, who said, "*he who has seen Me has seen the Father.*"² As Jesus Christ was the visible image of the invisible God, it was God's plan to express His unseen glory in and through every man. It was with this intent that God created man "*in His own image; in the image of God.*"³

Humans from the beginning were meant to be God's children.⁴ They were destined to participate in God's nature, in His wisdom, in His power and in His glory, – eventually to rule as "gods,"⁵ as sons and daughters of the Most High, together with their Father over the universe.⁶ This plan was impeded by the Fall, but not terminated. On the contrary, the fall of man led to the revelation of God's love through the Lamb of God and, thus, to a supremely glorious completion of His plan.⁷

In order to grasp the full extent of what it means that God created man in his own image, one must have a clear understanding of the following three principles with regard to God's nature.

Firstly, GOD IS EVERYTHING - "*For of Him and through Him, and to Him are all things.*"⁸ God is not only the originator of all things; He is also the keeper of all that

¹ Rom. 1:20 ML

² John 14:9

³ Gen. 1:27

⁴ Luke 3:38

⁵ Ps. 82:6

⁶ Heb. 2:5-8

⁷ Rev. 5:13, 21:7

⁸ Rom. 11:36

exists, “*since He gives life, breath, and everything else to all people.*”¹ God is “*the fountain of life,*”² from whom all life flows continuously.

Secondly, ONLY GOD IS. His name is “I AM.”³ No one except God, no human or angel can claim this. Every other being exists only because “I AM” created them. In reality there is only One who lives from eternity to eternity – “I AM.” Therefore, in order to not just exist, but to truly live and have eternal life, man has to be joined to God.

Thirdly, ONLY GOD IS GOOD. When a certain ruler addressed Jesus, saying, “Good Teacher,” His answer was, “*Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.*”⁴ If only God is good, nothing else can be good in itself. Therefore, the Psalmist comes to the conclusion, “*I have no good beside Thee.*”⁵ In other words, God is the source of all goodness. If man wants to be good and do what is good, there must be a profound awareness that it can only be obtained by drawing from the one and only good source. Being created in God’s image is the most wonderful privilege, but it can only materialise through intimate fellowship with God. This is the reason why all things are created not only “*of Him and through Him,*” but “*to Him.*”⁶

Man is the most beautiful vessel that has ever been created, a living vessel that has free will, the ability to think and to make a choice – attributes which truly make him a candidate for being the image of God. But while these attributes enable him to communicate with God, to think like God, to speak like God and to perform mighty deeds, he still is only a vessel. He is “*fearfully and wonder-fully made,*”⁷ but the only reason why this vessel is so wonderful, is because of its ability to contain God – that God can be inside the vessel. On his own, man can never be like God, but when he opens up his heart to God to enter, God can inspire him, speak through him and act through him. In this way God’s image will manifest itself through him, and he will become the man God designed him to be.

The relationship between the Creator and man, as described in the first chapters of the Bible, was a child-father relationship. The account of the paradise speaks of

¹ Acts 17:25 CEV

² Ps. 36:9, Jer. 17:13

³ Ex. 3:14, 1 Tim. 6:15-16

⁴ Lk. 18:19

⁵ Ps. 16:2 ML

⁶ Rom. 11:36

⁷ Ps. 139:14

a very tender and deep bond between man and God. Much like the relationship between children and their earthly parents, Adam and Eve were not supposed to be on their own and to live their life without their Father-God. God, on the other hand, showed very clearly that He, like any father, could not think of being without His children. There was no need for the first humans to think that any blessing was withheld from them. Living in the fullness of God's blessings, being perfectly satisfied with their Father's love, they continuously received life and strength, provision and protection, guidance and care in abundance.

Seeing that God is the fountain from which man forever will draw and on which he always will depend, the child-father relationship between man and his heavenly Father is something that man will never outgrow. God is the "*Everlasting Father*."¹ The Father who knows what is good, shows him what is good and works in him what is good.² Since man does not depend on his own knowledge, wisdom, and strength, there is no need of self-reliant knowledge of good and evil. Only when he decides to do things on his own, he has to revert to his own limited resources. In that instance, of course, he stops being a child. This signifies the end, spiritually and physically, because being cut off from the Father, he is like a branch that has been cut off from the tree.³

Thus, we understand that the fact that Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat from the tree of knowledge did by no means entail a limitation of the unfolding of their potential. God only wanted to keep them from losing their childlike and loving relationship with Him. God knew that, because He is EVERYTHING, they would lose everything if they should lose Him. Perfect fulfilment and happiness can only be found in communion with God and in childlike dependence upon our heavenly Father.⁴ In this respect the first man, Adam, failed, but thank God that there was a "*second Man*"⁵ namely, Jesus Christ, the "*last Adam*."⁶ He did not fail! In Him we see what God had in mind when He created man. Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. His secret was that, though He "*increased in wisdom and*

¹ Is. 9:6

² Phil. 2:13

³ Gen. 2:17

⁴ Matt. 18:3

⁵ 1 Cor. 15:47

⁶ 1 Cor. 15:45

*stature, and in favour with God and man,”*¹ He still remained His Father’s child. His entire life bears witness of a wonderful oneness with the Father, a communion of perfect love and trust in which the Father gave everything and the Son received everything. *“The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”*²

Jesus, as the “second Man,” never ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because, with regard to His Father, He was never on His own. Even though He was the Son of God, He still, like a child, accepted His total dependence on His heavenly Father. In this way, He continuously remained in perfect unity with the Father and He has been able to conquer hell and death. Thus, God achieved His purpose with the creation of man through “the second man,” Jesus Christ who became the origin of a new creation. By believing in Him every believer becomes part of the new creation. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”*³ This is how the image of God becomes visible in and through us *“to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.”*⁴ For *“as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.”*⁵

Man’s pride

Because God is literally everything, as we have seen in the previous chapter, there cannot be meaning and satisfaction in life outside God. True life is communion with God. Communion with God is not religiosity. It is not asking God for blessings or obeying His commandments. It is not belonging to a church or following certain rules. Communion with God, in its truest sense, is belonging to God, being,⁶ like the prodigal son, in the father’s loving embrace.⁷ No portrayal of this beautiful relationship comes closer to the reality than the words of the bride in the Song of Solomon, *“I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine.”*⁸

The arrogant suggestion that life is possible without a personal relationship with God, and the selfish calculation that such a life might be profitable, is the serpent’s

¹ Luke 2:52

² John 5:19

³ 2 Cor. 5:17

⁴ Eph. 1:6

⁵ 1 Cor. 15:48

⁶ 1 Cor. 6:19

⁷ Luke 15:20

⁸ Song of Solomon 6:3, Eph. 5:32

poison with which Satan has robbed man from true life. The proud thought that a being who has received its existence from God, might be able to live without God, is the cause of all ungodliness. To believe that man can manage without God, handle things with his own limited capacities in order to be an independent individual, is the spirit of Satan that wants to be an autonomous self – to be like “God.” Haughtiness is the destroyer of every good relationship, the relationship between God and man and the relationship between fellow human beings. It regards the childlike dependence on a loving God as a limitation of its liberties. The truth is that this childlike dependence on and fellowship with God is the very gateway that grants man entrance to an unlimited life through communion with an unlimited Person with unlimited power, unlimited wisdom and unlimited resources.

When man accepted the reasoning of the serpent, he opened his heart to the proud spirit of Satan and, in so doing, the devil entered into his heart. In this way, man became that self-centred ego (which he has been ever since) even before he ate of the forbidden fruit. When he started reasoning independently, nourishing his own selfish desires, contrary to the Father, he lost the Father’s hand and stopped being the child of his Father. Self-reliance was the end of childhood. For that reason, the tree of knowledge of good and evil suddenly looked different to Eve. While she was still a “child,” she paid no attention to the tree because it was of no interest or importance to her. But now she suddenly saw that *“the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise.”*¹ This was the fall of man, and thus man ate of the fruit of the tree.

We see therefore that the fall of man rather points to the nature of sin than to the first transgression. One does not understand the essence of sin, as long as it is seen in single transgressions or in multiple acts of sin. The simple truth is that man lost his childlikeness and love for his Father-God – his childlikeness which could not be on its own, and his love which did not want to be without the Father. In so doing, he lost his contact with God.

Excluded from communion with God, even the “good” that man does is not good in God’s sight. This implies that, even when he does not consciously sin, because of his separation from God, he finds himself in sin. We understand then that,

¹ Gen. 3:6

through the fall of man, not only his acts of sin but also his “good” deeds became polluted and sinful. *“All our righteousness is like filthy rags.”*¹

Since the fall of man destroyed his relationship with God, spiritual death set in.² Through the spiritual death, man started dying physically as well. Thus, the countdown of death began. Consequently, through sin, death came into the world and spread to all men.³

Religion and self-righteousness

As a result of the fall of man, the spirit of man became contaminated with the pride of the devil and thus it became second nature to man to be on his own. The effect of sin caused man’s heart to degenerate to such an extent that man became blind to God’s greatness and to His love. He became insensitive regarding the unique fellowship he had had with God before the Fall, and consequently there was not even a thought of repentance or a desire to regain what he had lost. Man was still aware of God, but he did not know God in the same way as he knew Him before the fall. He sensed an emptiness in himself but, blind as he was, he concentrated on the lost blessings of God rather than the lost fellowship he once had had with God.

Since Satan could not completely eradicate the Godhead from man’s mind, he had to quiet man’s conscience by creating a substitute that would prevent him from finding the truth. This substitute was religion, which under the pretence to be a way back to God, was actually a caricature of the original child-father relationship with God. The devil knew that man would eagerly lay hold of this idea, because religion would satisfy his pride. Therefore, he prompted man to rely on the building of temples, sacrifices and saying long prayers. He created the idea that the more they did for God and the bigger the sacrifices they made, the more they would deserve His favour. He did not remind them that God is the source of all life and that He is not *“worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.”*⁴ He blinded the hearts of men to the truth that God, as the Father, will always be the giver and that man, as the “child,” will always be

¹ Is. 64:6

² Gen. 2:17

³ Rom. 5:12

⁴ Acts 17:25

the receiver. Satan twisted everything elevating man to be the giver, and making God the receiver. He caused man to toil and labour in his religion, knowing very well that, as long as man, in his search for God, was on his own, he would only find himself. As long as man is separated from fellowship with God, religion is a dead, lustreless counterfeit of true worship, with which God is not pleased.

Pride blinded man to such an extent that God could not reveal to him right from the beginning the Good News of Christ who would come. He did however announce the coming of His Son and told the serpent “*He will crush your head,*”¹ but man in his fallen state could not comprehend it. To the spirit of pride, religion was a very satisfying prospect for in this way man thought he could earn God’s favour and establish his own righteousness.² That urge was so strong that God could not stop the progress of religion through the centuries. Nevertheless, God knew the way how to break this deep-rooted pride in man within his practice of religion by means of the law.³

The Law

Fallen man does not know about the deep ruin of sin inside of him. He does not realize that through the fall he has been separated from God. Therefore, he is not worried about the fact that he has turned his back on God. He does not realise that there is no true life outside the fellowship with God. To be on his own feels normal to him. He is so insensitive that, on the contrary, he sees something good in life and something good in himself. He does not understand that being barred from God, actually means that everything he does is sinful, no matter whether it is with respect to his sinful deeds or his good works. Irrespective of how beautifully he is trying to paint the landscape of his life, if God is not in the picture, everything is in vain.

Since he sees his sinfulness only in the light of his single transgressions, he considers himself good. In the same way, because he sees his righteousness in the light of his good deeds, he does not feel too bad about himself. Thus, thinking that the odds are in his favour, he perceives a way to prove himself through his religion and to convince God that he is right or, at least, becoming a better person. If he

¹ Gen. 3:15 ML

² Rom. 10:3

³ Rom. 3:20, 5:20, 7:7.13

only does his best, then surely God will notice it and reward him. It is striking how this spirit which is focused on effort and own strength surfaces in the vocabulary of a religious person; for instance, “you must do your share,” “exert your strength,” “do your best,” “you should pay the price,” – all depends on yourself. Characteristic of this trend of thought is the fact that, in the twenty verses from Romans 7:6-25, where the apostle describes the proud self-effort of the religious person, the pronoun “I” appears almost thirty times. However, here we see that the function of the law is to make man aware of his sinfulness. Through the law comes the knowledge of sin.¹ God’s purpose with the law was not that man could feel better about himself if he did not commit certain sins, or feel at ease when he had done a few good deeds. No, the law was given “*so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful*”² and that man would see that through the fall he had fallen away from God and would realize that sin was not merely a negative influence but that he had become a slave of sin – that he was lost.

Since the pride of fallen man is so deeply rooted, the law cannot tell him that there is nothing good in him, because he does not believe it and does not want to hear it. It can neither convince him that only God is good and that God alone has the ability to do good, for he is blind to these truths. No, the law addresses him as it suits him. He wants to know what God requires him to do, what is right and what is wrong, because his pride tells him that he is able to do it.

In order to break this pride, God gives man the law with these words, “*The man who does those things shall live by them.*”³ However, God does not say this because He is interested in a few good deeds. God is not pleased with good works but with a good heart. What is the good of it if you harbour wrong motives in your heart and you do good because you want to avoid punishment or to receive a reward, or if you feel compelled to do good but not out of a motive of love? Even if you do good from time to time, but you do not persevere in doing good, because your heart has not changed, this does not justify you in the eyes of the Lord. “*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*”⁴ Moses, who is a type of the righteousness of the law, because of one transgression

¹ Rom. 3:20, Rom. 7:7

² Rom. 7:13

³ Rom. 10:5

⁴ James 2:10

was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, although he “was faithful in all His house.”¹

Because the law is unyielding, a curse rests on everyone who does not strictly keep all of its rules and regulations. “*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*”² This means that the righteousness of the law is, metaphorically spoken, like a very steep mountain (Sinai) which has to be ascended. One wrong step causes the climber to slide back to the foot of the mountain, where he has to start climbing again. One single transgression reveals the sinful desire and wrong disposition of man – that sin has still a hold on him. In other words, his deepest being is not perfect before God. God requires a righteousness that always loves good with all his heart and always hates evil, a heart that has no yearning for sin. For this reason, it is obvious that “*by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight.*”³

Thus, the law is the means by which God shows man that there is nothing good inside him⁴ and that through all of his self-efforts he could not become a better person. God uses the relentlessness of the law to make him realise that he cannot meet God’s requirements and that he cannot please God as long as he is on his own. To come to this understanding, man has to get rid of his pride. Before he can be saved, he must realise that he is lost.

With the “tax collectors and sinners,” God easily achieves this purpose, because their sin is evident. However, with the so-called “good” people, that is, those not guilty of “great” or obvious sins who lead an “exemplary life,” it is not so easily achieved. While these people do not see the depravity of their sinful nature, they cannot understand the power of the Gospel. When they repent, they don’t do it, having a loving relationship with the Lord in mind; no, they want to learn what is right and what is wrong, in order to live up to the rules. And because they do not turn to the Lord, but to the law, they are obliged to meet the requirements of the law, as previously mentioned, “*the man who does those things shall live by them.*”⁵ Consequently, it doesn’t make any difference whether “those things” are

¹ Heb. 3:2

² Gal. 3:10

³ Rom. 3:20, Gal. 3:11

⁴ Rom. 7:18

⁵ Rom. 10:5

requirements of the Law, or words of Jesus, or instructions of the Holy Spirit. If man considers them to be conditions that must be satisfied first, in order to obtain salvation and eternal life, he is automatically under the law and *“fallen from grace.”*¹ This is why the apostle Paul comes to the conclusion, *“if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”*²

The law is still God’s method to teach every man, especially the “good” and “exemplary”, that, irrespective of his good deeds and his devotedness, he is lost, as long as he does not have a personal relationship with God. The more he strives to live up to rules, the more he finds, to his shock, that instead of becoming better, he becomes worse. The “do’s” bring forth the dislike for the good that is slumbering deep inside man – *“for the good that I will do, I do not do.”*³ The “don’ts” reveal the desire to sin that is still part of his nature, – *“but the evil I will not to do, that I practice,”* – to the effect that *“the offence might abound”*⁴ and *“sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.”*⁵ In this way, God shows a person who is under the law, by means of the law, that there is a different law working in him, *“the law of sin,”*⁶ which is stronger than all his good intentions and efforts, *“because the carnal mind is enmity against God.”*⁷ He has been sold as a slave to sin.⁸ Now his pride gives up the struggle. Taught by experience that no one can be made righteous by the deeds of the law, he finally realises that he is lost – a wretched man that desperately needs to be saved.⁹

It may take years before a so-called “converted” person comes to this realisation, because many Christians take it for granted that a person who is “converted” is saved. How can a converted person be lost? The answer is that no man has ever been saved unless he was first lost. A person may honestly repent, turn from his sins and love the Lord, but if he does not realise that he is lost, and therefore does not see the necessity of being saved, he cannot be saved. The word salvation implies that man is saved by grace alone. But as long as he does not

¹ Gal. 5:4

² Gal. 2:21

³ Rom. 7:19

⁴ Rom. 5:20

⁵ Rom. 7:13

⁶ Rom. 7:23

⁷ Rom. 8:7

⁸ Rom. 7:14

⁹ Rom. 3:20, 7:24

accept the fact that he is totally lost and therefore utterly helpless, he will always try to “assist” God and thereby prevent the Saviour from saving him.

However, eventually God will bring him to the point where he can be saved. Exhausted and discouraged from years of futile self-effort, he despairs of himself, realising that he cannot keep God’s commandments, nor follow Christ’s example. All his efforts cannot make him a better man. This signifies the end of his self-reliant spirit and the end of his pride. Without being aware of it, he moves away from the class of good and exemplary people to those who are “heavy laden.”¹ Accepting at last that he is lost, there comes forth the cry of despair, “Who shall save me? I cannot save myself!”

One day the same words came from the lips of the apostle Paul, “*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*”² But he found the blessed answer: “*I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”³

In the end Paul’s own painful experience taught him that salvation did not come through works, but by grace through faith in Jesus Christ!⁴ Looking back he now understood the function of the law better than anyone else. He wrote to the Galatians, “*before faith came, we were confined under the Law, awaiting in custody, faith that was yet to be revealed, so that the Law served as our custodian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.*”⁵

5

Grace

The law and grace are opposites. The law is full of demands; grace requires nothing but faith. The law lays down what man must do to be acceptable to God;⁶ grace proclaims that God accepts us because Jesus Christ died for us. The law

¹ Matt. 11:28

² Rom. 7:24

³ Rom. 7:25

⁴ Eph. 2:8

⁵ Gal 3:23-26 ML

⁶ Rom. 10:5

demands righteousness, grace grants it. Under the law, obedience is an imperative; under the dispensation of grace, obedience is a fruit.

Because God saw that we would never be good enough in His sight through something we could do, He did the only thing by which He could justify us without expecting from us anything but faith: He has laid on His Son *“the iniquity of us all,”*¹ declaring us not guilty. This was an act of sheer grace. In legal terms, God proclaimed a general amnesty for all who are in the prison of sin.² Every prisoner of Satan who accepts the pardon by believing in Jesus Christ, may leave the prison at once. This holds good even for God’s enemies, which all of us were before we were saved, because *“when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.”*³ That means that God did accomplish man’s redemption not only without the least contribution on our part, but in spite of our enmity. Jesus is the propitiation not only for the sins of believers *“but also for the whole world.”*⁴ In other words, before man could move a finger, while he was still godless, an enemy, God had reconciled him through the death of His Son.⁵ God is indeed the God *“who justifies the ungodly.”*⁶

Since God took the initiative and did it all by Himself through the death of His Son, we are justified by mere grace. This is why the apostle Paul arrives at the logical conclusion *“if by grace, then it is no longer of works.”*⁷ And if it is “not of works,” it can only be “through faith.”⁸ Through the substitutionary death of His Son, God replaced the law with grace.⁹ This was the most revolutionising spiritual change in history. By putting grace in the place of the law God reversed the established theological and legal concepts. He declared the first covenant out of date and entered into a new covenant. ‘In that He saith, *“A new covenant,”* He has made the first obsolete.”¹⁰ Thus, Christ became the *“Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.”*¹¹

¹ Is. 53:6

² Is. 61:1, Luke 4:21

³ Rom. 5:10

⁴ John 2:2

⁵ Rom. 5:6,10

⁶ Rom. 4:5

⁷ Rom. 11:6

⁸ Eph. 2:8-9

⁹ John 1:17

¹⁰ Heb. 8:13

¹¹ Heb. 8:6

Can the absolute unreservedness and boundlessness of grace be more strongly expressed?¹ No wonder that the moment a sinner becomes aware of the fact that God's grace has no limits and accepts it, the love of God comes into his heart² through the Holy Spirit,³ and fills him "*with joy inexpressible and full of glory.*"⁴

Unfortunately, many Christians cannot taste this glorious joy. Because they do not understand that the totality of grace implies deliverance from the totality of sin, they think that a change in their lives must take place first before they can experience the fullness of redemption. They seek "*the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*"⁵ in themselves. While they don't realise that salvation is God's work, they thus understand salvation psychologically and not spiritually, believing that it depends on their own doing.

Since humans were not able to fulfil the law, God accomplished their justification "*apart from the law,*"⁶ and hence without man's co-operation. Where the law held man accountable for his doings, grace released him from this accountability and imputed to him what another One, Jesus Christ, had done for him. Therefore, the solution to his problem lies no longer within himself, but completely "outside" of himself, for the problem was solved 2000 years ago on the cross of Calvary. There is man's righteousness, not based on what he must do, but based on what Christ has done for him. Consequently, it is not the righteousness of man, but the "*righteousness of God.*"⁷ The Reformers called it a "*foreign righteousness,*"⁸ because someone else's (Jesus') righteousness is imputed to the believer.⁹ No sin can corrupt it, and no good work can bring the believer closer to that righteousness. It is a free gift which can only be received by believing like a child, for it is "*the righteousness of faith*" which comes "*through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe.*"¹⁰

¹ Calvin speaks about "irresistible grace."

² Rom. 5:5

³ Titus 2:11, "Soon as my all I ventured on the atoning blood, the Holy Spirit entered, and I was born of God." Author unknown

⁴ 1 Pet. 1:8

⁵ Rom. 3:24

⁶ Rom. 3:21,28

⁷ Rom. 10:3

⁸ Martin Luther

⁹ Rom. 3 - 4

¹⁰ Rom. 3:22

In order to receive the grace of righteousness by childlike faith, means that man must give up his pride and subject himself to God's will.¹ As he can contribute nothing to his righteousness, he must only build on the foundation of grace. The only reason that he is "right" in God's sight, will be, for all eternity, that Christ died for him on the cross. If someone asks him, "where is your righteousness?" – he will not point to himself, but always to Christ, and answer, "THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!"² As the apostle says, "*If anyone is going to boast, let him boast only of what the Lord has done.*"³

Where the law required man to climb Mount Sinai, making the top of the mountain inaccessible through ordinances and decrees, the grace of our Lord Jesus came down from the mountain and offered eternal life as a free gift.⁴ Grace has freed us from the requirements of the law. There is no need to climb the mountain anymore, because "*he who has the Son has life.*"⁵ When anyone receives the Son of God in his heart, grace accepts him unconditionally, and gives him not only righteousness, but brings him back into the wonderful communion with God. "*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*"⁶ Because Christ died for him, Christ also lives for him. Because He has done everything for him, He wants to be everything for him. Through His blood He delivers all who believe from the *guilt* of sin, and through fellowship with Him He delivers all who receive Him from the *power* of sin. "*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,*"⁷ "*who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*"⁸ Through "*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*" we receive an "*abundance of salvation,*"⁹ namely salvation from our sinful past, as well as victory over our sinful nature.

¹ Rom. 10:3

² Jer. 23:6

³ 1 Cor. 1:31-32 LB

⁴ Rom. 6:23

⁵ Rom. 10:4, 1 John 5:12

⁶ 1 John 4:15

⁷ 1 Cor. 1:9

⁸ 1 Cor. 1:30

⁹ 2 Cor 8:9, Is. 33:6 ASV

Repentance

The Greek word '*metanoia*' is in most English Bible translations rendered as 'repentance'. The literal meaning is '*change of mind*' which in Biblical context is to be understood as turning from sin and turning to God. In some passages the emphasis is on turning from sin. In most texts however the emphasis is on turning to God. As there is no adequate word for '*metanoia*' in the English language we maintain the use of the word 'repentance,' keeping in mind that the meaning is both turning away from sin and turning to God.

If salvation is a free gift and not of man's own doing,¹ then repentance must be seen as a gift as well. Peter confirms this when testifying before the Jewish council about Jesus, "*God exalted Him to His right hand as Leader and Saviour, to grant to Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins.*"²

When the multitude who listened to Peter on the day of Pentecost, asked him, "*What shall we do?*" his answer was: "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.*"³ Of the three thousand who followed his advice, we read, "*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized.*" In other words, the fact that they received Peter's message with gladness, was regarded by the apostles as repentance.⁴

When, at a later occasion Paul proclaimed the Gospel to the heathen, the gladness with which they received the Gospel was characteristic of their conversion too. "*Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.*"⁵ It was no different in Samaria, "*And there was great joy in that city.*"⁶ "*When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.*"⁷

In the case of Cornelius and his house, there was, as it were, no time for repentance, for "*while Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.*"⁸ Since the condition was "*repent ... and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,*" repentance must have taken place in the hearts

¹ Eph. 2:8-9

² Acts 5:31 ML

³ Acts 2:38

⁴ Acts 2:41

⁵ Acts 13:48

⁶ Acts 8:8

⁷ Acts 8:12

⁸ Acts 10:44

of Cornelius and his people. But how? It is evident that the answer in this instance is the same as in Acts 2:41. Warmed by the glad tidings of God's love, they opened their hearts with joy. In this way they received the Holy Spirit, even before they could think of repentance in the till then familiar sense of the word. When the apostles and brothers who lived in Judea heard this, they glorified God, saying, "*Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.*"¹

Obviously, the apostles preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ with so much joy and power that the listeners' hearts were filled with joy and faith. Thus, they were converted and could be baptized. At the meeting of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem Peter announced, "*So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them, by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*"² Here Peter emphasizes the fact, that the purification of the hearts came to pass "by faith." While he was preaching the gospel, the Holy Spirit did the work through the Word.³

The notion that gentiles could receive the Holy Spirit was to Jewish thinking unacceptable. In the eyes of law-abiding Jews, the gentiles, who knew nothing about God and His commandments, were like unclean animals. Therefore, the Lord had at first to make Peter willing to bring the gospel to the gentiles, by showing him through the vision of the unclean animals that God cleanses the gentiles through faith in Jesus Christ.⁴ This is what Peter experienced in the house of Cornelius. Just as Jesus had previously said to His disciples, "*You are already clean through the word that I have spoken to you,*"⁵ the hearts of Cornelius and his friends were cleansed by faith in the Word that they had heard and believed.

Many sincere Christians may ask here: Does repentance not mean to turn around? Is a person who repents not supposed to make things right with God and men, to confess his sins, make restitution for stolen goods and ask forgiveness if he has offended someone? Do we not have an example in the book of Acts of people who confessed and made known their deeds? Certainly, yes! But in that very case Luke explicitly mentions that "many who had *believed* came confessing and telling

¹ Acts 11:18

² Acts 15:8-9

³ John 15:3

⁴ Acts 10:11-15

⁵ John 15:3 ML

their deeds.”¹ Their confession was not an act of repentance, but a spontaneous reaction to the wonderful deliverance which they had experienced through their freshly found faith in Christ.

This brings us to another question: Is there not in other parts of the Bible a difference in meaning with regard to repentance? Does not the emphasis in the Old Testament usually fall on things that man must do? Yes, indeed. Because of the different point of view, in the Old Testament from the Law, and in the New Testament from Christ, we have to do with two completely different concepts. The Law tells what man must do to find favour with God. When a person transgresses, the ministration of the Law turns into a “ministry of death” and “condemnation.”² Instead of blessing, there is the curse, *‘for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”’*³ Therefore, repentance under the Law is usually characterized by fear and the compulsion to fight sin.

Where the Law lays down what man must do – and we have seen clearly that by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in God’s sight⁴ – grace tells us what Jesus Christ has done for us, that He *“Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree”*⁵ and *“wiped out the handwriting of requirements [the law] that was against us, which was contrary to us. And has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”*⁶

If Christ then has *“put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”* and *“we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by,”*⁷ what is left for man to do but to accept the Good News with great joy? Furthermore, if Jesus has taken upon Himself the sin of the whole world, totally abolishing the barrier between God and man, what can withhold Him from coming into people’s hearts when they believe? Thus, in the dispensation of grace, the only meaningful explanation of repentance is that people open their heart to the Gospel and receive Jesus Christ into their heart by childlike faith. The book of Acts and the letters of the apostles

¹ Acts 19:18 italic for emphasis

² 2 Cor 3:7.9

³ Gal. 3:10

⁴ Rom 3:20

⁵ 1 Pet. 2:24

⁶ Col.2:14, in brackets added

⁷ Heb. 9:26, Rom. 7:6

give evidence that the effect of such faith was that the believers were time and again filled with “*joy inexpressible and full of glory.*”¹ Simply believing that through faith in Jesus Christ they were delivered from Satan’s power, released from the curse of the law,² freed from a guilty conscience, having the living Christ in their hearts, was enough to make everyone feel glorious. Simply believing in the accomplished work of redemption is even today more than enough for every Christian to be filled with great joy.

The heart where Christ lives is the “new heart” of which God says, “*I will put my laws into their hearts.*”³ The “new heart” does the will of God of its own free will. Obedience is no longer a compulsory reaction to the demands of the law from the outside, but a joyous response to Christ’s gentle urges from the inside.⁴ The man and woman who believe that Christ lives in their hearts keep His commandments because they love Him.⁵ Therefore, they produce “*fruit in agreement with... repentance.*”⁶ Their righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,⁷ because it is not their own righteousness, but “*the righteousness which is from God by faith.*”⁸

To help Christians to be sound in doctrine and sound in faith⁹ it is extremely important that law and grace are not confused. Unfortunately, this happens in many churches and denominations as a result of wrong teaching. When Christians hear that they must believe in Jesus Christ to be saved, and at the same time are taught that they have to observe the law or certain rules in order to be entitled to go to heaven, they become confused. Then redemption is partly the work of Christ and partly their own responsibility. Such false teaching keeps them necessarily under the law. When people hear this so-called “gospel”, they receive, together with the new life, a germ of death, because the ministration of the law is “the ministry of death.”¹⁰ Every time they fail, they feel condemned all over again and only feel “peace” again if they have done something to appease God. But as we have seen,

¹ 1 Pet. 1:8

² Gal. 3:13

³ Heb. 10:16

⁴ Ps. 40:8

⁵ John 14:23

⁶ Matt. 3:8 ML

⁷ Matt. 5:20

⁸ Phil. 3:9

⁹ Titus 1:10-13

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 3:6-9

true peace does not come by what we do for God, but by faith in what Christ has done for us; for He is our peace.¹ It is only when people's eyes are opened to the truth, that grace is lasting grace because it encompasses the totality of sin, that they receive lasting peace.²

So then, the secret of a victorious life, that is, *"to get rid of every impediment and the sin that ensnares us so easily,"* simply lies in *"looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."*³ This is the Gospel in a nutshell, *"for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*⁴ Thus, the main cause of sin and defeat in the lives of Christians is that they take their eyes off Jesus, that is, that they stop living by faith, *"for whatever is not from faith is sin."*⁵ This shortcoming of not keeping one's eyes fixed on Jesus is the root of sin, because it is the cause of all the other sins. Therefore, the Lord Jesus says that the Holy Spirit *"will convict the world of sin [singular] ... because they do not believe in Me."*⁶ The easiest way to get one's eyes on the Lord again is to confess the unbelief and to start living by faith again, 'as it is written, *"The just shall live by faith."*⁷

Baptism

*"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized."*⁸ Why? In the first place, of course, because the Lord gave the command,⁹ but then also because baptism is the logical next step of faith. Faith in Jesus Christ, as we know, does not only mean that we believe in what Christ has done for us, but that we have become a part of Him, joined together like the branches and the vine, like the members and the body.¹⁰ We are one with Christ. Christ is our life, our new identity.¹¹ For this reason, Christians identify with every aspect of the Christ-life, believing that they are crucified, buried and raised with Christ. Baptism is therefore a manifestation of

¹ Eph. 2:14

² 2 Cor. 3:16-18, Is. 26:3-4

³ Heb. 12:1-2 ML, KJV

⁴ Rom. 1:17

⁵ Rom. 14:23

⁶ John 16:8-9 brackets added

⁷ Rom. 1:17

⁸ Acts 2:41

⁹ Matt. 28:19

¹⁰ Rom 6:5, 1 Cor. 12:27, John 15

¹¹ Col. 3:4

this identification with Christ: *“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him,”*¹ *“we are buried with Him through baptism into death.”*²

The certainty with which the apostle describes these things, springs also from the fact that Christ not only died *for* us, as a sacrifice of atonement, but that He died *in our place*, as our substitute. This is why Paul comes to the conclusion *“if one died for all, then all died.”*³ In principle, it is the same as if a wealthy person pays for his friends, say, for an air ticket: if one has paid for all, then all of them have paid. If Christ died in my place, then I have died. His cross is my cross, His death is my death, and His tomb is my tomb. This is the reason why everyone who has received Christ, must be baptised, that is be “buried.” However, while baptism is the burial of the old man, it is also the resurrection of the new man in Christ.

Baptism is an act of God by which the believer is placed in Christ: *“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus.”*⁴ It shows clearly that the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, is not in part, not a mere acquittal of sins, but the deliverance from the sinful old self, and the gift of a new life. *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”*⁵ This is why Paul calls baptism *“the washing of regeneration.”*⁶ It makes us aware at the same time that this wonderful renewal cannot be from works – the new man cannot be the product of the old man – it is the work of God; *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”*⁷ Baptism seals the fact that God has included everything in the gift of His Son, *“who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”*⁸ *“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”*⁹

Ignorance and uncertainty in this regard are the reasons why many Christians never find the key to a victorious life. The tragic consequence of ignorance is that those who do not believe in Romans 6 end up in Romans 7; those who do not believe in God’s grace fall under the Law again. Those who do not believe that they are crucified with Christ must “crucify” themselves. Christians who do not see that

¹ Rom. 6:6

² Rom. 6:4

³ 2 Cor. 5:14

⁴ 1 Cor. 1:30

⁵ 2 Cor. 5:17

⁶ Titus 3:5

⁷ Eph. 2:8

⁸ 1 Cor. 1:30

⁹ Rom. 8:32

the words “it is finished” convey that the Saviour has accomplished and completed the work of redemption, must exert themselves and do what Christ has already done for them. Thus, they will try to crucify themselves by fasting and praying and soul-searching. If they are honest with themselves, they will acknowledge that by exerting their own strength the “old self” never dies. They may speak of deliverance, but their lives testify that they are not free. That which only grace could accomplish, can no man do. Owing to that ignorance, many sincere people have become discouraged like the apostle Paul in Romans 7 where he, from his own experience shows that the result of self-effort is despair: “*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*”¹ True deliverance can only come by accepting the truth that the old man which is the cause of all the trouble, is buried with Christ “*through baptism into death,*” and to believe, “*it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*”² When Paul grasped this wonderful truth and (for the first time!) shouted “Christ lives in me,” one can imagine that he was overwhelmed by a joyous excitement. He had discovered the secret and the power of a triumphant life: That the resurrected Christ in him meant victory over sin and death.

The funeral of a deceased person is a deep and final separation from family and friends and from all earthly possessions – from everything that is important to man this side of the grave. When Christians were baptized in the first century and emerged from the water, they shouted, “Jesus Christ is Lord!” It was a declaration to the world: I no longer belong to the world; I belong to Jesus Christ.³ I no longer live for the world; I live for Him “by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”⁴

Finally, but of no less importance, we have to mention that baptism means the introduction of a new member into the body of Christ; that is, the congregation.⁵ The baptism of a new convert affects the whole congregation.⁶ For this reason, from the earliest time, baptism has filled a central place in the life of the church. When the Christians had part in a baptismal service, they relived again and again and understood each time better what baptism meant to themselves.

¹ Rom. 7:24

² Gal. 2:20, Phil. 1:21

³ 1 Cor. 6:19-20

⁴ Gal. 6:14

⁵ Acts 2:41, 1 Cor. 12:12-13

⁶ 1 Cor. 12:26

Rebirth

The Greek word *'palingenesia'* is found twice only in the New Testament. In Matthew 19 verse 28 it is rendered as 'regeneration', 'new age' or 'future world'. The meaning of being born again or rebirth we find only once, in Titus 3 verse 5.¹ Rebirth means a new or second birth – not out of man, but out of God. At the first birth – from man – a child of man is born; at the second birth – from God – a child of God is born.² Just as a human being is the child of an earthly parent, because he is born of them, so is a child of God the child of his heavenly Father, because he is born of God. In both cases a birth has taken place.

By natural birth, a natural man is born; by rebirth, a spiritual man is born, for *"that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."*³ A natural man, who does not have the Spirit of God, is motivated by his own spirit. The spiritual man, on the other hand, is motivated by the Holy Spirit. The natural man does not subject himself to God *"because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."*⁴ Therefore, Jesus has said, *"unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*⁵ Inevitably, this means that the independent, selfish life, the old man, has to die and a new man has to be born. Since neither one nor the other is in the power of man, rebirth too, just like salvation, can be nothing but a gift that can only be received by faith. Just as an earthly mother is the one who gives birth – what can the little babe do to be born? – so the heavenly Father is the One who brings forth the new life. Therefore, the apostle Peter says, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His ample mercy has given us new birth into a life of hope."*⁶

The wonderful reality of the Gospel is that the death of the old man and the resurrection of the new man in one man, which is in Jesus Christ, have already taken place. Those who accept Christ and receive Him into their hearts, receive the life of Christ who died and rose again. This signifies the end of the old life in sin and

¹ Matt. 19:28; Titus 3:5 palingenesia

² John 1:12-13, 1 John 3:1

³ John 3:6

⁴ Rom. 8:7

⁵ John 3:3

⁶ 1 Pet. 1:3 ML

the beginning of the new life in Christ, as Paul says, “*old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.*”¹ Rebirth indeed means a new creation.

Proceeding on the principle that Jesus Christ is the life,² rebirth can be explained very simply. If any one hears the Lord’s voice and opens the door of his heart, Jesus comes into his heart.³ Until then the person was spiritually dead. But now, because Christ, the “life-giving spirit,”⁴ has come into his heart, to live inside of him, he has received life. He has received the rebirth, for “*as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*”⁵

In the Bible, there is no uncertainty about it that a person who has received the Lord Jesus and participates in the church’s activities, is born again. John puts it straightforwardly in his first letter: “*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.*”⁶

If we ask what the symptoms are of a person who is born again, we can look at the natural life. The fact that a child lives – regardless of its stature or its looks – is proof enough that it is born. There might be reason for worry when a baby hardly breathes, but to have doubts about its birth would be ridiculous. In the spiritual realm it is the same. As a new-born child breathes and moves, eats and drinks and responds to the mother’s smile, so a child of God shows the symptoms of the new-found life by praying, singing, reading God’s Word and rejoicing in the Lord with others.

The growing up of a child of God “*to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*”⁷ is, of course, a process that may take years. This, however, must not be confused with the rebirth. Rebirth is not a process. This is particularly clear in the first letter of the apostle Peter. Peter addresses the young congregation as “*new-born babes,*” “*having been born again*” “*through the word of God.*”⁸ He is thoroughly aware that they are not “holy” in all their conduct.¹

¹ 2 Cor. 5:17

² John 14:6

³ Rev. 3:20

⁴ 1 Cor. 15:45

⁵ John 1:12-13

⁶ 1 John 5:1

⁷ Eph. 4:13

⁸ 1 Pet. 1:23, 2:2

Therefore, they need to lay aside “all malice and all deceit, all pretence, envy, and slander.”² It would be wrong to assume that young believers who exhibit such traits cannot be born again, and to conclude that they are still in the “process” of rebirth. Peter would not call them “new-born babes,” if they had not been born again. Naturally, there must be a progress from being a child to mature adulthood in Christ. For this reason, Peter encourages them to “*desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby.*”³ It is evident that spiritual growth is the effect of rebirth and not the cause.

Christians who do not comprehend “*the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved,*”⁴ because they are not “*delivered from the law,*”⁵ cannot see that being born again is a gift. They cannot grasp the wonderful fact that “His divine power” has given them in and with Jesus literally “*all things that pertain to life and godliness.*”⁶ Because they are not sure whether they are born again, they seek a deeper experience. They are like children who, completely unlike children, try to convince themselves that they have been born. If one asks people who belong to a congregation with such an unscriptural approach whether or not they are reborn, the response is one of a shocking uncertainty. Such uncertainty is unknown in the New Testament, because it is an uncertainty with regard to salvation. If a believer is not sure that he is born again, he is not sure that he is saved, because Jesus says, “*Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*”⁷

If we understand rebirth for what it really is, namely as the gift of eternal life, because Jesus has come into our hearts, then the fact that we are reborn is a reality that never becomes obsolete, a fountain of great joy which never runs dry. Then we know that in Him we are “*enjoying fullness of life.*”⁸ Our hearts are filled with thanksgiving. We worship, pray and sing out of a deep thankfulness and joy that Jesus has come into our lives. We do everything out of love for the Lord. Nothing is too difficult. Even suffering hardship, for the sake of the gospel, is not a

¹ 1 Pet. 1:15

² 1 Pet. 2:1 ML

³ 1 Pet. 2:2

⁴ Eph. 1:6

⁵ Rom. 7:6

⁶ 2 Pet. 1:3, Rom. 8:32

⁷ John 3:3

⁸ Col. 2:10 ML

burden, but rather a joy. Every moment is an opportunity to live the Christ-life to the full.

Holy Communion

Baptism and Holy Communion have been given a prominent place in the church by our Lord. By adding the elements (water, bread, wine) to the Word, Jesus not only underlined their importance, but lent special weight to their message. For this reason, baptism and Holy Communion are called sacraments. Because these two have been instituted by our Lord Jesus,¹ the Protestant churches recognise only them as true sacraments, contrary to the Roman Catholic Church (which believes in seven sacraments).

About the visual elements Jesus has said, *“the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”*² The elements are material, perishable – flesh. Water, bread and wine do not of themselves hold eternal life. *“It is the Spirit who gives life.”*³ In other words, the outward form – or how the sacraments are administered – does not have the importance that has been attached to it in the church’s history. The power of the sacraments lies in the **WORD**. If this is understood, differences concerning the administration of the sacraments are no problem.

On the other hand, of course, the elements (water, bread, wine) cannot be regarded as of less importance or as unnecessary. The Lord has given them for a reason. To be able to appreciate the full meaning of the elements, there are three things that we need to understand:

- 1) By adding the elements to the Word, Jesus emphasises the truth which is represented by the sacraments.
- 2) The elements, as visible signs, lend greater clarity to the Lord’s words.
- 3) The visible sign assists the mind to concentrate on the invisible reality of the sacrament, and in this way strengthens the faith of the believers.

There is a close connection between baptism and Holy Communion. While being immersed in water is a manifestation of our being in Christ, partaking of

¹ Matt. 28:19, Matt. 26:26-28, 1 Cor. 11:23-26

² John 6:63

³ John 6:63

Communion points to Christ being in us. Baptism emphasises that we are so thoroughly united with Christ that His cross is our cross, His death is our death, His grave is our grave, and His resurrection is our resurrection. Holy Communion, on the other hand, is a demonstration that Christ is truly in us, and that, through His blood and through His body, His powerful presence is working in us.

Whereas the blood of Jesus that we drink gives us the “*boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus*,”¹ the broken body of Christ that we eat opens the “new and living way” into heaven, into Holy Communion with the Father.² While baptism puts the seal on the fact that we are reborn and have become living members in the body of Christ, the Lord’s Supper is the food³ that keeps the child of God alive and closely connected with the Father in Jesus Christ. “*Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life*”⁴ and “*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.*”⁵

¹ Heb. 10:19

² Heb. 10:20

³ John 6:55

⁴ John 6:54

⁵ John 6:56

The workings of the Holy Spirit

The baptism with the Holy Spirit

The phrase “baptize with the Holy Spirit” appears in the New Testament only six times, once in each of the four Gospels,¹ and twice in the Book of Acts.²

In Matthew 3 verse 11 where John the Baptist summarises his ministry and the ministry of Christ, we find the first reference to the baptism with the Holy Spirit: “*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*”³ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the hundred and twenty on the day of Pentecost was the fulfilment of these prophetic words. As to the extraordinary power of this initial outpouring, it can be justly said that the Lord indeed baptised them with fire, as John had prophesied.

There is no doubt that being baptised with the Holy Spirit was a prerequisite for being an apostle. Jesus had commanded them to “*heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons.*”⁴ Without the power of the Holy Spirit, they could not have fulfilled their mission. Therefore, the Lord instructed them to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the power, “*And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.*”⁵

However, Jesus’ words did not refer solely to His first disciples or to the hundred and twenty who were gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. Jesus’ last words to the apostles were, “*make disciples of all the nations.*”⁶ From the next chapters of the Book of Acts it is evident that in every place where the gospel was subsequently preached, people received the Holy Spirit in a similar way. That was an unmistakable proof that Jesus, who baptised them with the Holy Spirit, expected every believer to be a disciple. God’s ways with His people do not change. To be

¹ Matt. 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33

² Acts 1:5, 11:16

³ Matt. 3:11

⁴ Matt. 10:8

⁵ Luke 24:49

⁶ Matt. 28:19

baptized with the Holy Spirit means to be “*endued with power from on high*.”¹ God does not give His power in vain. He gives the Holy Spirit to men and women who are willing to do His work. Not every Christian has the calling of an apostle, but every Christian ought to accept that he is a disciple. And disciples cannot do the work of the Lord without the power of the Holy Spirit. The question is, how can we present-day Christians be baptised with fire? This question needs an urgent answer. Much is said about it, but the easiest answer is to be found by just looking at the way the early Christians believed. In the first place, they expected with all their hearts to be filled with the Holy Spirit, because they knew that Jesus wanted to dwell in them. Furthermore, they had a strong belief that being baptised in the name of Christ signified the end of their old sinful nature and the beginning of the new life in Christ. Through baptism which meant the burial of their selfish ego, they identified with Christ’s death at the Cross. They were dead to sin, dead to the world, dead to their own ways, but alive to God.² The baptism with the Holy Spirit to them was not a superficial sensation, but God’s answer to the death of the flesh. Just as the fire of God in the times of the Old Testament fell upon the dead animal sacrifices, consuming them, so the fire of the Holy Spirit came upon them and remained with them. If we present-day Christians will believe like them, we shall receive like them.

During the time of the apostles, people were baptised as soon as they became believers. Normally, after being baptised in water, they received the Holy Spirit, speaking in other tongues.³ When this, as an exception to the rule, did not happen, as for instance in Samaria, Peter and John went down and prayed for them, “*that they might receive the Holy Spirit*.”⁴ The apostle Paul also experienced that young converts, once they had become believers and were baptized, usually received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. In Ephesus, however, he met some followers of the Lord who had not received the Holy Spirit when they were baptised, because they had been baptised according to what John the Baptist had taught.⁵ For this reason, they had a somewhat curtailed knowledge of the gospel. Therefore, Paul taught

¹ Luke 24:49

² Rom. 6

³ Acts 2:4, 2:38, 10:46, 19:6

⁴ Acts 8:14-17

⁵ Acts 19:2

them all they needed to know about Jesus Christ, telling them that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, and that John had told the people "*that they should believe in the One who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.*"¹ Then he baptised them in the name of the Lord Jesus. "*And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.*"²

If we look at how the apostles handled problems like these, we see that the working of the Holy Spirit depends more than on anything else on how clearly the undiluted truth of the Gospel is preached. If in those days there was no other manner in which the Holy Spirit could be received, it cannot be different in our days. We may justly conclude that if the true gospel is administered today in the same way, there will be the same results. Everyone who hears the same Gospel which Cornelius and his friends or the Ephesians heard, and believes with all his heart, can be baptised with the Holy Spirit just as the early Christians. Whether it happens by just hearing the Gospel, as in the house of Cornelius, or by the laying on of hands, as in the case of the Samaritans and Ephesians, may differ according to circumstances, but the ways God works through the Holy Spirit never change.

In the early church, unlike what is happening in many churches today, there was perfect unity among the apostles concerning the basic truth. There was no reason for the believers to be confused. There were little differences here and there, but these were not insurmountable, because the hearts of the believers and the preaching of the apostles were focused, as Paul summarised it, on Jesus Christ and Him crucified.³ Due to this principle, the Holy Spirit worked in every place in the same manner and led them, in spite of prosecution and hardships, from victory unto victory.

Part of their success, of course, was due to the glorious reality that Jesus had risen from the grave. Christ's resurrection was still fresh in the minds of the apostles. They "*ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.*"⁴ Their joy was contagious. The resurrection had sealed the fact that their sins were forgiven, and that Christ, indeed, had overcome Satan and death. Jesus was alive, and as He had promised, He would never leave them nor forsake them. They would never

¹ Acts 19:4 ML

² Acts 19:5-6

³ 1 Cor. 2:2

⁴ Acts 10:41

be alone again, nor would they have to depend on their own limited wisdom and strength. The same Spirit that they had cherished in Jesus, who had ministered to all who were heavy laden and burdened, was now *their* Spirit. Redemption was no longer an issue, for the Redeemer dwelt in them. No wonder their hearts were running over with joy. Their only purpose in life was, to follow Christ's example in serving their fellow men and getting them saved.

However, the deep awareness of grace, which was ministered by the apostles, had the most forceful impact on the hearers of the Gospel. The greater the awareness of grace, the greater was their faith; and the greater their faith, the more they were filled with the Holy Spirit and with power. This deep awareness of grace created in them a joyful anticipation so that they expected great things from God rather than from man. Therefore, they were occupied with the Lord rather than with each other's weaknesses and faults. Thus, their gatherings were charged with the expectation that Jesus would reveal Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit just as He had done when He was on earth, by saving souls, healing the sick and through signs and wonders.

They developed a deep compassion for people who were not saved and who were still in sin. Inflamed by the love of the Spirit, they submitted spontaneously to Christ's commission, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*"¹ They were convinced that every one of them was called to lead people to Jesus. They understood that Jesus' purpose for baptising them with the Holy Spirit was for one reason only, namely to equip them with power so they would be able to convey the message of God's love and grace with boldness and great conviction. Just as Jesus had begun preaching the kingdom of God after the Spirit had come upon Him,² the believers, after being "*endued with power from on high,*" "*spoke the word of God with boldness.*"³

Their own spiritual progress was not their first priority. Being saved and filled with the Holy Spirit to them did not mean to settle down and forget the souls around them. Their hearts were overflowing with love, and this was the reason why their

¹ Matt. 28:19

² Luke 4:14-19

³ Acts 4:31

hearts went out to their brothers and sisters and to the people who did not know Jesus. Because they had received so much, the love of God urged them to reach out and to help others. The more they reached out, the more the fire of the Holy Spirit burned in their hearts. Therefore, Jesus fulfilled His word among them: *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.”*¹

Jesus has not changed, nor has the Holy Spirit lost his power through the ages. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If “the works of Christ”² do not manifest among us as in the days of Acts, it is because the approach to sin and grace is too superficial. The evil of sin must be seen as bad as evil itself, and “the abundance of grace”³ as unlimited as God Himself. It is only then that the believer understands that believing in Christ is nothing less than receiving Christ and losing oneself. Jesus did not come into the world to help people amend or “upgrade” *their* life, but to become the substitute for their old life. The Christian who grasps this, ceases to strive in his own strength, and allows Jesus to take over.

If this truth – and there is no other truth – takes root in believers’ hearts, the result is similar to a nuclear reaction. When faith reaches the core of the Gospel, – the abundance of grace, – the atomic power of God is released. This is when believers get “endued with power from on high” and the “works of Christ” come to pass as in the beginning.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit

The Christians in Ephesus were people who were baptised with the Holy Spirit.⁴ Of the first believers there, we read, *“And when Paul had laid hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”*⁵ Yet, in his Epistle to the Ephesians Paul writes, “be filled with the Spirit.”⁶ How can this be explained?

It is as if the apostle says: *“...receiving and being filled is not the same thing. You have received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Triune*

¹ John 14:12

² Matt. 11:2

³ Rom. 5:17, 20

⁴ Eph. 1:13

⁵ Acts 19:6

⁶ Eph. 5:18

God, dwells now within you. You are endued with power from on high, but you have only a vague concept of what you truly have received". If the apostle had lived in our technological era, he might have said, "You are connected to the heavenly power station and you have experienced the power of God first-hand. But you do not yet know what this wonderful power can accomplish in and through you. Let me give you an illustration. Think of the power of electricity which illuminates cities, moves transportation systems and connects people around the world through the internet. Likewise, but in a much bigger dimension, the Holy Spirit provides energy for unlimited possibilities. Therefore, be *filled* with the Holy Spirit! Do not limit the Holy Spirit by only opening to Him a portion of your heart. Allow your entire being, your mind and your heart to be enlightened and enlarged by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit did not come merely to work in your gatherings; He wants to be part of your very being and to work in every area of your life. Whether you are at home or on the road, whether you work or rest, He wants to keep you constantly in pleasant fellowship with Jesus and to make you continuously aware of His presence. He must be the supreme factor in your life, every day, from sunrise to sunset and throughout the night. Therefore, invite Him by *"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."*¹

Jesus said, *"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed"*² and *"the words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."*³ That means that to be filled with the Spirit implies to drink in His words. Love for the Word of God makes one receptive for the Holy Spirit, as Jeremiah writes, *"Your words were found, and I ate them and your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart."*⁴ After Jesus had expounded to the Emmaus disciples "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself," they said to each other, *"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"*⁵ The more Jesus becomes a reality to us in the Word, and the more we absorb His Word (and practise it), the more we will be filled with the Spirit. It is with this purpose that the

¹ Eph. 5:19

² John 8:31

³ John 6:63

⁴ Jer. 15:16

⁵ Luke 24:27,32

Holy Spirit brings to remembrance all the words that Jesus has told.¹ He reminds us of what Jesus means to us,² so that we may treasure His words, “eat” them like Jeremiah,³ store them in our hearts,⁴ and do as Solomon recommends, *“Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead you; when you sleep, they will keep you; and when thou awake, they will speak with you.”*⁵

The fruit of the Spirit

In his second Epistle, Peter writes, *“his divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.”*⁶ That implies that the fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of God, and not the fruit of man. When men and women are filled with the Holy Spirit, they are not just religious; people can see that God is in their lives. Because they are “a temple of God,”⁷ the light of the Holy Spirit is radiating through them. Just as the light of an illuminated house at night is shed through the windows into the dark without the inhabitants thinking of it, so the light of God is shining from His children without them being aware of it. In an unobtrusive manner, without words, they show by their behaviour that God with His qualities have entered their lives. Just joyfully yielding to the Holy Spirit within them, always produces a kind look, a loving smile or a spontaneous act of charity, to say the least. These things will come to pass like fruits which silently grow on a tree. As we have seen in a previous chapter,⁸ it was God’s intent right from the beginning that His invisible nature should be embodied in man. Because of the fall this glorious purpose could not there and then materialise. But now God can achieve His wonderful purpose with His children because they are a temple of the Holy Spirit. Because they are deeply aware that this wonderful transformation in their lives is only due to God’s grace, they do not honour themselves, but always point to Jesus Christ. Yet, as the fruit of the Spirit appears in their life and Christ is formed within them, God’s nature becomes visible and God is glorified. Jesus says, *“By this My Father is glorified,*

¹ John 14:26

² John 15:26

³ Jer. 15:16

⁴ Ps. 119:11

⁵ Prov. 6:21-22

⁶ 2 Pet. 1:3.6.7, 3:11

⁷ 1 Cor. 3:16

⁸ Chapter 4

that you bear much fruit."¹ Without being conscious of it, the Christian's life testifies, *"he who has seen Me has seen the Father."*²

So, we understand why Paul is speaking of the "fruit"³ (singular), not "fruits" (plural) of the Spirit. The "fruit" of the Spirit is the nature and character of only one – Jesus Christ. Like all the grapes of a bunch of grapes grow and ripen simultaneously, so the different characteristics of Christ develop within a Christian side by side. Where love is present, there is kindness; people who have peace in their hearts, have the joy of the Lord. On the other hand, where unkindness rules, there cannot be peace, and where impatience rules, there is no love.

Because the fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of God and not the fruit of man, it would be wrong to say, "I am not gentle" or "I am impatient." Of our own accord, we will never be gentle or patient. Man cannot produce what God alone is able to bring forth. It would be just as wrong to say of a fellow Christian, "He is unloving or impatient." As long as he does not walk by faith, he cannot be different. *"The just shall live by faith."*⁴ Therefore, we ought to pray for each other and encourage each other to walk in the Spirit by faith. Then the fruit of the Spirit will naturally appear.

To live by faith in this context means to believe that we are branches of the true Vine,⁵ that we wholeheartedly consider ourselves being just that – believing that the sap of the Vine, that is Christ's humility and love, His faith and obedience is continuously flowing through our veins. While we, thus, unceasingly are drinking the life of the vine, we bear much fruit. Because it is through the broken body and the shed blood of our crucified Saviour that we receive this life, even the weakest may come with boldness and become a branch of the vine. The vine's message to the branches is, *"Because I bore your sins, I bear you, and because I bear you, you bear fruit."*

Sanctification by the Spirit

By grace, we *"have come to fullness of life"* in Christ."⁶ The King James Version translates; we are *"complete in him."*¹ Yet, though we are complete in *Hím*, the Lord

¹ John 15:8

² John 14:9

³ Gal. 5:22

⁴ Rom. 1:17

⁵ John 15:1,5, 1 Cor. 1:30, 2 Cor. 1:21

⁶ Col.2:10 RSV

does not possess *us* completely. Like a new house-owner who moves into his home but dwells only in one or two rooms, the Lord takes up residence within us but does not dwell in every room. This is however God's purpose with every one of His children, to fill their whole being with His presence! "*For this is the will of God, your sanctification.*"² Every child of God is a temple, a residence of God.³ To live a sanctified life means that the Lord inhabits the entire temple with all its apartments. Christ must be in charge of every detail of our life. There must be no area, no moment where we exclude Him. Only in this way we can be moulded into His image.⁴ Thus, we understand that our sanctification is first and foremost in God's interest. God's desire to have a holy people is prior to our desire to be sanctified. Therefore, we must never allow sanctification to become the object of selfish (religious) ambition. It is also not a matter of our own effort; it is the "sanctification by the Spirit."⁵

Sanctification is God's work. He is the One "who sanctifies," we are "*those who are being sanctified.*"⁶ Because it is the will of God and the work of God to sanctify us, the Father gave His Son, and the Son gave His life. Thinking of His impending crucifixion, Jesus prayed, "*for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.*"⁷ Because Jesus was willing to fulfil the will of the Father by shedding His blood and offering His body, we are sanctified "*through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*"⁸ To understand that God paid the price for our sanctification, and that it cost Him so dearly, is of vital importance. How dare man say that *he* is paying a price? Just as we are reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus, we are sanctified through the crucified body of Christ. For this reason, Paul says, "*of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us ... sanctification.*"⁹ Everything with regard to our sanctification that had to be done, Jesus has done on the Cross. That was *His* work. All that we need to do, is to believe. That is *our* work, for "*the just shall live by faith.*"¹⁰

¹ Col.2:10 KJV

² 1 Thess. 4:3

³ 1 Cor. 3:16

⁴ Rom. 8:29 AB

⁵ 2 Thess. 2:13, 1 Pet. 1:2

⁶ Heb. 2:11

⁷ John 17:19

⁸ Heb. 10:9-10

⁹ 1 Cor. 1:30

¹⁰ John 6:29, Rom. 1:17

Since we still have our human nature and because sin so easily ensnares us,¹ there is of course the practical question, how we can get rid of it? If sanctification is not our work but God's work, as we have seen, how must we understand the apostle's exhortation to "*seek eagerly ... for holiness,*"² "*perfecting holiness in the fear of God*"?³ In the same breath we could ask, if it is God who works in us "*both to will and to do for His good pleasure,*"⁴ in other words, if God does it all, why does the apostle say, "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,*"⁵ as if we are the ones who are accountable for everything? How can these apparently contradictory views be consolidated? The answer is, by simply looking "*unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.*"⁶ The literal meaning of this phrase is "looking away to Jesus." If Jesus has accomplished the work, we may most assuredly expect that He will bring it to pass within us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Since justification, sanctification and redemption are only to be found in Jesus Christ, we must look away from ourselves and expect everything from Him; just as the Israelites in the wilderness, who were bitten by the serpents, had only to look to the bronze serpent. God's explicit will was, "Anyone of those who are bitten, who looks at it, shall live."⁷ It is God's will that we just like them come to the cross and look to Christ. It is only by looking upon the Crucified that the venom of the old serpent loses its power. Therefore, Jesus says, "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*"⁸ Forgiveness, redemption and sanctification is in no one else but in the crucified Christ.

When we, with this in mind, look away from the things that distract our attention from the cross, and hear Jesus speak, "it is finished," a wonderful calm enters our whole being, as is written in the book of Hebrews, "*for we who have believed do enter that rest.*"⁹ If we really believe that Christ took upon Himself all the unrest and anxiety, which, through sin, came into the world, we relax. In this way the "sanctification by the Spirit" is accomplished in the same way as salvation and

¹ Heb. 12:1 ML

² Heb. 12:14 ML

³ 2 Cor. 7:1

⁴ Phil. 2:13

⁵ Phil. 2:12

⁶ Heb. 12:2

⁷ Num. 21:8 ML

⁸ Num. 21, John 3:14-15

⁹ Heb. 4:3,10

justification, without our doing. When we simply keep looking to Jesus, expecting everything from Him, like little children looking to their father, God does it all through His Spirit. Only such childlike faith can be spoken as a work we must do. And only with this in mind are we able to understand the words, *“Let us therefore be diligent [do our best] to enter that rest.”*¹

When Abram was ninety-nine the Lord appeared to him and told him, *“I am God Almighty; live in my presence and be upright.”*² The literal meaning in Hebrew is “live in my presence and be *perfect*.” Perfection and holiness are only found in the presence of God. When we are looking away from ourselves, directing all attention to Jesus, we enter into His presence. Then what we read in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18 happens: *“But we Christians ... can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him.”*³ Metaphorically speaking, this means that Jesus Christ is the “Sun,” and every Christian is a living mirror. Our heavenly Father wants us to reflect His Son and to be like Him. In other words, God sees the potential in every human to become a mirror picture of His Son. This will not happen if we polish the mirror or frame it with gold. No, the mirror must be directed toward the “Sun”, and kept fixed upon the “Sun”. In this way the mirror will reflect the “Sun” and become a virtual image of the “Sun”.

All that matters is that we have genuine faith like little children. The faith that Jesus dwells in us through the Holy Spirit, must become a conviction. We must be absolutely convinced that Jesus lives in us, and realise that He is lovingly paying attention to us every moment. How can we respond to His love otherwise but by directing our full attention to Him, allowing our hearts to be warmed and enlightened by His presence? If we do this, our words and deeds and all our doings, like a mirror, begin involuntarily reflecting His glory. Thus, in due course, the light and warmth of the Lord’s presence will penetrate the deepest places of our hearts, so that eventually our entire being will reflect Jesus.

¹ Heb. 4:11 brackets added

² Gen. 17:1 ML

³ 1 Cor. 3:18 LB

The gifts of the Holy Spirit

In the previous chapters we have discussed the baptism of the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, and the sanctification by the Spirit. Now is the time to look at the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are different reasons why we did not address this subject until now.

Firstly, the gifts of the Holy Spirit certainly must have a place in the church, but they benefit no one when the emphasis is on the gifts and not on the Giver. When too much attention is drawn to the gifts, it can be very harmful. Spiritual gifts are only a means to an end. God gives the gifts for the sake of the fruit and *“for the edifying of the body of Christ.”*¹ The golden rule is, *“let everything be constructive and edifying and for the good of all.”*²

Secondly, the power with which the Holy Spirit works when a gift is administered, depends on the measure of genuine faith, that is the degree to which the gifted person has grasped the full meaning of the Gospel. Therefore, the apostle Paul writes that the gift of prophecy, for instance, must be used in proportion to the measure of faith.³

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit always works in agreement with the attitude which was shown by Jesus Christ.⁴ Without the love of Christ, the gifts are not only worthless,⁵ they may even be destructive. A passenger train is only efficient as long as it stays on the track. If the train leaves the rails, the passengers may be injured and never reach their destination. In that case the enormous power of the locomotive is still demonstrated, but it is power out of control. Therefore, Paul recommends love as the *“more excellent way.”*⁶ Every Christian should make love his greatest aim,⁷ especially when the gifts of the Spirit are concerned.

From this some people conclude that Paul considered the spiritual gifts of little importance, as if love is all that matters. But this is not true. *“It is the same God who works all in all.”*⁸ There is also the tendency to depreciate the other gifts in respect

¹ Eph. 4:12

² 1 Cor. 14:26 AB

³ Rom. 12:6 ML

⁴ Phil. 2:5

⁵ 1 Cor. 13:1-3

⁶ 1 Cor. 12:31

⁷ 1 Cor. 14:1, 16:14

⁸ 1 Cor. 12:6

of the “best gifts,”¹ for example, the gift of speaking in tongues. But God lovingly bestows every gift for a special purpose. It is for that very reason, that Paul speaks of “the best gifts,” not that there are lesser gifts, but because he is considering the purpose for which each gift is given. For example, speaking in an unknown language in the congregation would serve no purpose, and might offend unbelievers.² In this respect, the gift of prophecy is a “better gift”, since it uses a known language and edifies the entire congregation.

On the other hand, Paul thanks God that he speaks in tongues more than the Corinthians.³ If one considers how much the Corinthians valued speaking in tongues, one can imagine how much Paul must have spoken in tongues. Paul recognised the gift of tongues a source of personal edification; it must have been vital to his prayer life.⁴ Unfortunately, however, the gift of tongues is presently in a state of discredit, because some believers practise the gift in public meetings, contrary to the definite advice of the apostle. Consequently, few Christians understand what Paul means when he says that the believers should pray “always with all prayer ... *in the Spirit*,”⁵ or what Jude means when he writes, “*beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God.*”⁶ Paul explains, “*For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the result then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.*”⁷ This can only mean that in private fellowship with God, Paul frequently prayed in tongues and sang in tongues.⁸ In other words, to use the gift of tongues privately, either in prayer or in songs of worship is, with Jude’s words, “*building yourselves up on your most holy faith.*”

We cannot leave this subject without mentioning the gift of discernment. Just as the physical body is warned against harmful influences by the pain which the different parts of the body experience, likewise the body of Christ receives warnings by members who have the ability to discern what is spiritually harmful. This is highly

¹ 1 Cor. 12:31

² 1 Cor. 14:23

³ 1 Cor. 14:18

⁴ 1 Cor. 14:2,4

⁵ Eph. 6:18 italic for emphasis

⁶ Jude 1:20 italic for emphasis

⁷ 1 Cor. 14:14-15

⁸ 1 Cor. 14:16

important with regard to the gifts of the Spirit. Every person who has received the Holy Spirit is sensitive in the spirit and has the ability to “test all things.”¹ The least of the saints, who has experienced the love of God, immediately sense when love is not in control. Therefore, here, as in all other areas, leaders and those who administer the gifts of the Spirit should make love their great quest. The love must be true and sincere. It is not sufficient if a gifted person says, “I have no ill feeling against anyone.” Of a man and a woman who administer the gifts of the Spirit much more is expected. Peter says, “*Above all else, cherish intense love for one another, for love covers up many sins.*”² This applies to every Christian. Each one, but especially one who wants to serve another with his gift, ought to ask himself, “How do I truly feel in my heart toward my brother and my sister? Do I love them fervently?” If this is the case, people will sense it and be open-minded; if not, it would be better to stop the operation of the gift and to seek the love of God first.

In concluding this chapter, we can say that where love and humility are the golden rule, there is mutual respect. The love of the Spirit is modest, “*regarding others superior to yourselves.*”³ Love has no need to do all that has to be done, or to say all that may be said. Love welcomes the Holy Spirit working through others, always mindful of giving others an opportunity to participate in the work of the Lord. No one will allow his gift to become too prominent, because it would suppress the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit in the other believers. The apostle says, “*Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*”⁴ “*One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*”⁵ Thus, where the spiritual growth of the church is concerned, God does not use only single talented people. Every member of the congregation is expected to co-operate in accordance with what the Spirit apportions to each individual.

Offices in the church

In connection with the different functions and offices in the church we may learn a lot from Paul’s Epistles to Timothy and Titus, which are called “pastoral Epistles,”

¹ 1 Thess. 5:21

² 1 Pet. 4:8 ML

³ Phil. 2:3 ML

⁴ 1 Cor. 14:26 italic for emphasis

⁵ 1 Cor. 12:11

because here Paul discusses the work of a shepherd (Latin: *pastor*). Every person who holds an office or takes an active interest in the church, ought to give special attention to these Epistles and read them from time to time.

The apostle speaks emphatically of the importance that whoever aspires to the office of bishop (overseer, pastor) “*must be blameless.*”¹ In all respects he ought to be an example to the believers. “*He must also enjoy a favourable reputation among the outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and into the trap of the devil.*”² Even those who do assistant services like deacons “*should first be put on probation and then, if they are without blame, they may serve as deacons.*”³ As example is better than precept, exemplary conduct is of greater importance than proficiency. Therefore, Paul advises Timothy to “*be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*”⁴ Like the apostles, leaders should be inspiring role models worthy to be followed. Paul writes to the Philippians, “*Join with me as followers, brothers, and observe those who behave as you have it exemplified in us.*”⁵

However, the apostles would not have been able to fulfil this role if the Master had not enabled them. They could not have accomplished the work of the Lord if it had not been for the work the Lord had accomplished in them. “*For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you.*”⁶ Jesus’ example was that He took on the form of a servant.⁷ “*I am among you as the One who serves.*”⁸ The greatest marvel was that Jesus, when He was approaching the time to return to glory, never ceased to serve them, as John relates, “*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God.*”⁹ He washed the feet of the disciples. To Peter, who did not comprehend what the Lord was doing and tried to stop Him, He said, “*If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.*”¹⁰ In other words, “If I cannot be your servant, My love cannot transform you.”

¹ 1 Tim. 3:2

² 1 Tim. 3:7 ML

³ 1 Tim. 3:10 ML

⁴ 1 Tim. 4:12

⁵ Phil. 3:17 ML

⁶ John 13:15

⁷ Phil. 2:7

⁸ Luke 22:27

⁹ John 13:3

¹⁰ John 13:8

What a powerful message to every believer through all the centuries! Before you think of serving another, Jesus wants to serve you first. Before you show your fellow-man love, Jesus wants to show you love first. Whatever He expects you to do, He wants to bestow it to you first. With every word you speak and every favour you do to others, He wants to work in and through you, as Augustine prayed, “Give what you bid; bid then what you want.”¹ In all our doings He wants to remind us of the inspiring fact that, “*we love, because he first loved us.*”²

When Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, He also washed Judas’ feet. As the root of the tree supports the smallest and lowest branch, so the love of God in Christ carries the weakest believer. Paul writes to the Romans, “*Remember, you are not supporting the root; instead, the root supports you.*”³ Christ is the root.⁴ This is the reason why His grace is sufficient for everyone, and His strength especially “*comes to perfection where there is weakness.*”⁵ Because Christ is the “washer of feet,” the lowly root, the insignificant and weak, even the lost ones stand a good chance in His kingdom. What a wisdom of God, that we may receive the love and strength to serve our fellow-man through the fact that Jesus Christ has made Himself our servant!

By washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus showed them – and us – that true love takes pleasure in serving others, especially in circumstances where it requires genuine humility. In those days, the washing of feet was the duty of a slave. When Jesus and His disciples arrived at a home after a tiring journey, their feet were dusty, sore and swollen. If a slave then washed their feet with cool water, they felt refreshed and comforted. This is what in a deeper sense Jesus, the Lord and Master, did to the disciples. “*Do you know what I have done to you?*”⁶ Jesus asked them afterwards. So great was His love for them that He, who was the greatest, became the least!⁷ This was what refreshed their spirits and their souls. By washing their feet, Jesus wanted to show them His utter willingness to serve them in the most humbling circumstances. At the same time, He stirred up in their hearts a

¹ Latin : Da quod iubes, et iube quod vis.

² 1 John 4:19 ASV

³ Rom. 11:18 ML

⁴ Rev. 22:16

⁵ 2 Cor. 12:9 ML

⁶ John 13:12

⁷ Luke 9:48

fervour to look at every situation as an opportunity to serve one another. *“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.”*¹ Every Christian should follow the Master's example. However, with leaders and those who hold an office in the church, rests the special responsibility to show by their exemplary conduct the humility and meekness of Christ, so that the weak and dejected may be helped and encouraged.² *“We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”*³ As Peter would have had no part in Jesus if he had not allowed his feet to be washed, likewise Christian fellowship and true unity cannot be accomplished unless we practically serve each other through love.

Next to love, humility is the most important characteristic of a leader. It is in the nature of things that leaders wish to be respected. They are inclined to watch over their dignity, but Jesus says that their dignity consists in their humility.⁴ *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*⁵

In the world, force is the last resort to restore stability and order. In the church of Jesus Christ, the love of a servant reigns. *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”*⁶ The use of force, even in the most subtle way, is irreconcilable with the Spirit of Christ. Those familiar habits like making unpleasant remarks, speaking ill of people behind their back, being unkind, impatient, harsh, the use of negative body-language, even unloving thoughts, are nothing but force in disguise. All these attitudes, no matter how refined, are forms of psychological warfare. They do not befit the leaders and shepherds of the church. Jesus hates these things.

Because of the prestige and authority that is linked to the position of a leader, he exercises a very strong influence on people entrusted to him. This influence can be positive or negative. If he is fair, free of favouritism, *“doing nothing out of*

¹ John 13:14

² Matt. 11:28

³ Rom. 15:1

⁴ Luke 22:26

⁵ Matt. 20:25-28

⁶ Matt. 5:5

*selfishness or conceit,*¹ trying to outdo his flock in showing respect, serving each and everyone with genuine love, particularly the weak and lesser privileged, he will be a blessing and inspiration to everyone. However, if the leader is ambitious, intolerant, impatient, takes sides, and lords it over his congregation, the church will suffer harm. The weak, in particular, are the ones who suffer under an unloving and intolerant leader. Because he is standing in the place of the Lord, a wrong attitude toward weak members of the congregation may give them the impression that the Lord Himself is against them. This can be a stumbling-block that in the end may shipwreck their faith. It is the responsibility of a leader to protect those entrusted to him from stumbling. A leader must always be aware that the Good Shepherd carries the weak with infinite love and that Christ identifies with the least. *"In as much as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it unto Me."*² For those who give occasion for stumbling waits a heavy judgment, for Jesus said, *"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea."*³

*"The Lord's servant must not quarrel but be gentle to all,"*⁴ that includes in particular those of a nettled character. His qualification lies not only in his ability "to teach", but in his willingness to suffer wrong,⁵ "in humility correcting those who are in opposition."⁶ Without distinguishing between people, he must by his love and kindnesses, like a magnet, draw everyone to the Lord.

Another quality that is required of a servant of the Lord is, he must not be two-faced.⁷ That is to say, he must not because of fear, partiality, bias or antipathy, speak in the presence of some people one thing, and in front of other people tell another story. When Jesus spoke about people or circumstances, anyone could be present and listen. Jesus never hurt anyone with words.

With regard to the different offices in the church, there is one more important lesson to learn. Among the members of many churches prevails the wide-spread

¹ Phil. 2:3 ML

² Matt. 25:40

³ Matt. 18:6

⁴ 2 Tim. 2:24

⁵ 2 Tim. 2:24 ML

⁶ 2 Tim. 2:25

⁷ 1 Tim. 3:8 "double-talker" AMP. Greek dilogous double-tongued

idea that only people with formal theological education or with certain qualifications are authorised to do the work of the Lord. But that is not what the Bible teaches. According to Ephesians 4 verses 11 and 12, it is the duty of the ministers to prepare the congregation for the service assigned to *them* by the Lord. “He has given some to be apostles and others to be prophets; some to be evangelists and others to be pastors and teachers, *to equip the saints for the task of ministering toward the building up of the body of Christ.*”¹ Every part of the physical body has a unique function. If the member concerned does not fulfil its function, it becomes weak and ill and eventually dies, doing harm to the entire body. Just as the natural body can only be healthy if all the members execute their instructions which they receive from the head, similarly, the body of Christ can only be in good condition if every Christian knows his function and joyfully commits himself to fulfil it. Every believer must learn to personally receive his instructions from the Head and to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is what Paul means when he says, “*But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ.*”² Leaders must avoid smothering by their own strong initiative, the tender impulses which each member of the congregation personally receives from the Lord. It is their duty to set an example and to encourage and motivate everyone to understand their specific task.

¹ Eph. 4:11-12 ML, italic added for emphasis

² 1 Cor. 11:2-3

True religion

The purpose of true religion

Asking what the purpose of true religion is, the idea of “the purpose driven life” which in recent years has gained popularity springs to mind. There is no doubt that living without purpose means to have no goal, no direction and no success. There can also be no doubt about the fact that people with strong convictions and purposes have built empires, politically, financially and socially. But in the history of mankind, the greatness of success has never been a criterion that the purposes which led to it, were right. As the end does not justify the means, so success does not justify the purpose. For the Christian church there is only one standard by which its purpose can be measured – Christ. Christ is God’s purpose. To be purpose driven, for a Christian, can only mean to be led by the Spirit of Christ, that is to have Christ’s purpose. Christ’s purpose is found in the first three petitions of the Lord’s prayer: “*Thy name be kept holy, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven.*”¹

Using the guidelines of the corporative world can be a great help for successfully running an organisation. To purposefully follow certain Biblical principles may lead to the building of mega-churches. But whether our purpose is right depends on whether our focus is right. God’s focus is His Son – that the world may be saved through Christ and people “be conformed to the image of His Son.”² Therefore, the true purpose of the Christian ministry is not to have great churches, but a great God, who reigns through Jesus Christ, and whose will be done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We have seen how the pride of the devil entered the hearts of men and how they exchanged their childlike dependence on their Father-God for a false concept of religion. Moreover, we learned that Satan created in mankind the idea that God’s favour could be found by making sacrifices and doing good works. It became the common notion that in his relationship with God man was the giver and God the

¹ Matt. 6:9-10 ML

² Joh 3:16, Rom. 8:29

receiver. Because this had an appearance of godliness, it seemed to be the proper way to serve God. But this was not true religion. Actually, man played the leading role, while God was a side-show.

Behind this false concept of religion was, of course, a false concept of God. To be sure, God is the **LORD** who must be feared, but He is also the **SHEPHERD** who is keeping watch over His flock.¹ Jesus says, *"I am the good shepherd."*² By this attribute He characterises Himself as servant of the sheep. Like parents who never stop caring for their children, who are in some way serving the children all the time, so the great Creator as the Everlasting Father, is the **SERVANT** of His creation. From this point of view, true religion is where God is the server and man the receiver, where God does the doing and man does the believing. That does not mean that the believer is passive, but that he stands back and lets God take the initiative. God wants us to follow in the wake of His blessings.

When Christians stand back, God gets the opportunity to speak and to work in unforeseeable and surprising ways, saving and healing people, and changing their life. True religion fills people with holy expectation like children who with wonderment are looking at what their father is doing. Sin has blinded man to this wonderful reality, but Jesus has revealed it by His example: *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*³ How wonderful is the consequence of these words when we bear in mind, that Jesus said, *"I and my Father are one."*⁴

Fallen mankind's reaction is like Peter's, *"Thou shalt never wash my feet!"*⁵ "You shall not serve *me*, I will serve *you!*" That sounds religious, almost convincingly like the words of the serpent in Paradise. But we know Jesus' answer: *"If I do not wash you, you are not sharing with Me."*⁶ In other words, "If you do not allow Me to serve you, you have no God. Let go of your pride. Become like a child and enter the Kingdom of God, where God is all in all and *"worketh all things in all."*⁷

¹ Ps. 23

² John 10:11

³ Mark 10:45

⁴ John 10:30

⁵ John 13:8

⁶ John 13:8 ML

⁷ Matt. 18:3, 1 Cor. 15:28, 1 Cor. 12:6, Phil. 2:13

True religion starts with the body

“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”¹

Unfortunately, notions like ‘child of God’, ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’, ‘temple of God’, because of overuse, become Christian jargon and tend to suffer a loss of reality. Consequently, these powerful truths lose their impact, because the believers are no longer aware of the Biblical meaning of these truths. They think they believe, but do not really believe. When Christians truly believe that they are a temple of God,² they experience, as their faith grows, an ever-increasing awareness of God’s presence. The result is great joy. *“Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with singing.”³* This awakens in them a desire to belong to God with all they have and to glorify God with their body.⁴

Some tend to neglect their body and to be ungrateful for so many blessings God bestows on His children. They are beguiled by certain precepts and teachings, which have, *“to be sure, a suggestion of wisdom by self-imposed worship and humiliation and unsparing severity of the body, but are of no value in combating fleshly indulgence.”⁵* While our heavenly Father is mindful to keep His temple healthy and strong, these people are indifferent and negligent with regard to their bodies. As a result of their negative disposition, they are frequently ailing and in bad health and prove with their bodies that they do not understand God’s purpose.

The material from which the temple is made, is flesh, and, of course, *“as grass and all the glory of man like the flower of the grass.”⁶* Yet, the Creator has a vital interest in it, because in the physical appearance of a Christian who is filled with the Holy Spirit, something of the invisible God becomes visible in this physical world. Therefore, Christ did not concern Himself with only the souls of the people, but had compassion with their bodies as well. He healed the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf, the tongues of the dumb, the arms and legs of the paralysed, the backs of the crippled and the skin of the lepers. If our heavenly Father clothes the grass of

¹ 1 Cor. 6:19-20

² 1 Cor. 3:16

³ Ps. 16:11, 126:1-2

⁴ 1 Cor. 6:20

⁵ Col. 2:22-23 ML

⁶ 1 Pet. 1:24

the field and feeds the birds of the air, how much more will He not care for His children's welfare?¹ Although His children, like all humans, have their share in suffering and trials, it is their Father's aim that they may succeed in every way and enjoy health, just as their soul is prospering.²

The more we open our hearts to the wonderful fact that our bodies are the temple of God, the more every heartbeat reminds us that the Father's heart is tenderly moved towards us,³ and the more every breath we take, makes us aware that His breath is in us, the more we enter into the stream of His love and power. If we accept that we were "bought and paid for" with a great price⁴ and do not belong to ourselves, our spontaneous response will be to present our bodies "*a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable (logical) service.*"⁵ If God sacrificed His Son to die for us, it is indeed mere logic that we at least become living sacrifices, so that the love of God without hindrance can flow through us to others.

Religion in the Christian community

*"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ."*⁶ *"For by one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and we have all been imbued with one Spirit."*⁷

In the previous chapter we have seen how glorious it is that Christ is in His temple every moment of our lives, that He does not slumber or sleep and that He is continuously watching over every member of His body, blessing and protecting them in ways we cannot comprehend.

But His love goes further. Just as God in the beginning created a suitable companion for Adam, so that he would not be alone,⁸ God had an exceedingly wonderful plan to protect us from spiritual loneliness. By individually joining every one of us to Christ, He automatically joined us to all others. While "*the many of us*

¹ Matt. 6:25-33

² 3 John 1:2 ML

³ Jer. 31:20

⁴ 1 Cor. 6:20 ML

⁵ Rom. 12:1, Greek: *logikos*

⁶ 1 Cor. 12:12

⁷ 1 Cor. 12:13 ML

⁸ Gen. 2:18

*form one body in Christ, each is related to all others as a member.”*¹ As “*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,*”² so the Father has destined us to be one in Christ and in the future to be together with the Lord forever.³ For this reason, Christians ought to recognise each other as people who are united in Jesus to all eternity.

While Adam and Eve were thrown on each other’s company, without support of other humans, the love of God through faith in Christ has joined us to all Christians throughout the world.⁴ All believers are one spiritual body. Faith in the Redeemer creates a godly solidarity between the redeemed that is unsurpassed. It cannot be compared to any corporate membership or union in this world. This unity comprises all believers who have ever lived from the beginning of Christianity, and those who are yet to become believers in the future. Adam and Eve were joined to each other only during their lifetime, while we are joined to all the members of the body of Christ forever. What unfathomable depths are opened up to our spiritual view once we perceive that Christ, the Head, through His boundless love desires to serve every individual through all the members of His body! Therefore, where Paul is speaking of the Gentiles as fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, he refers to the Gospel as to “*the unsearchable riches of Christ.*”⁵

That this wonderful unity came to pass was God’s, not man’s initiative. God has joined us to one body in Christ, not through anything we have done, or will do in the future, but purely through what Christ did for us on the cross.⁶ Forgiving love is the key. With the love which unconditionally accepts us and everyone in Jesus Christ, with that same love we accept our brothers and sisters in Christ, forgiving and loving them unconditionally.

*The more we grasp how great the grace is that accepts us, the stronger our desire will be to accept those who share in the same grace.*⁷ *On the other hand, the weaker our brotherly love, the more we reveal that we are not living by God’s mercy*

¹ Rom. 12:5 ML

² Eph. 1:4

³ 1 Thess. 4:17

⁴ Heb. 12:23

⁵ Eph. 3:6,8

⁶ The following passages (in italic) are adapted from thoughts of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 1939, Chr. Kaiser Verlag München. Only word-for-word quotations are placed in quotation-marks.

⁷ Rom. 15:7

and love. We have only fellowship with each other through Jesus Christ. "The more real and deep our fellowship, the more will every other thing between us disappear, and the clearer and purer only Jesus and his work will become alive between us." We stand thanking, receiving, and giving in the Christian community together with other children of God. We thank the Lord for what He has done for us. And we thank Him for brothers and sisters who, like ourselves, share in His calling, in His forgiveness and in His promises. Christian fellowship is not "an ideal which we must attain, but a reality which God has created in Christ, in which we may partake." It is not founded on the benignancy or excellence of men, but on the grace and goodness of our Lord Jesus.

The more we are moved by gratitude for His abundant love and mercy, regardless of how much of it we or the others may have experienced, the less the mistakes in the community will bother us. Then we will not grumble and complain one to another or to God about our brothers and sisters, but rather lay the blame for their shortcomings on ourselves and intercede for them.

Some, however, come into the congregation with an ideal, a dream of how the Christian community should look like. They enter the community with demands, acting harshly and standing in the crowd as a living reproach toward everyone. They have the idea that they must affect the Christian community, as if their dream can bind the believers together. Whatever does not fit with their ideals or is contrary to their wishes they call a failure. Such people become at first accusers of the brothers, then accusers of God, and finally desperate accusers of themselves. "One who loves his dream of the Christian community more than the community itself, will be a destroyer of every Christian community, no matter how good, how honest and devout his intentions may be."

When, contrary to this attitude, Christians are not concerned with perfect brothers and sisters but rather with the perfect Christ, the presence of other Christians to them is a source of joy. Those who are lonely or afflicted experience in the visit of a brother the presence of the Lord.¹ How much more are those blessed who are privileged to live and work together with other Christians every day! How easily this privilege is taken for granted, disdained or even trodden under foot! How

¹ 1 Cor. 12:13, Heb. 13:1-3, Matt. 25:35-36

easily we forget that the gift of fellowship with other Christians can so soon be taken away.

The more our hearts are focused on Jesus,¹ the more we non-discriminately appreciate fellowship with any brother or sister in Christ, just for one reason – the wonderful promise, that “*where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*”² Consequently, we are not occupied with each other’s faults or virtues, but we love one another and communicate in the Spirit of the Lord, being aware all the time that Jesus is in our midst. Because “Christ *is* all and in all,”³ we rejoice in the Lord together, like people who enjoy the sunshine together.

Religion in the meetings

When Christians come together in a service, everyone’s attention is, like the needle of a compass, quietly focused on God, just waiting. The atmosphere is filled with holy expectation that God, not man, will take the initiative. The love of God which God has poured into the hearts of the believers creates a calm but strong awareness of God’s presence.⁴

Many a time the Lord starts working even before anyone has prayed or said anything, because according to His promise, when two or more believers are gathered in His Name, Jesus is in their midst. Those who rely on His promise with all their hearts, know that He is not only in their midst, but that He is present in every believer. Therefore, whenever they worship with other believers, a special blessing awaits, a special surprise, which God gladly bestows on His children. Each one receives from the Lord’s unlimited riches whatever he needs, and everyone is satisfied, refreshed and filled, sometimes to overflowing.

As the Father serves and blesses each of His children, all of them are prepared also to share their blessings with others. Like children who share their toys with other children, they joyfully share with one another what they receive from the Lord. In this way, the riches of God’s grace and love flow from the Father to the children and from the children to each other and even to others.

¹ 1 John 4:19

² Matt. 18:20

³ Col. 3:11

⁴ Rom. 5:5, 1 John 4:16

Because faith comes from hearing and hearing comes from listening to the Word of Jesus Christ,¹ the Christian can always rely on the Word that he has heard. He does not seek peace and happiness in himself or in other Christians, but only and solely in Christ and in what He has done for him on the cross. When he is asked, "Where is your salvation, your blessedness, your righteousness?" he cannot point to himself; he always points to the Word of God which promises him all this in Jesus Christ. Therefore, wherever an opportunity offers, he is always on the look-out for the Word. Because he daily hungers and thirsts for righteousness, he longs to hear the liberating words again and again. In himself he is poor and dead. Relief must come from the outside, and it has come indeed in the Word of Jesus Christ which brings us salvation, righteousness and forgiveness. God has laid this Word in the mouth of people so that they may share it with other people. If one is touched by it, he tells it to others.²

The love of God stirs in every member of the body a willingness to serve with whatever the Holy Spirit individually apportions to them. *"Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification."*³ One is moved by a text from Scripture and shares it with the congregation. Another has a personal testimony or a song which exalts the Name of the Lord. Thus, through the administering of a variety of gifts the love of the Spirit flows from one to another, refreshing the hearts of the believers. The relationship with God and the brothers and sisters becomes close and heartfelt, and each one's faith is strengthened. Because the heavenly Father loves His children as He loved His Son,⁴ His love awakens in them a mutual affection towards Him and towards each other, bringing them into a godly unity. Perfect unity through the love of the Cross is God's letter of recommendation to the world. Before Jesus went to Gethsemane He prayed, *"that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."*⁵ "That the world may believe", is the purpose of the message of Christ. The secret of how this great

¹ Rom. 10:17

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, 1939, pg. 14

³ 1 Cor. 14:26

⁴ John 17:23,26

⁵ John 17:21

purpose, in spite of the past ups and downs of the church has been achieved and finally will triumph, is the love of the cross. The love of the cross is the divine magnet which in the end will draw that great multitude of Revelation 7 to Jesus *“which no one could number.”*¹ Jesus words will come true, *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw everyone to Myself.”*²

Practical application in the meetings

A lively worship and the free working of the Holy Spirit through all the gifts of the Spirit should be the aim. Believers should have freedom to give utterance and to move in the Spirit. However, everything must be bridled by the Spirit. It is *“not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”*³ It is not the noise or dramatic physical manifestations which make the fire of God to come down.⁴ The power of the Holy Spirit is only attracted by faith, obedience and earnest prayer.

Just as the best gifts of the Spirit are only useful if they are operated with wisdom and love, so all the other things in the meetings must be done according to *“the more excellent way.”*⁵ *“Let all that you do be done with love.”*⁶ Love is *“neither self-seeking nor irritable, nor does it take account of a wrong that is suffered.”*⁷ A Christian’s whole pursuit is to please his neighbour, not himself. *“Even Christ did not please Himself.”*⁸ When love prevails, the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keeps guard over the hearts and minds of the believers,⁹ and enables them to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The most important attitude next to love is humility. Jesus is our example in all respects. *“Learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart.”*¹⁰ Jesus must be seen, not man, as John the Baptist said, *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”*¹¹ Leaders should always keep a low profile. Specially gifted persons like prophets, preachers, faith healers should be on their guard not to steal the limelight. When

¹ Rev. 7:9

² John 12:32 ML

³ Zech. 4:6

⁴ 1 Kin. 18:26-29, 36-39

⁵ 1 Cor. 12:31

⁶ 1 Cor. 16:14

⁷ 1 Cor. 13:5 ML

⁸ Rom. 15:2 ML

⁹ Phil. 4:7 ML

¹⁰ Matt. 11:29

¹¹ John 3:30

Jesus perceived that the people were about to make Him king, He withdrew into the mountain.¹

It is a privilege and a blessing to worship with other Christians, to be filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, or to experience the baptism with the Holy Spirit. But everything must *“be done decently and in order,”*² *“for God is not the author of confusion but of peace.”*³ It must be said that the power and glory of the Holy Spirit is not entrusted to believers for emotional purposes. Although it is an unspeakably glorious experience to feel the presence of the Lord, the emotion must not be an end in itself. The Lord’s purpose is to equip us for special service to our fellow Christians and for the unsaved. The Holy Spirit who is always seeking to edify people, encouraging and comforting them,⁴ does not allow unseemly screaming or offensive behaviour in the meetings. In a small group of matured and spiritually experienced believers the Holy Spirit may allow praying in tongues, expressing overflowing joy, or to wrestle and manifest in the Spirit. There is, however, a marked difference in bigger gatherings and in public worship. If the Word forbids speaking in tongues in public worship in regard to outsiders who might think, “you are out of your mind,”⁵ how much more does this apply to behaviour that could offend them even more.

Jesus has said that the kingdom of God “isn’t ushered in with visible signs.”⁶ The kingdom of God is not a matter of outward things, of *“food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.”*⁷ *“Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”*⁸

Religion in the home

The love of God in Christ is the rock on which the church is built. It is the vital power of every facet of the Christian life, even of the family. The fact that God sacrificed His Son in order to save the world and adopt His enemies as sons and

¹ John 6:15

² 1 Cor. 14:40

³ 1 Cor. 14:33

⁴ 1 Cor. 14:3

⁵ 1 Cor. 14:23

⁶ Luke 17:20 LB

⁷ Rom. 14:17-18

⁸ Rom. 14:19

daughters, reveals a feeling of fatherhood and a vision for a family of His own in God's heart that is beyond the human scope. Just mentioning it and talking in the family circle about God's plan for an eternal family has a soul-stirring effect on parents and children.

If we look at the inner relationship within the Holy Trinity, we find that it sheds further light on the different aspects of the family.¹ There, for instance, is the loving relationship between Father and Son, the mother-like care of the Holy Spirit, the brotherly love of Jesus toward his disciples,² and the sincere dedication of the Bridegroom, Jesus, to His bride, the church.

Paul writes, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.*"³ Men whose hearts are warmed by the love with which Christ gave His life for the church, are able to love their wives with the same love. Women who believe that Jesus is their Bridegroom, have the inner strength to be submitted to their husbands as the congregation is submitted to Christ. Fathers, who from experience know how the heavenly Father protects and provides, and mothers who are aware of the caring love of the Holy Spirit, can, through faith, be parents in Christ to their children. Children who learn to trust God as the source of all love and authority can obey and please their parents because they respect and love them. Brothers and sisters who are inspired by Jesus' brotherly love, because He is not ashamed to call them His brothers and sisters,⁴ tolerate and love each other with His love.

*"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head," "like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing – life for evermore."*⁵ What a blessing to be part of a Christian family where the love of God makes every relationship bright and pleasant – the relationship between parents, between parents and their children and between brothers and sisters! They read together, pray together, sing and praise the Lord together for His love and faithfulness. They stand together, help each other and treat everyone with respect.

¹ Eph. 5:22 - 6:4

² Matt. 12:50

³ Eph. 5:25

⁴ Matt. 12:49, Heb. 2:11

⁵ Ps. 133

Of course, because they live together so closely and they are still human, they all need the Lord's grace to be able to forgive "seventy times seven".¹ However, where both parents and children can bow their heads and bend their knees, willing to acknowledge their mistakes and set them right, there will always be harmony and blessing.

Through their faith in Christ, the members of the Christian family are part of a bigger family, the family of God; they are "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."² In the earthly family, husband and wife, parents and children are joined for an *earthly* purpose and for a limited time. In Christ, all who belong to Him are forever joined together for a *heavenly* purpose. When Jesus' mother and brothers stood outside and wanted to talk to Him, He said, "*Who is My mother and who are My brothers? And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.*"³ When Christians put the will of God first in their lives,⁴ they are not restricted by family ties; they are free to obey the Word of God and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Yet, this freedom does not mean that they in any way may neglect their duty to care for their families. It rather gives them strength and authority to give greater support to their families and the congregation.

Thus, the Christian family is a cell and building-block of the congregation, wherein the nature of the Godhead is reflected. For this reason, we find in Acts and in Paul's letters indications that some churches started with the first family of believers in a town. When other believers met in that house, they formed a cell group which, with time, became the centre of a congregation.⁵ From the very beginning of Christianity throughout the centuries, but especially during times of persecution, home churches have been the indestructible heart of the church of Christ. Today, the persecuted Church experiences this in communist and Islamic countries. With regard to coming times of persecution we must earnestly pray for home churches and cell groups.

¹ Matt. 18:22

² Eph. 2:19

³ Matt. 12:48-50

⁴ Matt. 10:37, Luke 14:26

⁵ 1 Cor. 16:15-16.19, Phil. 4:22, Col.4:15

Religion in the workplace

Because the Lord is interested in every detail of His children's life, He is interested in their work too. Because of our relationship with Jesus, who was obedient unto death, the Holy Spirit inspires us in all circumstances, including our work places, to follow His example. Therefore, He motivates us to work with a high sense of duty, to be reliable, and to be subservient to our employers, and, well, "*not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.*"¹

Actually, the life of a Christian is all about Christ. No matter where he is or what he is doing, he does everything in the Name of the Lord. That is why Paul writes to the Colossians, "*whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*"² To do everything in His name means to do everything through His Spirit. Doing everything through His Spirit means that the Lord does everything through us. Apart from Him we can do nothing.³ There can be no doubt that the Creator and Maintainer of everything that exists,⁴ excels in all that He does.⁵ If we allow Him to work through us, He will do everything very well, no matter how insignificant the task may be. In this way, without words, everything we do will bear witness to our Lord.

If a person is not entirely controlled by God's love, and therefore incapable of showing his faith through a quiet and exemplary behaviour, he ends up talking too much about his beliefs to compensate for his shortcomings. Zeal for the Lord in the wrong place and at the wrong time does more harm than good. Talking about the Lord hours on end while necessary work is put aside, can mean that one is stealing time and money from the employer. It can also upset colleagues and cause division among employees. No blessing will rest on this. At work, our testimony must be more by our example, our conscientiousness and commitment to our work than by words. In this regard we understand the exhortation of the apostle to the workers of his days, "*Servants, obey your earthly masters in every way, not as men-pleasers*

¹ 1 Pet. 2:18

² Col. 3:17

³ John 15:5

⁴ Col. 1:17, Heb. 1:3

⁵ Gen. 1:31

when working under their eyes, but with unmixed motives out of reverence for the Lord.”¹

Religion in the world

Christians are “*the salt of the earth*” and “*the light of the world*.”² Salt is of no value if left in the salt box and a lamp means nothing if it is covered with a vessel. Salt is for the food and light for the darkness. Humanity is suffering from the unsavouriness and darkness that is in the world as a result of sin, and people are yearning for what true children of God have. “*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.*”³ Salt and light do not exist for their own benefit. Children of God are meant to give the world a pleasant savour and to brighten people’s lives around them. That is why Jesus said, “*Go into all the world...*”⁴

For this reason, Christ, the Light of the world,⁵ left His heavenly abode. The world would never have seen the light if “*the Bright and Morning Star*”⁶ had not been born in a stable and the King of glory⁷ had not become a little baby; if Jesus had not lived among the poor and the sinners. We read of Him that He, “*though existing in the form of God, did not consider His equality with God something to cling to, but emptied Himself as He took on the form of a slave and became like human beings.*”⁸ Jesus went into solitude for prayer, but for Him seclusion was not the standard, but the exception. He did not withdraw from the world, not even from His enemies. In the end He hung on the cross, forsaken by His disciples, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. Even in the darkest place, He has been a light, bringing peace to the enemies of God. So should every child of God let his light shine in the darkest circumstances. “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*”⁹

Because Christ, Who is the Light of the world dwells in our hearts, He wants us to light up the darkness where His enemies live so that they can be saved. The

¹ Col. 3:22-23 ML

² Matt. 5:13-14

³ Rom. 8:19

⁴ Mark 16:15

⁵ John 8:12

⁶ Rev. 22:16

⁷ Ps. 24

⁸ Phil. 2:6-8 ML

⁹ Phil. 2:5

more we realise that all of us, *“when we were enemies ... were reconciled to God through the death of His Son,”*¹ the more we will be moved by His great and wonderful love so that He can send us into the world like the sun sends its beams into the darkness.

Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”*² *“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also.”*³ Since it is not the Christian doctrine but the living Christ who is the “way” we must follow, we must know in what direction He moves. To go to church and participate in church-activities alone does not indicate that one is on the right track. To be on the “road” but to move in the opposite direction from Jesus, would mean that we would daily pass Him by, and yet miss both, Him and our destination. This is what happens when we say, “Lord, Lord”, but do not do the will of the Father.⁴ To be sure that we are on the right path, we must make certain that we follow in Jesus’ footsteps. Jesus’ footprints start in the highest place in heaven and end at the lowest place on earth. His direction was not heaven. He left heaven and came into the world to seek and to save those who were lost, to be a light to all who were in darkness, and to die for the sins of the world. That is the Jesus way. Had it been a way of precepts and rules, we could not even take the first step, for who could begin where Jesus began? No, the Jesus way is a new and a living way; not a law, but a person who says, “I am the way.” Many Christians stick to certain subjects (repentance, confession of sins, baptism, speaking in tongues etc.) which are a part of the road. But these things are neither where the road begins nor where it ends. They forget that Jesus said, “I am the way.” Because the Christ as a whole dwells in us, He wants to walk with us the entire route. Therefore, Paul prays for the Ephesians that they may *“comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*⁵ God wants us not to shrink back from “the exceeding riches of His grace,” reckoning this too high and that too deep, but to accept everything He has provided in Jesus Christ. God wants us to stop reasoning

¹ Rom. 5:10

² John 14:6

³ John 12:26

⁴ Matt. 7:21

⁵ Eph. 3:18-19

and start relying on the fact that He has *“made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”*¹

The essence of God’s grace is that God in Christ has inseparably linked Himself to the destiny of mankind. Because *“the Word [God] became flesh”*² and carried the sins of the world, God actually took all mankind with Christ on the cross. This is why God sees all of us with Him on the cross and with Him in the grave.³ And no matter how unbelievable it sounds, He sees all who believe in Jesus Christ together with the exalted Christ in heaven: *“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”*⁴ So far has grace brought us! We can begin the Jesus way where Jesus began, in heaven. And even more! We can begin with the victory which He has already gained. Grace has made us to sit with Jesus on the throne and let us share in the triumph of Christ.⁵ In the light of these glorious truths, suffering and afflictions appear like nothing. That is why Paul writes, we are truly “more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”⁶ Because the Father enabled us, who were so poor and sinful, to be so rich in Christ and lifted us to such incomprehensible heights in the Spirit, Paul spoke of the *exceeding* riches of His grace. At this point, one cannot but humbly ask oneself: Have I recognised these riches in the Word, and if so, have I at least started to really believe and accept them? If we honestly try to answer these questions, Jesus will remind us of His words to Mary, *“Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”*⁷

As soon as the full extent of grace comes into view and we decide to simply believe like little children, because the Word says so, we discover that our life indeed is hidden with Christ in God.⁸ We are not of the world, just as Jesus is not of

¹ Eph. 2:5-7 The Greek word *epouranios* (*epouranios*) which here is translated as ‘heavenly places’, is the same as in Eph 1:20 where it points to Christ seated at the right hand of God in ‘the heavenlies’, that is in heaven.

² John 1:14 brackets added

³ Rom. 6

⁴ Eph. 2:4-6

⁵ 2 Cor. 2:14

⁶ Rom. 8:37

⁷ John 11:40

⁸ Col. 3:3

the world.¹ Because He left heaven and overcame Satan, death and the world, and now sits triumphantly on the throne in heaven, His life has become our life.² This is the life of the Holy Spirit which everyone receives when he is saved. Thus, we understand Jesus' words, "*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*"³ In other words, Jesus sends us from the highest level of His victory – from heaven where we are already with Him, in the Spirit, – into the world, just as the Father sent Him into the world. The only difference is that when Jesus came into the world, He had yet to gain the victory for us; for Him victory was ahead of Him. We enter the battle with the victory already won. We may start with the assurance, "it is finished." Faith in His victory is the victory that overcomes the world.⁴

So, we start the Jesus way with the greatest victory imaginable. Obeying the Master's command, "*Go into all the world,*"⁵ we walk in His footsteps with great joy in the same direction as He did when He came into the world. We do not seek to escape from the world or to evade the cross. On the contrary, we love the cross and "glory in tribulations."⁶ The Lord, who has saved us by grace and allows us to sit with Him in heaven, sends us as sons and daughters of God to the lost to tell them of His saving grace so that they may be saved.

It is a great pity that so many believers do not see these exceeding riches. They struggle to get rid of their earthbound and sinful nature and do not understand that they have already been freed by the cross of Christ. They do not realise that heaven for those whom Christ sends into the world, in this context is not the end, but the beginning.

Why do they not see it? Because, as we said earlier, they seek "*the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*"⁷ not in Him but in themselves where they will never find it. The problem is that they do not subject themselves to what the Word says. Consequently, they do not truly believe, and because they do not believe, they do not begin where Jesus began. For this reason, they do not go and bring Christ into

¹ John 17:16

² John 16:33, Col. 3:4, Eph. 1:19-23

³ John 17:18

⁴ 1 John 5:4

⁵ Mark 16:15

⁶ Rom. 5:3

⁷ Rom. 3:24

the world. Because they are not obeying the Lord's commission, Jesus will say to them, *"for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me."*¹

¹ Matt. 25:42-43

The last things

The great harvest

Experience teaches that everything man does, good or bad, has its consequences. Every word, every deed is a seed that is sown and sometime must be harvested. Christians know that in the foreseeable future a harvest awaits this world. Jesus has said, *“the harvest is the end of the age.”*¹ He also said, *“The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.”*² When both have ripened the time for the harvest has come. Concerning the last phase of the ripening process, the angel said to John, *“He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.”*³ Do these words imply that at that stage changing one’s ways will no longer be possible?

When the children of the kingdom are ready to be harvested, the image of Christ, their King, will be clearly perceptible in them. When the children of the wicked one are “ripe”, they also will portray the image of their father, the devil. It will be a double harvest, namely, a harvest of corn and a harvest of grapes.⁴ It will occur when the *“Lord of the harvest”* will come *“with power and great glory.”*⁵

For the children of the wicked one it will be a *“dreadful anticipation of judgement and of a fierce fire that is to devour those who oppose God.”*⁶ In the time that precedes that day, men will be *“swooning from dread and apprehension about events that are about to take place in the world.”*⁷ The believers, on the contrary, will remember the words of the Lord Jesus, *“when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”*⁸ Then the great winepress of the wrath of God will be trodden.⁹ But God’s children won’t have to fear anything; *“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation*

¹ Matt. 13:39 Greek aiwn = aeon, an immense time

² Matt. 13:38

³ Rev. 22:10-11

⁴ Rev. 14:14-20

⁵ Matt. 9:38, Luke 21:27

⁶ Heb. 10:27 ML

⁷ Luke 21:26 ML

⁸ Luke 21:28

⁹ Rev. 14:19-20

through our Lord Jesus Christ."¹ If one considers Jesus' words that "the harvest is the end of the age," how encouraging then is the fact that He has promised, "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*"²

The great revival

The great harvest will be preceded by an extremely eventful period. The devil, who is interested in seeing wickedness on earth in full bloom, hastens the process by pouring out upon mankind a flood of filth and violence. The Lord of the harvest, on the other hand, will send a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit before His return to prepare His children for that great day. "*And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.*"³

There will be a revival like never before. The revival will be accompanied by a great persecution such as Christianity has never experienced before. "*Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.*"⁴ However, "*these occasions will give you opportunities for testifying,*"⁵ for then "*this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world.*"⁶ As a result of this last great revival an innumerable multitude out of all nations and peoples and tongues will come forth from the great tribulation as conquerors.⁷

Satan's idea of the cross was to destroy the head of the body. But that which happened on Calvary God had long foretold the serpent, "*He will crush your head.*"⁸ Through the great persecution before the return of Christ, Satan will attempt to destroy the body of Christ on earth, but it will mean the greatest revival of all time. While persecution has always served the cause of Christ, the last persecution will lead to a gathering of souls, the extent of which we can't yet imagine.

¹ 1 Thess. 5:9

² Matt. 13:39, 28:20

³ Acts 2:17-18, Joel.2:28-29

⁴ Matt. 24:9

⁵ Luke 21:13 ML

⁶ Matt. 24:14

⁷ Rev. 7:9,13

⁸ Gen. 3:15 ML

The great tribulation

When the disciples asked Jesus at which time these things would happen and what the sign of His return would be, He answered, *“the misery of those days will be such as never was since the beginning of God’s creation until now, neither ever will be. For unless the Lord had shortened those days not a human being would survive; but because of the elect whom He has chosen He has shortened the days.”*¹

The last days before the return of Christ will be the hardest struggle in the history of mankind. The Biblical predictions point to war, famine, death of unknown proportions, unusual catastrophes (earthquakes, hail), and cosmic events (“the forces of heaven will be shaken”).² This will be the time when the Antichrist will make his appearance. His charismatic personality will create the impression that he is the strong political figure that the world needs in that hour. He will not only direct the course of political affairs, but with all modern means draw the public opinion on his side. His intention, however, will not be to bring peace, but to destroy the faith in the only true God. In order to reach his purpose, he will try to do away with the two historical evidences that prove the existence of God, namely the Jewish nation and the Christians. The irreconcilable hate of the Moslems will bolster his plans. In the Western world a wave of anti-Semitism due to Israel’s harsh course in the Middle-East, as well as the wide-spread repugnance toward fundamental Christianity, will work in the Antichrist’s favour. Through the combination of these forces, the accusation that Jews and Christians are the main cause of discord in the world will gain credibility. The Antichrist will fan the flame of hate against Jews and Christians until the moment comes of which Jesus has said, *“then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all the nations for My name’s sake.”*³

In this situation Jews and Christians who never could accommodate each other, will find themselves in the same camp. Both will face total annihilation, the Jews through war, and the Christians through persecution. For both, this chapter will seemingly end in defeat. But through Christ’s return the scene will change all of a

¹ Mark 13:19-20 ML

² Matt. 24:29 ML

³ Matt. 24:9

sudden. For Christianity, Christ's return will be the absolute climax, and for the Messianic Jews it will be the great turning point in their history. In the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, several chapters are devoted to these events. As these chapters deal with the close of the Christian era, the "saints" of whom we read, are sanctified Christians. John saw the system behind the world-wide persecution "*drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.*"¹ The quality of those Christians cannot better be summarised than with the few words of Revelation 14 verse 12: "*Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.*"² These are "*the light of the world,*"³ the best that the world has ever seen – God's "elect" for whose sake the time is shortened.

If one thinks of the vast host of the redeemed in Revelation 7 which no one could count, and realises that these saints are "*the ones who come out of the great tribulation,*"⁴ it is difficult to comprehend why some Christian writers paint this last and most glorious chapter of Christianity with dark colours. One cannot help asking whether this disposition does not sprout from a deep-rooted fear of suffering, which is human, but which the persecuted Christians of all centuries have overcome, and over which the saints of the end times finally will triumph.

Holiness has never been a safeguard against persecution. On the contrary! Jesus says, "*a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.*"⁵ When the disciples asked Jesus what the sign of His coming would be, He answered, "*you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.*"⁶ This raises the question when Christians will be persecuted not only in a few countries, but throughout the world, where will they get the strength to be faithful unto death and not to deny Christ? The answer is: the Holy Spirit will remind them of Jesus' words, "*when these things begin to occur, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your deliverance is near.*"⁷ They will know for a certainty that the coming of the Lord is at hand.

¹ Rev. 17:6

² Rev. 14:12

³ Matt. 5:14

⁴ Rev. 7:14

⁵ John 15:20

⁶ Matt. 24:9

⁷ Luke 21:28 ML

All will not be killed, but each and every one will be prepared to die for the Lamb who has shed His blood for them. Thus, like in earlier centuries, the Christians will overcome the devil by the blood of the Lamb, as John reports, *“And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore, rejoice O heavens and you who dwell in them!’”*¹

The great plagues

At the peak of this fatal chapter in the history of humanity, the seven angels of Revelation 16 will go forth and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God upon the earth.² It is almost inconceivable that any human can survive because the afflictions which will be caused by these plagues will be horrible beyond measure. Yet, there is profound reason to believe that, similar to the plagues of Egypt which did not touch the least of the children of Israel,³ these last plagues will come only upon the godless. Of the first bowl we read that *“a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image.”*⁴

A clear indication that the faithful believers are still on the earth, and that the coming of the Lord is at hand, is that mysterious verse 15 in Revelation 16, where the Lord, between the sixth and seventh bowl (while the armies are mustered for the battle of Armageddon), all of a sudden says: *“See, I come like a thief. Blessed is the alert one who takes care of his clothes so that he will not go around naked and people see his shame.”* Natural reasoning does not want this verse in that context. The words “I come like a thief” which are associated with the rapture, seem out of place. For this reason, some translations have put them in brackets. Why didn’t John just leave these words out? The answer is not complicated. He knew with the certainty which every person has who has had a truly prophetic experience that he had heard the Lord speaking. And he knew it was with a reason. How could

¹ Rev. 12:10-12

² Rev. 16:1

³ Ex. 11:7

⁴ Rev. 16:2 italics added for emphasis

he have omitted them!¹ The reason why Jesus interrupted John's vision, saying, "*Behold, I come like a thief*," is evident: For those who are destined to live through this darkest hour in history the assurance that Jesus' coming is at hand will be the only source from which they will draw the supernatural strength to persevere to the end.²

The last bowl will be the destruction of the anti-Christ's army at Armageddon.³ It is obvious that those who have received the mark of the beast and yielded themselves to total apostasy and open rebellion against God, have rejected the grace of God. They will have no excuse. They have experienced a revival like never before. They have heard the gospel from the mouths of the martyrs and were warned by an angel not to worship the beast and his image.⁴ They have seen Christ in the Christians and have had the best chance to repent but have deliberately rejected it. Where the Jews chose Barabbas in the place of Christ, they chose the Christ-without-the-cross, the anti-Christ, above the true Christ.

The great exodus

Israel's exodus from Egypt and crossing of the Red Sea can be seen as a prototype of how Christ will come to the rescue of His Church at the end of the Christian era.

When the Antichrist will be revealed, he will claim to be the god of this world. All of mankind will succumb to his overpowering satanic spirit – all but the true Christians and the true Israelites.⁵ Therefore, the Antichrist will endeavour to destroy the faith in Christ and the faith in the God of Israel. He will persecute the Christians first. Then, in an attempt to wipe Israel from the face of the earth, he will gather together the kings of the earth and their armies for the battle of Armageddon.⁶ Now the stage is set for the coming of the Lord who will supernaturally take the elect out of this world and destroy the Antichrist by "the visible manifestation of His coming,"⁷ saving Israel from total destruction.

¹ Rev. 1:1

² Matt. 10:22

³ Rev. 16:16, 20:19-21

⁴ Rev. 14:9-10

⁵ Rev. 7:1-8

⁶ Rev. 16:14, 16, 19:19

⁷ 2 Thess. 2:8 ML

With regard to persecution Jesus' teaching is uncompromisingly clear: *"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."*¹ Therefore, right from the beginning of the Christian era, the apostles encouraged the young believers *"exhorting them to continue in the faith, saying, we must, through many tribulations, enter the kingdom of God."*² It is not without reason that in the book of Revelation great emphasis is put on the martyrs, the blood witnesses, who have laid down their lives for Christ. Jesus has said, *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."*³ Jesus did not say this only in regard of Himself, but with those in mind who would lay down their lives for Him. John saw *"the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hand. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."* *"This is the first resurrection."*⁴ The great tribulation will be more severe than the severest of all the tribulations through which Christians have gone in previous centuries. It will however be shortened by the coming of the Lord and come to an indescribably glorious end. When the struggle is finally over, the committed believers of all the ages, as conquerors after their leader Jesus, will triumphantly enter through heaven's gates into the celestial city.

Standing on the sea of glass, they will sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb;⁵ the song of the Lamb because they have overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb; and the song of Moses because there is no other song more applicable to the wonderful exodus from this world than Israel's victory song after they crossed the Red Sea: *"The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my desire shall be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.'" You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? You stretchest out Your right hand; the earth swallowed them. You in your mercy have led forth the people*

¹ John 15:20

² Acts 14:22

³ John 15:13

⁴ Rev. 20:4-6

⁵ Rev. 15:1-4

whom you have redeemed; you have guided them in your strength to your holy habitation.”¹

The great peace

Many of the plagues that are described in the book of Revelation (Apocalypse) can be understood as the effect of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. If we look at the political scene and the enormous advance of technology after the Second World War, we see that the stage has been set for the apocalyptic drama. Even people of the twenty-first century who do not believe in the Bible, acknowledge this fact. The tension in the Middle East can erupt at any moment. The possibility of a Third World War is not laughed at. The media do not hesitate to refer to “Armageddon”. The spirit of the anti-Christ has gained so much momentum that many people consider a world government as the only solution to world problems. If the world then is considering the possibility of these things, how much more may Christians expect that all these things will come to pass, and that there will be a new dispensation, namely the millennium, where they will reign with Christ a thousand years!²

God will see to it that twelve thousand of every tribe of Israel will survive the holocaust that is to be expected in the Middle East.³ In their distress, they will call upon their Messiah to come to their rescue. When He then descends on the Mount of Olives⁴ they will realise that their Messiah is none other than the Lord Jesus whom they crucified.⁵ In that day will come to pass what the prophet Isaiah saw twenty-seven centuries before and which caused him to ask with amazement, “*Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she gave birth to her children.*”⁶ In one moment, the Jews will recognise Him and acknowledge Him as their Messiah and thus be born again. By accepting Jesus as their Messiah, the Jewish nation will not only be saved from total

¹ Ex. 15:9-13

² Rev. 20:4,6

³ Rev. 7:1-8

⁴ Zech. 14:4

⁵ Zech. 12:10

⁶ Is. 66:8

annihilation, but they will also have priority over all other nations.¹ Jerusalem will become the religious centre of the whole world.

The Great Day

John writes, *“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.”*² This is the Great Day – great, because in that day everything that was great and important in the eyes of men, will appear small and insignificant, and only One will be great and beyond measure important – He who is on the throne.

*“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. ... The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to their works.”*³ What a terrible day it will be when man will no longer has a place to hide or entrench himself, neither a robe to cover himself, nor an advocate to assist him – only the righteous God on the white throne – and the opened books! Then God, in righteousness, will finally restore order in His household. The Bible says that the saints will assist Him. *“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”*⁴ In His endless patience and wisdom God has given man opportunity upon opportunity to repent and to turn to Him. Through the substitutionary death of His Son, God has shown His love to the world so that everyone could see and accept His love. Many, who have laid hold of this opportunity, have been so gloriously transformed that they now are able to judge the world. Those who will be judged will recognise it and realise that the judgment is just.

At this time, we will see that God waited until the last soul was saved. He allowed the ‘weeds’ to grow so that no one was robbed of his chance to repent. He also allowed the weeds to grow in order to destroy them in the end with an eternal destruction. *“This is the second death.”*⁵ The long process which started with the fall of man and continued throughout the centuries with all its consequences, will finally be brought to an end at the great day of the Last Judgment, when Christ will *“put an*

¹ Deut. 28:1,13, 26:8-9

² Rev. 20:11-12

³ Rev. 20:13

⁴ 1 Cor. 6:2-3

⁵ Rev. 20:14

end to all rule and all authority and power.”¹ “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”² “Now when all things are made subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”³

The great change

Now, the time has come for the greatest change of which the Bible speaks, a change which exceeds all imagination. *“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”⁴*

The earth where we now live is a speck of dust on the edge of the universe. Yet, because the Son of God was born on earth, and God, through Him, reconciled *“all things to Himself ... whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross,”⁵* the new earth will be pre-eminent and become the centre of the new world. The New Jerusalem, which is the visible dwelling place of God, will descend from heaven and will be the government seat of the universe. The believers, who by grace have been changed into the image of Christ, will be sons and daughters of God, through whom God will govern the world.

¹ 1 Cor. 15:24

² 1 Cor. 15:26

³ 1 Cor. 15:28

⁴ Rev. 21:1-2

⁵ Col. 1:20

Church and church relationships

As the truth and the life are exclusively in Jesus Christ, the living truth is not found in canonical books, in church traditions, ecclesiastical practices, holy places or in saints, but only and solely in the living Christ Himself. Because Jesus Christ is the way, and the truth, and the life, the way cannot be a method, the truth cannot be a dogma, and the life cannot be a ritual. Not a secured tradition, nor orthodox theology, nor impressing numbers of members or the Church's influence in the public sector can be a foundation on which faith builds. *"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*¹ For this reason, the question whether a church really serves its purpose, does not depend on superficial things like the above-mentioned, but on the personal relationship which each member of the congregation has with Jesus Christ.

Just as the Christian individual cannot point to himself, when asked, "where is your salvation, your righteousness and your redemption?" likewise the church, as the body of Christ, cannot point to itself, but only towards Christ. The life is in Him. In itself the church is poor and dead. Therefore, as the individual believer needs to be continually corrected by the Lord, so the church likewise must be prepared to be continually corrected by the Head of the church, Jesus Christ. This is why the Reformers made the (Latin) statement *'ecclesia reformata semper reformanda'* which means that the reformed church is every time anew to be reformed. In other words, the true Christian church does not rest upon its laurels and does not self-assuredly rely on what has been achieved, but waits moment by moment on the leading of the Holy Spirit, being totally dependent on the Head, Jesus Christ. As the Holy Spirit applies only one standard, namely Christ, the true Christian church which constantly measures itself against this standard, will always find shortcomings in itself. The more Christ is manifested in His church, the more the

¹ 1 Cor. 3:11

believers will glory in their weaknesses.¹ If something good is found among them, they will boast of the Lord, as is written, *“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”*²

When there is nothing to pride oneself on, except the Lord, then gratitude for the love of the cross is all that remains. Where this disposition prevails, there is no room for unfavourable remarks or giving judgment against other churches. We are not called to be judges. *“But you, why do you find fault with your brother? Or you, why do you look down on your brother?”*³ *“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”*⁴ *“So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”*⁵ That is why Paul comes to the conclusion, *“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.”*⁶

To His warning not to judge and not to condemn, Jesus adds, *“release and ye shall be released.”*⁷ Not to talk negatively about others is a step in the right direction, but to see the good in others and to give them credit for it, is even better. It sets both free, the one who receives credit and the one who gives it. Here the words of our Lord Jesus are applicable, *“Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the prophets.”*⁸ If we approach other churches with this attitude, we may perhaps see something wrong with their doctrines and their customs. Considering however, that we ourselves have our ups and downs too, we will not reject them but show them understanding. The love of the Holy Spirit is not blind to others’ faults, but it appreciates the good which other Christians have also. Love *“takes no pleasure in injustice but sides happily with truth.”*⁹ To see the good in other Christians and give them credit for it, creates confidence. In the end it may bring us closer to each other and help the others to welcome advice or assistance.

In the first chapter of this book, we found that knowledge *of* God and knowledge *about* God are not synonymous. True knowledge *of* God is having fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. Every Christian should have a personal relationship with

¹ 2 Cor. 11:30

² 1 Cor. 1:31

³ Rom. 15:10 ML

⁴ Rom. 14:10

⁵ Rom. 14:12

⁶ Rom. 14:13

⁷ Luke 6:37 ASV the literal meaning of the Greek *apoluo* (*apoluw*) is to release or set free

⁸ Matt. 7:12

⁹ 1 Cor. 13:6 ML

God. On this vital principle depends not only the unity between the members of a local church, but also the good relationship with Christians in other denominations. The closer the individual Christian's walk with God, the closer the Christians are related to one another. Then almost automatically the rule is applied, "*In essential things unity, in dubious things liberty, in all charity.*"¹ Here, we emphasise once more that the "essential things" are summarised in the apostle Paul's determination not to know anything, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.² For the sake of unity Paul confined his preaching to one Person and one subject. Compared to Christ and the cross, spiritual and doctrinal preferences are not essential.

We must keep in mind, as explained in the beginning of this book, that, metaphorically speaking, the "spokes of the wheel" must not be allowed to push the "hub" from its central place. Christ is the "hub." All the other subjects, no matter how important they may be considered, are only the "spokes" of the wheel. As a matter of fact, if one wheel has fewer spokes than another wheel, it is still serviceable. If, however, the hub is pushed from the centre, on account of one or two spokes which are longer than the others, because of the importance attributed to them, the wheel will start to wobble. This happens in spiritual matters when a certain subject is given so much prominence that Jesus Christ and His cross is no longer the heart of the Christian message.

Speaking of the wheel, there is one more truth to be understood. All the "spokes" are pointing towards the "hub". It has to be like that, because Jesus says, "*I am the way.*"³ Consequently, if we do not want to stray but stay on the way, we have to keep all attention on the way, which is Jesus. When, however, certain subjects become pre-eminent so that people refer to them, for instance, as to "the way of baptism" or "the way of Pentecost" or "the way of confession of sin", then these "spokes" are not pointing towards Christ, the "Hub", but towards themselves. The consequence is that these people do not seek fellowship with Jesus first and above all. They think they are on the "way" as long as they have been baptized or speak in tongues or confess their sins. Instinctively they consider Christians who in this respect differ from them, as Christians who are walking on the wayside.

¹ Author unknown

² 1 Cor. 2:2

³ John 14:6

When Christians look at Jesus as the centre of everything, and seek fellowship with Him rather than indulging in the extras which they above other Christians may have, then this attitude is the bond which binds the members of the body together with the Head and, thereby, also with each other.

Sectarianism

In this book we cannot deal with every aspect of sectarianism. We think it proper to at least point out a few characteristics in order to enable the reader to discern between a sectarian and non-sectarian spirit:

1. Sectarians do not believe that “*Christ is all and in all.*”¹ They venerate angels,² a deceased saint, or the founder of the sect. They consider certain subjects, where they differ from other churches, of great importance.

2. The Bible is not their only reliable source of truth. They place other books beside the Bible. They believe in revelations for which they claim divine authorship. They regard the quality of these revelations tantamount to those of the Bible.

3. In order to verify their doctrines, the followers of a sect take Scripture out of its context. They do not interpret the Word of God, but read their thoughts into the Word.

4. Because they do not know the love of the cross, they have to comply with various rules and precepts to deserve God’s favour. Although they talk about grace, they do not know what it is, nor do they have an idea of the power of God that is working through His grace. Therefore, they come up with forceful arguments of what men must do for *God*, rather than rejoicing in the Gospel that tells us what Jesus Christ has done for us.

5. The real problem is that the sectarians have a “different gospel.”³ For this reason they rely more on the “extras” which they have above other churches, than on the grace of God. This causes them to criticise and depreciate other churches. Because they are presumptuous, the mere thought that something might be wrong with themselves is blasphemous in their eyes.

¹ Col. 3:11

² Col. 2:18

³ Gal. 1:6-9

6. Sectarians believe more in their own set-up and in their way of thinking than in the love of God in Christ. Therefore, they think that people who do not agree with them, cannot be saved, or at least cannot come to the high level of perfection which they have reached. They are convinced that their church is the best or even the only one; their standard is the highest, and their reward will be the greatest. While the true child of God is “poor in spirit,”¹ that is poor in himself, because he knows that he is saved by grace, sectarians are self-righteous and self-complacent. They boast of their church, their achievements, their buildings and their numbers.

Because of their one-sided disposition as a result of their false beliefs, sectarians are cut off from the true fellowship with Christ, and therefore, also from fellowship with the body of Christ, that is from fellowship with other Christians. “Cut off” is, indeed, the original meaning of the word ‘sect’.

There are, admittedly, Christian churches and groups that do believe in the Holy Trinity and in Jesus Christ as Redeemer and yet are considered to be sects, because their views and customs do not flow with mainstream Christianity. For the sake of upright believers among them, these groups should not be judged too harshly. We should not use a measuring-rod for others, unless we have used the same measuring-rod for ourselves. Jesus says, “*Do not pass judgement that you may not be judged; for the way you judge you will be judged and with what yardstick you measure you will be measured.*”²

We cannot finish this chapter without mentioning movements which maintain to be Christian, but actually have nothing in common with Christian churches and denominations. The Bible talks about “destructive heresies”³ and people who “*depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.*”⁴ Regarding such ruinous heresies and demonic teachings Christians should not in the least show any indulgence, because “*what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? ... And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?*”⁵ The apostle Paul’s stern advice is to take an uncompromising stand: “from such withdraw yourself.”⁶ The apostle John writes, “*He who abides in*

¹ Matt. 5:3

² Matt. 7:1-2 ML

³ 2 Pet. 2:1

⁴ 1 Tim. 4:1

⁵ 2 Cor. 6:14-16

⁶ 1 Tim. 6:5

the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him.”¹ He who does not take notice of these warnings, just for the sake of good relationships, exposes himself to demonic influences and brings his soul in great danger.

¹ 2 John 1:9-10

In conclusion

As we mentioned in the foreword, the purpose of this book is to help the reader to know God and Jesus Christ. While discussing the different subjects, we have drawn the attention time and again to the Word, to Christ, to grace, and to faith.¹ In this way it has become clear that our redemption is founded solely on the grace of God.

Grace, which has no limits, draws the believer away from the narrowness of systematising thinking and allows him to apprehend “the width and length and depth and height” of God’s plan.² Unlimited grace creates unlimited faith. What will happen if Christians respond to God’s unlimited grace with unlimited faith? “*Much more,*” says the apostle, “*for if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*”³ What a statement, if one considers how death has reigned and still reigns!

Just think of the great influence which the Gospel has had on the course of world history. What unbelievable transformation was accomplished when the Church in the first centuries began as an insignificant minority in the Roman empire! What a revolutionary change the Gospel caused in the time of the Reformation, although the Catholic Church and the political potentates of that time were determined to prevent it by all means!

The message of the cross is the power of God!⁴ Jesus’ life is the grain of wheat that God Himself has sown.⁵ If it applies to man that “*whatever a man sows, that he will also reap,*”⁶ how much more does this apply to God! His word shall not come back to Him empty, but shall accomplish its purpose.⁷ How glorious will the final result be when the “good seed”⁸ has ripened and all of us have come “*to the unity*

¹ Martin Luther’s battle cry during the reformation was (in Latin): sola scriptura (only the Scripture)) , solus Christus (only Christ), sola gratia (by grace only)) , sola fide (only through faith)

² Eph. 3:17-20

³ Rom. 5:17 italic for emphasis

⁴ 1 Cor. 1:18

⁵ John 12:24

⁶ Gal. 6:7

⁷ Is. 55:11

⁸ Matt. 13:37

of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ!”¹

In the last days, for a limited time, persecution will be the order of the day. Those issues which divided Christianity in the past will become meaningless. Christians will no longer keep themselves busy with what is taught or said or written about Christ, but with the living Christ Himself. “The sons of the kingdom”² will know their King. They will know God through Jesus Christ, and experience that this is eternal life.

Then in due time they will stand together with the overcomers of the earlier centuries before the throne of God clothed with white garments, as John witnessed, *“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands.”*³ Every Christian is called to be one of that glorious multitude.

In that day, the full and glorious meaning of the words of our Lord Jesus will become a visible reality: *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.”*⁴ Do we know God through His Son? God says, *“I will give them a heart to know me.”*⁵ May everyone who reads these words, respond with the urgency with which the prophet says:

*“Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD,
for as certain as the break of dawn He comes to us.”*⁶

*“The time is at hand.”*⁷

¹ Eph. 4:13

² Matt. 13:38

³ Rev. 7:9

⁴ John 17:3

⁵ Jer. 24:7

⁶ Hos. 6:3 ML

⁷ Rev. 1:3, 22:10